

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in a Message Derided U.S. bid to Come Back to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action Despite Its Withdrawal From the Nuclear Deal Two Years Ago

IRAN NEWS

Some 8b Rials of Donations of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei Have Been Distributed Among the Families of Prisoners in Northwestern Iranian Province of West Azarbaijan

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Iran Records Lowest Number of New COVID-19 Infections

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Health Ministry has confirmed 991 new COVID-19 infections in 24 hours, recording less than 1,000 new cases for the first time in 36 days.

Health Ministry Spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour announced on Monday the newly confirmed cases raise the total number of infections to 91,472.

He also put the country's death toll from the novel coronavirus at 5,806, including 96 new fatalities in the past 24 hours.

According to Jahanpour, 70,933 COVID-19 patients have so far recovered from the disease and been discharged from the hospital.

3,011 patients are also in severe conditions of the disease, he added.

432,329 COVID-19 tests have been taken so far across the country.

Meanwhile Deputy Health Minister stated that to date Iran has carried out over 35,000 outpatient tests to identify those with mild symptoms.

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Iran Non-Oil exports Expected to Decline

TEHRAN (ILNA) - Chairman of Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce Majid-Reza Hariri told that it is not possible that Iran's non-oil exports to hit \$50 billion by the end of the year.

The Iranian official said "Due to severe border restrictions and a sharp decline in world purchasing power, we cannot expect Iran's non-oil exports in reaching its targets and hit the value of \$50 billion."

Referring to the international economic crisis is provoking a deep and prolonged downturn in the world economy, he added that about 50 percent of Iran's non-oil exports were exported to countries such as India, China, and Turkey but now with sharp declines in world energy prices and declining global demand, our exports in this sector have also declined sharply.

"Therefore, exports in this sector are expected to decrease by \$10 to \$12 billion."

The economic analyst stressed that in order to achieve the \$ 50 billion export goal, it is necessary to either find a new export market or increase the composition and production of goods, but in the current situation, none of this is possible.

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U.S., Europe's Anti-Iran Fuss "Natural"



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Seyed Ebrahim Raisi said on Monday that it is natural for U.S. and European countries to heap up accusations against Iran as they oppose the country's growth and progress.

"Today, they are against what IRGC did to make Iran stronger, and this is natural," Raisi stressed.

He strongly ruled out U.S. and some European countries' accusations that the recent Noor-1 satellite launch was in breach of UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

"We should not pay attention to this ballyhoo, rather we should continue the course with more power," he said.

Touching upon May 1 and the Labor Day, he pointed to the key role of workers in surge in production, adding that without workers' efforts it would be impossible to materialize the slogan of the year "Surge in Production."

He also blasted some countries which criticize the health condition of prisoners in Iran's prisons, adding that they criticize while they ignore furloughs granted by the Judiciary to prisoners whereas prisoners' condition in those countries is worsening.

He blasted those countries double-standard approach towards the prisoners' health condition and human rights. Raisi reiterated that world public opinion will not accept such contradictory behaviors from those who claim defending human-rights.

Reacting to government officials' reactions to the Supreme Audit Court's recent report on missing of some \$4.8b, Hojjatoleslam Raisi defended the report, reiterating that the Judiciary have started probe and will strongly confront with the offenders.

He once again underscored that the Judiciary will not be affected by recent attacks and criticisms on the Supreme Audit Court's report and urged the critics to abide by law.

He added that the Judiciary would welcome any transparency from any organ, adding that all organs should also welcome transparency and should not let improper comments and remarks overshadow probes in the case.

He further said that a work group has been formed to pursue the case of missing dollars where representatives of the related bodies are also present.

Raisi said that his colleagues in the Judiciary will probe the case very carefully and will announce its result publicly.

The Director of the Supreme Audit Court of Iran (SAC), Adel Azar, has recently in a Majlis open session read the court's report, claiming almost \$5b is missing.

Based on the official rate of 42,000 rials for one dollar, the government distributed billions of cheap dollars among local importers to buy essential goods from overseas.

Nevertheless, according to the SAC director, Adel Azar, \$4.8 billion has been distributed, but no goods and products have been imported. The cheap dollars provided by the government for imports is in effect a subsidy.

The Judiciary Chief also noted that 26 managers and staff of the Central Bank have been prosecuted on their offences regarding allocation of forex.

U.S. Renews Waiver for Iraq to Import Iranian Electricity

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States has renewed a waiver for Iraq to continue importing Iranian electricity, a State Department official said on Sunday, but this time for a shorter period of 30 days, adding that Washington would be reassessing whether to renew again once a "credible government" is formed in Iraq.

"The Secretary granted this brief extension of the waiver to allow time for the formation of a credible government," a State Department official said, referring to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and added that the waiver would expire on May 26. Washington has repeatedly extended the exemption for Baghdad to use crucial Iranian energy supplies for its power grid, for periods of 90 or 120 days.

The United States has insisted that oil-rich Iraq, OPEC's second-largest producer, move towards energy self-sufficiency as a condition for its exemption for importing Iranian energy.

Earlier this month, Iraq's president named intelligence chief Mustafa al-Kadhimi as prime minister-designate, the third person tapped to lead Iraq in just 10 weeks as it struggles to replace a government that fell last year after months of deadly protests. "Once that government is in place, the Secretary will reassess whether to renew the waiver and for how long," the State Department official said. David Schenker, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Bureau at the State Department in a briefing earlier this month had praised Kadhimi's work as the head of intelligence.

Ties between Washington and Baghdad have been strained as the United States said it was disappointed that Iraqi forces have failed to protect the U.S. forces stationed in Iraq. They have come under multiple rocket attacks this year alone, for which the United States blames the Iran-backed militia. The State Department official said the waiver granted by Pompeo applied only to electricity and referred to the Treasury Department for transactions related to Iranian natural gas imports.

Pakistan's NTDC To Seek Rs714m From Iran Firm

LAHORE (Dispatches) - Pakistan's National Transmission and Despatch Company (NTDC) is set to serve a notice on an Iranian firm this week for the payment of about Rs714 million with interest under a recent decision of the Paris-based International Chamber of Commerce (ICC).

The NTDC may move a court in Pakistan for implementation of the ICC's international arbitration-based decision in case the Iranian firm fails to pay, it is learnt.

"We have started preparing a notice. It will be served on the Iranian firm within this week for the payment of Rs714m with interest. If the firm fails to pay, we will file a petition in a court in Pakistan for implementation of the ICC verdict," NTDC chief legal officer Hamza Khalid Randhawa told Dawn on Sunday. "We have also identified some of the Iranian firm's assets abroad in this regard," he added.

Paris-based tribunal ordered Iranian company to pay for delays in executing project at Rahim Yar Khan substation.

The ICC announced its decision on April 24 in the international commercial arbitration initiated by the Iranian company in 2017 before a tribunal constituted under the ICC's rules.

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Russia Slams U.S. for Condemning IRGC Satellite

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations has slammed Washington's "hypocrisy" for condemning Iran's recent launch of an Islamic Revolution Guards Corps satellite citing UN Security Council resolution 2231.

"U.S. claims that recent launch of a military satellite by Iran was a violation of 2231 UNSC resolution. Wrong interpretation," Mikhail Ulyanov said in a tweet on Sunday.

"But there is also a different curious aspect- the US attempt to build on the resolution, which it undermines by all possible means. Double standards and hypocrisy," he added.

U.S. claims that recent launch of a military satellite by #Iran was a violation of 2231 UNSC res. Wrong interpretation. But there is also a different curious aspect- the U.S. attempt to build on the resolution, which it undermines by all possible means. Double standards and hypocrisy

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Syria Air Defenses Down Israeli Missiles Over Damascus

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Syrian air defenses have thwarted an Israeli aggression, and shot down a number of "hostile" missiles in the skies over the capital, Damascus, before reaching their targets.

The official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) said the aggression took place in the early hours of Monday, which left three civilians dead.

According to the report, the Israeli missiles came from the Lebanese airspace.

Since the start of the foreign-backed war on Syria in 2011, Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes in the country, targeting government troops and their allies.

Last Monday, the Syrian air defenses intercepted a number of Israeli missiles over the ancient city of Palmyra in the central province of Homs, and downed "a number of enemy's missiles".

Back then, Israeli media claimed that the target site was the T4 base in Homs, a base that Israel has attacked a number of times in the past.

Israel's aggressive moves have been viewed by observers as an attempt to weaken the Damascus government as it increasingly gains the upper hand in its fight against terrorist groups.

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Zarif, His UAE Counterparts Discuss Latest Regional Developments

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Foreign ministers of Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) reviewed latest regional developments in a telephone conversation late on Sunday.

During the phone talk, Mohammad Javad Zarif and his UAE counterpart Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed congratulated each other on the advent of the fasting month of Ramadan and discussed coronavirus spread and other issues of mutual interest.

Tehran, Jakarta Pledge To Forge Closer Ties On All Fronts

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iranian and Indonesian presidents have discussed a range of issues during a phone call on Monday.

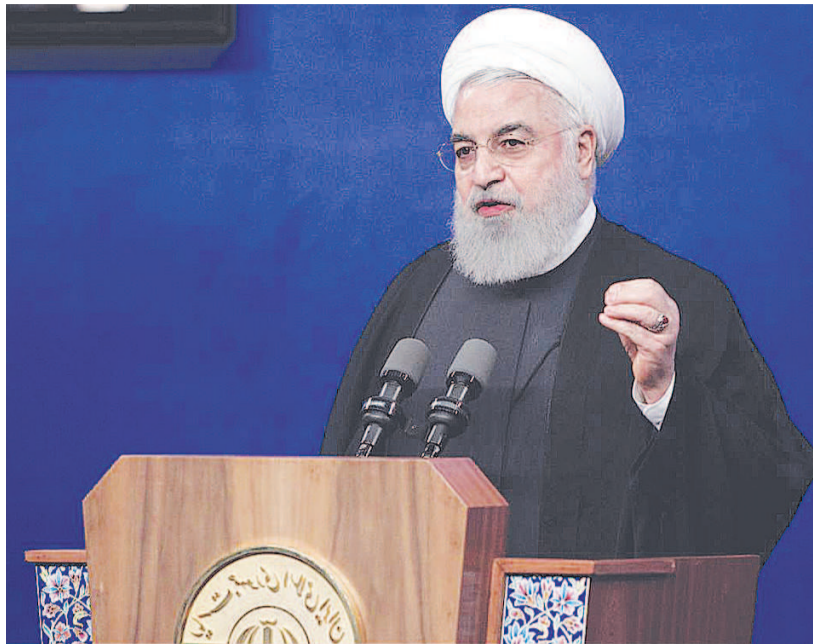
During their conversation, President Hassan Rouhani of Iran and his opposite number Joko Widodo touched upon cordial, brotherly and ever-growing relations between the two countries.

They also underlined the need to further enhance Tehran-Jakarta ties in all areas to serve the interests of both nations.

The two presidents also touched upon the coronavirus pandemic in the world as well as the plans made and measures adopted by both countries to fight the disease. They underscored the necessity of boosting mutual cooperation as well as exchanging experience and scientific and technological achievements in that regard. They also highlighted the need to meet each other's needs in the campaign against the virus.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has achieved good accomplishments in the field of science and technology and producing items such as diagnosis kits, ventilators, CT scan machines and N95 masks, and stands ready to work with Indonesia in that regard," said President Rouhani.

The two presidents also touched upon friendly and age-old relations between the two countries, and expressed hope the holding of the 13th meeting of the Iran-Indonesia Joint Economic Cooperation Commission will expedite the implementation of agreements signed between the two sides and lead to further expansion of reciprocal ties.



President Rouhani noted that U.S. sanctions against Iran run counter to basic human rights. "Illegal objections can be dangerous at a time when all world countries are fighting the coronavirus," said the Iranian president.

The Indonesian president, in turn, expressed content with Iran's achievements in the fight against the coronavirus.

He said the pandemic has created tough conditions for the whole world today, urging all countries, especially Muslim nations, to help one another under the current circumstances.

Roughly 13m Masks Produced Amid COVID-19 Outbreak in Iran



TEHRAN (IFP) - A top Iranian official says the country's Technical-Vocational Organization has produced nearly 13 million face masks amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Mohammad Shariatmadari added hundreds of thousands of other medical supplies were also produced by the organization and other workshops working under its supervision.

He, however, said what is more significant than the production of these medical items is national unity consolidated amid the pandemic.

"How many items have been produced is unimportant; what is important is the solidarity and unity of the Iranian nation all across the country to fight this phenomenon which has emerged not only in Iran, but in other parts of the world as well," he said.

"The unity, solidarity and rapport that have been created today among officials and people at all levels may be our most significant achievement amid this unpleasant phenomenon (coronavirus outbreak)," he added.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the minister described US sanctions against Iran as a "virus" affecting Iran.

"Since the beginning of this year, we have been facing the wicked coronavirus in addition to the virus of sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran by hegemonic powers in recent years," he said.

"We have been gripped by the coronavirus outbreak in the country as a new ordeal. The Iranian nation has always put up a stiff resistance against threats and remained united, turning threats into opportunities," the minister added.

He also expressed regret over the fatalities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It is true that some of our fellow countrymen lost their lives during the course of this unholy happening, and were extremely sorrowful because of that and we wouldn't like this trend to continue," said Shariatmadari.

The minister urged people to keep abiding by health protocols to help stem the spread of the disease.

"We should make every effort in that regard by maintaining personal hygiene, keeping social distances and paying due regard to health issues, which is not very hard to do, and which will help save lives if done," he noted.

"We should take major steps in that regard and rid the country's health and treatment system of the extreme pressure caused by the rapid spread of this virus," he concluded his remarks by saying.

U.S. Freedom of Expression Is Blocking Media

TEHRAN (IP) - The Guardian Council Spokesman Abbasali Kadkhodaei in response to the U.S. Treasury Department's move to block web domain of "Iran" newspaper, said, "Freedom of expression in the United States is blocking the media of other countries."

The domain of the official website of "Iran" at Iran-newspaper.com was blocked by the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).

The Guardian Council Spokesman wrote in his twitter page on Monday, "In addition to assassinating individuals and economic assassinations (sanctions), the U.S. regime has now resorted to media assassinations and has intensified its terrorist record by confiscating the domains of the Iranian media."

The Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is a financial intelligence and enforcement agency of the U.S. Treasury Department. It administers and enforces economic and trade sanctions on the pretext of supporting U.S. national security and foreign policy objectives.

OFAC has previously acted against Iran's financial, executive, and media legal entities.

Iran Calls Pompeo "Secretary of Hate"

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry announced on Sunday night that during Mike Pompeo's tenure as US Secretary of State, the world has become more insecure and the US more hated and humiliated.

Iran Foreign Ministry wrote in a tweet, "After 2 years in office, US Secretary of State Pompeo also known as Secretary of Hate, has literally achieved NOTHING in diplomacy."

According to reports, the secretary reportedly plans to take that route should the UN Security Council (UNSC)

decline to reimpose an arms embargo against Tehran when an existing embargo expires later this year. An extension of the arms embargo is expected to be opposed by Russia.

"We cannot allow the Islamic Republic of Iran to purchase conventional weapons in six months. President Obama should never have agreed to end the U.N. arms embargo," Pompeo said in a statement to the Times.

"We are prepared to exercise all of our diplomatic options to ensure the arms embargo stays in place at the U.N. Security Council," he added.

Embassy Advises Students to Leave Russia

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Islamic Republic of Iran's Embassy in Moscow advised Iranian university students in Russia to return home over concerns about the outbreak of the coronavirus.

"Given the outbreak of the coronavirus in Russia and the concerns about the possibility of outbreak of the disease in university dormitories and with reference to the previous proclamations, we'd advise dear Iranian students to give priority to protecting their health and return to Iran until the end of the epidemic and improvement of the situation," the Iranian Embassy said in an advisory.

The Embassy also noted that efforts have been made to operate one or two one-way flights every week from Moscow to Tehran to return Iranian nationals.

The advisory also reminds the Iranian citizens that any decision to reopen the Russian borders and allow foreigners to enter Russia again will be within the purview of authorities in Moscow.

Earlier this month, the Office of Scientific Consultation and Administration of Iranian Students in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Central Asia advised Iranian university students in Russia to return to Iran amid the pandemic and proceed with their education via distance learning.

AEOI Imports Several COVID-19 Rapid Diagnostic Devices Into Country

TEHRAN (MNA) - Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) imported several coronavirus rapid diagnosis test devices into the country.

Deputy Head of Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) and Director of Nuclear Science and Technology Research Center Javad Karimi Sabet revealed.

While appreciating the unflinching and relentless efforts of all officials at the Ministry of Health and Medical Education especially medical staff in the country for taking drastic measures in the fight against coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, he expounded on the recent measures taken by the Organization in using capacities of nuclear technology in the sector of public health.

All departments, affiliated to the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) including Nuclear Science and Technology Research Center have considered

helping the Ministry of Health and Medical Education in the fight against COVID-19 as its duty and have spared no efforts in this regard, he emphasized.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he pointed to the fair cooperation of the Organization with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and added, "with the continuous and effective follow-ups of the Nuclear Science and Technology Research Center and Intl. and Legal Affairs Deputy Office of the Organization over the past two months, we managed to take advantage of capacities of our cooperation with IAEA."

In this way, "we could receive a number of portable X-ray imaging devices, users' personal protective equipment, several COVID-19 rapid diagnostic devices, known as RT-PCR, along with the relevant equipment, valued at more than €200,000, from the International Atomic Energy Agency."

Iran to Take Back Relics From Europe Via Interpol

TEHRAN (FNA) - Chairman of Iranian Interpol Brigadier-General Hadi Shirzad said on Monday that a European country will give back artifacts including antique gold and silver objects dating back to ancient Iran.

"According to the Interpol, a European bank was repairing its building. They reopened the safe deposit box inside the bank during which they realized that the owner of one of the boxes holds a number of antique gold and silver objects in its box," Shirzad said.

"Regarding the importance of the issue, through examinations by experienced cultural heritage experts, it was determined that the objects belonged to ancient Iran of the Achaemenid, Parthian and Sassanid eras and the owner of the fund is an Iranian citizen," he added.

He continued, "After informing Tehran Interpol, with probes Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization said that the objects belong to the Islamic Republic of Iran. So, coordination was made with the Judiciary."

"Through due coordination, the request for judicial help to return the antiquities was prepared, and sent to the relevant officials via the Interpol communications channel as well as diplomatic channels, and the issue of restitution of property is being pursued," Shirzad said.

Iran Export Volume of Sponge Iron Surges 77%

TEHRAN (MNA) - Some 942,000 tons of Direct Reduction Iron (DRI) was exported from the country last year [from March 21, 2019 to March 20, 2020], showing a 77 percent growth year on year.

According to the statistical tables of the Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA), 533,000 tons of Direct Reduction Iron (DRI, also called sponge iron) was exported from the country from March 21, 2018, to March 20, 2019.

ISPA put the volume of Direct Reduction Iron produced in the country last year at 27,907,000 tons, showing a six percent growth as compared to a year earlier.

Some 26,359,000 tons of sponge iron was produced from March 21, 2018 to March 20, 2019.

After India, Islamic Republic of Iran is considered as the second-largest producer of sponge iron in the world, ISPA added.

Statistics showed that 26,965,000 tons of sponge iron was consumed in the country last year [from March 21, 2019 to March 20, 2020], registering a four percent growth as compared to the same period of last year.

Meanwhile statistical tables showed that 6,908,000 tons of steel ingot was exported from the country in the past Iranian calendar year [from March 21, 2019 to March 20, 2020], registering a 26 percent hike as compared to the last year's corresponding period.

According to the Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA), 5,493,000 tons of steel ingot was exported from the country from March 21, 2018 to March 20, 2019.

Of total steel volume exported last year, 4,836,000 tons of bloom and billet hit the target markets, showing a 24 percent growth as compared to the same period of last year.

A study of statistical tables indicates that 3,455,000 tons of steel products were exported from the country, recording a 16 percent growth as compared to the same period of last year.

Accordingly, 5,000 tons of steel ingot was imported to the country last year [ended March 20, 2020], showing an 82 percent decline as compared to a year earlier.

U.S. Better to Leave Persian Gulf

TEHRAN (IP) - Deputy Chief of Operations of the Navy of the Islamic Republic of Iran referred to April 29, the National Day of Persian Gulf, saying that the unilateral period is over and it is better for the U.S. to leave the region.

On the sidelines of the National Day of the Persian Gulf in Army University, Gholamreza Tahani said in an exclusive interview with Iran Press that April 29 is called National Day of the Persian Gulf in the Iranian calendar which reminds the Iranian nation's fight against colonialism.

Referring to the history of the Persian Gulf, he said, "A few centuries ago Imam Quli Khan (an Iranian military and political leader who served as a governor of Fars, Lar, and Bahrain for the Abbas the Great the 5th Safavid Shah of Iran emphasized that this region belongs to Iran and resisted against Portugal colonialism. His action highlighted this message that this region is not and will not be a place for colonialism."

In Year of Production Leap

Relying on the Private Sector The Way to Overcome Crises



Basically, in a time of global financial crisis in the 1970s, when many countries, especially the United States, hit a record stagflation, perhaps instead of fully supporting large corporations, there may be a way to support small, medium and agile corporations. In previous decades, such decisions have saved the British economy from collapse. Certainly, when the world economy ship reaches the shores of peace and stability, it is necessary to change the strategy, to put the movement of industry and economy on the shoulders of large upstream industries, which of course, like a hybrid engine, can use the power and capacity of institutions. Implement small production and trade, the role of leadership and guiding them in the channel of strategic development and sustainable employment in accordance with the macro-policies of each country. Certainly, the wisdom, insight and foresight of the managers of each country are important in using these two sections at the right time. Experience has shown that in times of economic crisis, due to the sheer volume of problems, it will be more difficult to set up larger industries and require more financial resources and time. This may not have been possible with the injection of large sums of money, and in practice the existing retail capital has been wasted or blocked in the bureaucracy of the collections. With the same capital, several medium and smaller

sets can be moved with more guarantee. Many examples of this can be seen in our own country. Spending a lot of money on large-scale projects for many years and not speeding up their launch, as well as not calculating the cost of missing opportunities, has been seen repeatedly, while in return we could have had more support from the industrial and commercial sectors. Let's achieve the development goals of the country smaller. This is especially true in free zones, where there is a clearer definition of geography and the policies and powers of government. Therefore, the creation of organizations such as UNIDO at the international level is a reason for this claim. The vision and mission defined for these organizations can also be a beacon for overcoming these crises. Certainly, considering these conditions and considering all these indicators and macroeconomic characteristics, we will see more precise control in the country's management. Otherwise, we will see the wrong orientation of managers and we will have to wait for the consequences of their wrong decisions, which will appear with symptoms such as inflation, recession, rising unemployment and job loss, and finally the collapse of the economy. Today, the creation of industrial clusters in small and medium sizes, using up-to-date knowledge, will certainly lead to the production of higher quality products that can compete with other global manufacturers. The result will be nothing but significant export growth. The main task of public managers, especially the High Council of Free Zones, is to create a suitable business environment and provide infrastructure for the establishment of small industries in these areas. With more lenient rules in these areas, exports and entry into international markets are also more likely. The greater flexibility of small industries in changing their product lines and strategies can increase the competitiveness at any time and make us more marketable. Examining the role of economic enterprises in developed countries in the development of exports, production, as well as their contribution to creating sustainable employment, attracting labor and GDP, can be a great help to a better understanding of reality. Basically, making a change in a large

collection takes more time and energy than in a small collection. Even now, if success has been achieved in controlling corona in the world and in Iran, it is due to the active presence of private companies, medical staff and jihadi forces. The spread of the Corona crisis itself is a reason for the inadequacy and efficiency of bureaucratic government systems. In contrast, where the public sector does not cooperate with the private sector, we have seen satisfactory results. The cooperation of the Kish Free Zone Organization with the Kish Medifarm Pharmaceutical Company and other active private production sectors is a good example. From the earliest hours of the announcement of the Corona Crisis, these companies sat around a table without considering the usual bureaucracies and formalities, which resulted in better control over the spread of the disease on the island compared to other cities in the country. This cooperation is a very brilliant experience in its kind and will be in the performance record of the Kish Free Zone Organization for many years as a successful model of regional macro crisis management.

- The bottom line is that we value human capital and our workforce more, especially those who work as advocates for public health. We need to value our medical community and medical staff more
- And appreciate our private sector more, especially those who have been and will be with you in crises.
- Coronary heart disease is an opportunity to awaken human societies, and the result can be dramatic changes in human attitudes toward nature. Certainly, the wise man at this time is trying to turn threats into a suitable opportunity for all-round improvement.

Dr. Majid Mohammad Hosseini
Managing Director of KMP Healthcare Group
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NIDC to Improve Its Quality Goals This Year



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) says the company according to its set strategies will improve the quality goals in three sectors in the current year.

Eng. Seyed Abdollah Mousavi said yesterday that in year of surge in production, the company is determined to improve necessary strategies for materializing quality objectives in three sectors of efficient operation, competitiveness and share of the market, and organizational improvement and sustainable development.

He said NIDC as the biggest Iranian company in drilling oil and gas wells with a collection of experienced and efficient staff and equipment capacity ranks first in the country in offering drilling services and integrated technical services.

Mousavi noted that the company with an entrepreneurship and customer-oriented approach has defined its developmental goals to keep its position in the current year and it will implement it in different qualitative dimensions with more seriousness.

Improving executive output, output of operations and drilling services and key underway projects, logistics, optimizing drilling machines and equipment, using all equipment potentials and human resources, and strengthening the domestic capabilities are of the major goals of the company which will be pursued this year, he added.

Mousavi emphasized that the issue of competitiveness and share of market will be strongly pursued by active presence in the tenders.

Baft-e Balouch Co., Kermanshah Bioimplant Center to Open



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Deputy Industry, Mine and Trade Minister and head of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) says two projects of the organization will bear fruit in the year of surge in production and will come on stream soon.

Mohammad Baqer Aali said these two projects which are ready to be inaugurated are industrial units of Baft-e Balouch (a textile factory) Company in Sistan and Baluchistan and Bioimplant Center in Kermanshah.

He termed Gostaresh Sanaye Balouch as one of the IDRO's projects which had been handed over to the organization in line with reviving old industries, and currently it is considered as one of the affiliate companies of IDRO and it is one of the biggest textile factories in the east of the country.

He also hailed the Plan and Budget Organization for allocating budget for completing Baft-e Balouch textile project, adding that all financial capacities were used to accomplish the project and despite cruel sanctions, all necessary measures for finishing the projects were taken from necessary channels.

He admitted that the Supreme Leader had asked for activating Baft-e Balouch Company and solving its workers' problems.

On the second project to be inaugurated in the year of surge in production, he said Kermanshah Bioimplant Center is another one whose construction process started 8 years ago after the Supreme Leader's visit to Kermanshah and it is among the distinguished medical production units in the west of the country.

Aali added that the center is to produce heart and bone implants and some parts of its production would be exported.

POGC Gets Int'l Energy Management Certificate



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC) due to its success in establishing energy management system got international energy management certificate based on ISO 50001.

According to reports, due to efforts of all departments of the company for deploying energy management system which happened through two phases of evaluations late last year, the company got successfully the international energy management certificate.

Head of planning and project control of POGC Mr. Ali Afarideh Ghiasi said that the company had started measures for deploying the system since two years ago and the process was underway and finally in the last days of last Iranian calendar year, the company was awarded with the Energy management System certificate by the German firm TUV NORD which was in charge of evaluating the performance of the company.

He added that reforming and improving methods of consumption, implementing proper patterns of energy consumption, reducing costs of consumption and reducing the growth of greenhouses gases were of the major results of deployment of this system.

Ghiasi noted that policy, goals, process and directives regarding energy management in the form of several documents have been drawn up and approved by the company and have been carried out in different management levels.

He reiterated that observing necessary standards and helping them to be protected as well as developing them is very crucial and it needs cooperation of all departments of the company.

Iran Exports 320k One-Day Old Chickens to Afghanistan

BIRJAND (IRNA) - The head of Veterinary Organization of South Khorasan Province, northeastern Iran, said on Monday that since the beginning of the Iranian Year (March 20), 320 thousand one-day old chickens were exported from the province to Afghanistan.

Mohammad Asgharzadeh said that poultry farming enjoyed output growth, adding that 701 tons of eggs have also been exported to Afghanistan and Iraq in the same period, which has been zero in the preceding period.

Asgharzadeh said that last year, the province has exported 3,000 partridges to Pakistan.

He added that in the previous Iranian Year, South Khorasan Province exported 1,165 tons of eggs to Afghanistan and Iraq.

He added that in the last Iranian Year, 250 thousand fertilized chicken eggs were exported to Afghanistan as well.

Asgharzadeh said that last year, 850 one-day old ostrich chickens were exported to Uzbekistan for the first time.

IREC Launches Portal for E-Services

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Isfahan Regional Electric Company has launched a special portal in its website to offer e-services for its clients and customers.

According to reports, in line with materializing e-government, IREC has launched a e-service desk in its website which can improve services and reduce physical presence of clients in the offices.

This new service has been deployed in the company's website www.ereco.ir and it offers 45 various services for the subscribers and non-subscribers of electricity industry of Isfahan Province.

The portal offers services to the electricity subscribers of Isfahan like issuing the bill, services after subscription and services related to subscription and after-subscription services. The portal can also act as a good source for conducting poll from subscribers.

Some services are also offered for non-subscriber visitors to the portal like requests for supportive facilities for research, scattered power stations production and areas of power transfer lines.

From now people can take advantage of the company's e-services by logging on the website and going to the e-service portal.

Sri Lanka Extends Virus Lockdown

COLOMBO (AFP) - Sri Lanka reversed plans to end its virus lockdown on Monday, extending it for another week after a spike in coronavirus infections led to a recall of military personnel on leave.

Within hours of announcing on Saturday that the nationwide restrictions imposed on March 20 would be lifted, the government revoked the order and extended them to May 4.

Army chief Shavendra Silva said on behalf of the army, navy and air force that the leave of all military personnel was cancelled. He ordered them to report back to work immediately.



Turkey's Coronavirus Death Toll Rises to 2,805

ISTANBUL (Reuters) - Turkey's confirmed cases of COVID-19 increased by 2,357 in the past 24 hours, and 99 more people have died, taking the death toll to 2,805, Health Ministry data showed on Sunday.

The total number of cases in the country stood at 110,130, the data showed, the highest total for any country outside Western Europe or the United States.

A total of 29,140 people have so far recovered from the new coronavirus, which causes the respiratory disease COVID-19. The number of tests carried out in the past 24 hours was 30,177.



North Korea's Kim "Alive and Well"



SEOUL (AFP) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is "alive and well", a top security adviser to the South's President Moon Jae-in said, downplaying rumours over Kim's health following his absence from a key anniversary.

"Our government position is firm," said Moon's special adviser on national security Moon Chung-in, in an interview with CNN on Sunday. "Kim Jong Un is alive and well."

The adviser said that Kim had been staying in Wonsan -- a resort town in the country's east -- since April 13, adding: "No suspicious movements have so far been detected."

Conjecture about Kim's health has grown since his conspicuous absence from the April 15 celebrations for the birthday of his grandfather Kim Il Sung, the North's founder -- the most important day in the country's political calendar.

Kim has not made a public appearance since presiding over a Workers' Party politburo meeting on April 11, and the following day state media reported him inspecting fighter jets at an air defence unit.

His absence unleashed a series of unconfirmed media reports over his condition, which officials in Seoul previously poured cold water on.

"We have nothing to confirm and no special movement has been detected inside North Korea as of now," the South's presidential office said in a statement last week.

South Korea's unification minister Kim Yeon-chul reiterated Monday that remained the case, adding the "confident" conclusion was drawn from "a complex process of intelligence gathering and assessment".

Daily NK, an online media outlet run mostly by North Korean defectors, has reported Kim was undergoing treatment after a cardiovascular procedure earlier this month.

Citing an unidentified source inside the country, it said Kim, who is in his mid-30s, had needed urgent treatment due to heavy smoking, obesity and fatigue.

Soon afterwards, CNN reported that Washington was "monitoring intelligence" that Kim was in "grave danger" after undergoing surgery, quoting what it said was an anonymous US official.

U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday rejected reports that Kim was ailing but declined to state when he was last in touch with him.

On Monday, the official Rodong Sinmun newspaper reported that Kim had sent a message of thanks to workers on the giant Wonsan Kalma coastal tourism project.

It was the latest in a series of reports in recent days of statements issued or actions taken in Kim's name, although none has carried any pictures of him.

Italy Unveils Plan for Life After Covid-19 Lockdown

ROME (Dispatches) - Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte promised Italians on Sunday they would soon be allowed to stroll in parks and visit relatives as the country emerges from the world's longest coronavirus lockdown.

The Italian leader also vowed to reopen schools by September and most other businesses over the next three weeks. But he warned that people would have to wear face masks in public places and rigorously observe social distancing measures when the current restrictions are lifted on May 4.

Hugs and handshakes will still be discouraged and a decision to restart Italy's beloved Serie A football championship has been postponed.

Italy was entering an era "of responsibility and coexistence with the virus", Conte told the nation in a televised address. "If you love Italy, keep your distance from others."

Conte's announcement followed a frantic weekend of talks with regional and business leaders aimed at deciding how



Yemen Southern Provinces Reject Separatists' Claim to Self-Rule

SANAA (Dispatches) - Authorities in five southern provinces in Yemen have rejected a separatist group's claim to self-rule, further heightening tensions among ostensible allies in the Saudi-led coalition battling Houthi rebels elsewhere in the country.

The separatists' Southern Transitional Council (STC), which is backed by the United Arab Emirates, scrapped a peace deal with the Saudi-backed government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and declared a state of emergency overnight.

The separatists said they would "self-govern" the key southern port city of Aden and other southern provinces, accusing the government of corruption and mismanagement. The STC seeks the return of the independent state that existed in the south until 1990. Yemen's internationally recognised government rejected the STC's self-governance, and described the move as a continuation of the armed rebellion that started last August.

The government said local and security authorities in the provinces of Hadramout, Abyan, Shabwa, al-Mahra and the remote island of Socotra dismissed the move as a "clear and definite coup".

Some of the provinces issued their own statements condemning it.

The authority to declare an emergency lies with the president only, and militias cannot replace state institutions, Shabwa security forces said in a written statement.

The administration of Hadramout, the biggest province in the south, said the STC's announcement is "a violation of legitimacy and the Riyadh Agreement", referring to a 2019 power-sharing deal between the separatists and the Yemeni government.

Abyan and Socotra administrations called for loyalty to the president, while the local authorities of al-Mahra province said the STC's step aimed to deepen the crisis already existing in the country.

The STC did not immediately comment on the statements from the five provinces.

Demonstrators Block Roads in Lebanon Protest Over Dire Economy

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Demonstrators blocked roads through Lebanon late Sunday to protest the deteriorating economic situation, despite a lockdown and curfew imposed because of the coronavirus, according to the official news agency.

Police quickly intervened to reopen the highways where the demonstrators burned tyres to block roads, the ANI national news agency said.

In Zalqa sector, northeast of Beirut, six people were injured, Lebanese Red Cross official Rodney Eid told AFP without providing further details.

An AFP photographer saw protesters setting tyres ablaze on the highway north of the capital, in the suburbs of Dbaiyeh, before the army and police moved in.

Protesters also mobilised in the main northern city of Tripoli, according to ANI.

And south of Beirut, young people set tyres

ablaze on the Damour highway, the agency said.

Protesters have staged several daytime demonstrations recently, including a convoy of cars in the capital last week, despite the coronavirus lockdown and nighttime curfew.

A nationwide protest movement erupted in October last year, with hundreds of thousands of people demonstrating against the ruling elite and the rampant graft critics say has brought the economy to its knees.

Lebanon's worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war is now compounded by the coronavirus lockdown. Poverty has risen to 45 percent of the population, according to official estimates.

Its economy is forecast to contract 12 percent in 2020, according to the International Monetary Fund.

The Lebanese pound has also plummeted against the dollar, resulting in high inflation.



Russia at Risk of Spike in Coronavirus Cases During May Holidays

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia could experience a spike in cases of the new coronavirus if people flout lockdown measures during public holidays scheduled for early May, a top health official said on Sunday.

The number of coronavirus cases in Russia began rising sharply this month, reaching more than 80,000 on Sunday after a record 6,361 new cases were registered over the past day. Anna Popova, head of Russia's consumer health watchdog, said the country had so far avoided a spike in cases and could continue to do so "if only we do not give up during the holidays".

"That is the biggest risk today," Popova said in an interview on state television, Russian news agencies reported.

Russia only has a handful of working days between May 1 and May 11 this year, with back-to-back long weekends for the Labour Day and Victory Day state holidays. Many Russians typically take the entire period off work for travel or family holidays. Russia, which has so far recorded 747 coronavirus-related deaths, has declared lockdowns across the country, including in the capital Moscow, the area worst-affected by the virus.

Muscovites are only allowed to go out to buy food or medicines at their nearest shop, get urgent medical treatment, walk their dog, or take out the trash. They must apply for a digital permit for any other movement across the city. Popova urged Russians to remain home during the holidays in a bid to help stem contagion. "We owe it to ourselves and our loved ones," she said.

President Vladimir Putin announced this month that Russia would postpone its May 9 celebrations, including a massive military parade across Red Square to mark 75 years since the Soviet victory in World War Two.

The Ministry of Defence said on Sunday that 874 troops had tested positive for the virus since March, as well as 779 cadets and students of military academies across the country. The ministry said earlier this week it had ordered thousands of troops to remain in quarantine for two weeks after the Red Square military parade was called off. Next week Putin will address the measures needed to curb the spread of the coronavirus, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Sunday, Russian news agencies reported.



Elahieh Apt (\$2400)
260sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Velenjak Villa (\$5000)
1500sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

Farmanieh (\$2000) 200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, F.F
Zaferanieh (\$2200) 240sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, F.F
Gheitarieh (\$1700) 140sq.m, 2bdrs, S/p, S, J, F.F

Jordan (\$1800)
200sq.m, 3bdrs
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German Minister Wants to Put Right to Home Working in Law

BERLIN (Reuters) - German Labour Minister Hubertus Heil is working on legislation to give employees the right to work from home even when the coronavirus crisis is over, he told a newspaper on Sunday.

"Everyone who wants to and whose workplace allows it should be able to work in a home office - even

when the coronavirus pandemic is over," Heil told the Bild am Sonntag newspaper.

With schools closed and many companies encouraging their employees to work from home to try to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, about 25% of Germans are now estimated to be working from home, up from about 12% normally.



White House Aims to Zero in on Further Stimulus to Help Battered Economy

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - White House advisers hope to come up with several options to present to President Donald Trump for "big thoughtful policies" to help rebuild confidence in an economy battered by the coronavirus pandemic, a Trump economic adviser said on Sunday.

Nationwide lockdowns to curtail the spread of the novel coronavirus have battered the U.S. economy, shuttering businesses and causing rising unemployment.

"We're going to need really big thoughtful policies to put together to make it so that people are optimistic again," White House economic adviser Kevin Hassett told reporters, warning that the U.S. jobless rate would likely hit 16% or higher this month.

"We hope to be talking to the president about it ... to start to come up with the top five, six ideas that we want to take up with Congress," he added.

Hassett said it was possible the economy could quickly rebound as it begins to reopen, but warned that things will start to look worse before they begin to look better.

"I think the next couple of months are going to look terrible," Hassett said. "You're going to see numbers as bad as anything we've ever seen before."

A record 26.5 million Americans have filed for unemployment benefits since mid-March, and retail sales, homebuilding and consumer confidence have all weakened sharply. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office predicted on Friday that the economy would contract at nearly a 40% annual rate in the second quarter, with unemployment cresting at 16% in the third quarter. But even next year, the CBO forecast the unemployment rate averaging above 10 percent.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said the economy should "really bounce back" in the third quarter after it begins to reopen in May and June.

"We're putting in an unprecedented amount of fiscal relief into the economy," Mnuchin said on the Fox News Sunday program. "I think this is going to have a significant impact."

EU Economy's GDP May Fall Up to 15% on Coronavirus

BRUSSELES (Dispatches) - European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde told the region's leaders that the euro-area economy could shrink by as much as 15 percent as a result of the pandemic, and that they risk doing too little, too late, according to three people familiar with the remarks.

Lagarde spoke during a video meeting of the European Union's 27 heads of government, who are discussing how to mitigate the economic fallout of the virus. One of the officials, who asked not to be identified because the deliberations are private, said the 15 percent figure was the extreme scenario, with the ECB president saying her baseline estimate is a 9 percent cut in output this year.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who spoke to her counterparts after Lagarde, vowed to back a huge stimulus package for Europe. European stocks, Italian bonds and the single currency all rose. The Stoxx 600 share index gained as much as 1.57 percent; the single currency reversed losses against the dollar and was up slightly at US\$1,0838 after falling as much as 0.6 percent; Italy's 10-year yield fell as much as 15 basis points to 1.93 percent before paring the move.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told leaders that not even in World War II there was such deep contraction in output as the one expected this year and only in the Great

Embraer Adjusting Production After Deal With Boeing Collapses

SAO PAULO (Reuters) - Brazil planemaker Embraer SA said that after a \$4.2 billion (£3.4 billion) deal with Boeing Co fell apart over the weekend, it is working on adjusting production levels and capital expenditures, as well as working to preserve cash.

The company added in a statement that it finished 2019 with a "solid cash position" and had no "significant debt in the next two years."

"We are taking additional measures to preserve our liquidity and maintain our solid finances during these turbulent times," the company added.

Other measures include adjustments to inventory, extension of payment cycles, reduction of expenses and seeking financing, Embraer said.

The deal between Embraer and Boeing was announced almost two years ago and the companies were in the final stages of closing it before it fell apart. Boeing was to take 80% of Embraer's commercial aviation division, which makes planes of up to 150 seats.

Boeing and Embraer had already received antitrust approvals from all necessary governments except for the European Union, and Embraer had spent millions carving out the business segment that Boeing would take over.

Embraer, the world's No. 3 planemaker, saw the deal as necessary for its long-term survival as the Boeing-Airbus duopoly has strengthened.



China's March Crude Imports From Saudi Slip, Russia Up 31%

BEIJING (Reuters) - China's March crude oil imports from top supplier Saudi Arabia fell 1.6% from a year earlier, while purchases from No.2 supplier Russia rose 31%, Reuters' calculations based on customs data showed on Sunday.

China's March crude oil imports rose

4.5% year on year to 9.68 million barrels per day (bpd) as refiners stocked up on cheaper cargoes despite falling domestic fuel demand and cuts in refining rates due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shipments from Saudi Arabia were 7.21 million tons, or 1.7 million bpd, data from the General Administration of Customs showed.

That was down from 1.73 million bpd a year earlier and average daily imports of 1.79 million bpd during the first two months of this year.

Russia supplied 7.02 million tons last month, or 1.66 million bpd, down from 1.71 million bpd recorded for the first two months, the data showed.

While state refiners mostly maintained deep production cuts in March to reduce their fuel stocks, independent plants cranked up run rates as the oil price plunge triggered partly by Saudi and Russian pledges to increase supply boosted refining margins.

Saudi Arabia and other members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries as well as other producers have since reached a new agreement on output cuts, helping to lift oil prices off historical lows but with many saying that deeper reductions will be needed.

China's imports from the United States remained close to zero in March. After falling last year because of the U.S.-China trade war, they are expected to pick up later in 2020 after Beijing started granting tariff waivers on U.S. goods including crude oil from early March.

There were no shipments from Venezuela for a fifth month in a row, as China National Petroleum Corp, Caracas's top oil client, steered clear of Venezuelan crudes to avoid violating secondary U.S. sanctions.

Also, despite little sign of any easing in U.S. sanctions on Iran's oil exports, data showed China's imports from the Middle East producer at 2.558 million tons, up 11.3% from a year earlier.

Russia's Oil-and-Virus Airbag Is Robust But Finite



LONDON (Dispatches) - Legend has it that during the war with Sweden in the 18th century, Russia's Peter the Great ordered church bells to be melted down and made into cannons. Battling an oil price collapse and the economic fallout from Covid-19 at the same time may require the same sort of innovative frugality.

Brent crude is trading at around \$21 a barrel as markets wait for the production cuts agreed by Russia and Saudi Arabia to take hold. Under the finance ministry's base case of a \$20-per-barrel average for the year, Russia would have a budget deficit of 5% - or around \$80 billion - according to Renaissance Capital. Luckily, Russia's economic buffers are in much better shape than in 2014, when the invasion of Ukraine led to sanctions and counter-sanctions, and a fall in the oil price helped plunge the economy into recession.

Moscow has around \$170 billion squirreled away in its National Wealth Fund, more than \$120 billion of which is in liquid form. RenCap analysts reckon there is enough domestic demand to absorb around \$27 billion in bond issues this year. The Kremlin has also hinted of flexibility for the funds for its \$400 billion development program.

The problem is more political. In a widely viewed video, opposition campaigner Alexei Navalny has claimed the government's various assets amount to \$1,600 per citizen. That's overegged, but President Vladimir Putin is vulnerable to popular discontent given Moscow is not, like other countries, subsidising private sector coronavirus-hit wages. While he's grudgingly postponed a vote extending his rule and cancelled the Victory Day parade, Putin will find it tempting to push Finance Minister Anton Siluanov to splash the cash with 2.8% of GDP in extra spending.

Siluanov could resist. Like everyone else, he doesn't know the full extent of the virus impact on public finances or how long it will last. Currently, he estimates he will use \$70 billion of his rainy day fund this year. Until he knows when the downpour might stop, he should aim not to use any more.

OCCI Calls for Emergency Loans for Private Sector

MUSCAT (Dispatches) - To help private sector companies bear the brunt of COVID-19, and enable them to quickly reach optimum performance levels following the easing off of the pandemic, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has called for emergency loans to be provided to them.

Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef, the Chairman of the OCCI Board, called for emergency loans for private sector establishments and companies to help them overcome the reduction in their revenues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

He also urged the COVID-19 Supreme Committee and the economic team to consider setting a plan for reopening some economic activities, mainly those associated with sectors important to people which affect their daily needs, as well as the operations of industrial estates and factories in the Sultanate.

Opening up and offering of such services and activities to the public could gradually start across all the governorates, with communication coming from either the establishments themselves, or through modern methods of sharing information, such as online platforms.

Al Yousef also commended the role played by the Supreme Committee, and the efforts of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, that had been taken to reduce the spread of the disease. The OCCI chairman also praised the efforts extended by the personnel of the Ministry of Health, the security and military services, and the Royal Oman Police during the current pandemic, especially during the month of Ramadan.



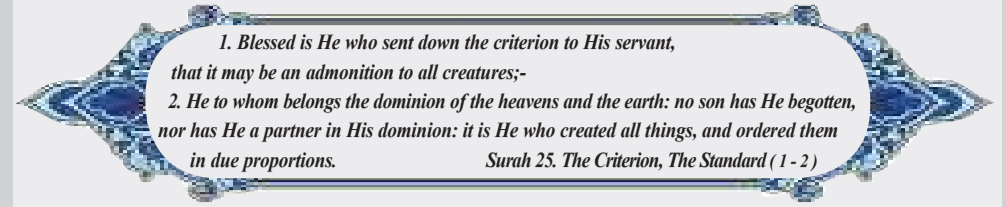
He also praised the latest decisions taken by the Supreme Committee related to the second package of economic facilities/incentives, in coordination with the ministerial committee formed to this effect, the related government departments, and the representatives of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

He also extended his appreciation and gratitude to all those involved in handling the COVID-19 spread in Oman, including those departments and organisations tasked with responding to emergency situations. He also praised the government sector for its coordination with private organisations, with efforts leading to a balanced package of economic incentives and measures.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:07
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:41
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:13



SAARC Rolls Out Stimulus Packages To Tackle COVID-19 Economic Fallout

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - The SAARC countries have rolled out a raft of stimulus packages to boost investments, buffer private businesses and bolster growth in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected the economic activity in a region inhabited by over 1.8 billion people. The World Bank recently warned that South Asia faces its worst economic performance in 40 years due to the deadly coronavirus pandemic which has been wreaking havoc worldwide.

Earlier this month, the World Bank said the coronavirus outbreak has severely disrupted the Indian economy, magnifying pre-existing risks to its outlook. In its report "South Asia Economic Update: Impact of COVID-19", the World Bank estimated the Indian economy to decelerate to 5 per cent in 2020 and projected a sharp growth deceleration in fiscal 2021 to 2.8 per cent in a baseline scenario.

The COVID-19 outbreak came at a time when India's economy was already slowing, due to persistent financial sector weaknesses, the report said.

To contain it, the government imposed a 'lockdown' with restrictions on mobility of goods and people. "The resulting domestic supply and demand disruptions (on the back of weak external demand) are expected to result in a sharp growth deceleration in FY21 to 2.8 percent in a baseline scenario (an estimate subject to wide confidence intervals)," the report said, adding that the services sector will be particularly impacted.

It advised the governments to "ramp up action to curb the health emergency, protect their people, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, and set the stage now for fast economic recovery".

India, a USD 2.9 trillion economy, the biggest in the 8-member SAARC grouping, responded by unveiling a Rs 1.7 lakh crore (USD 22.6 billion) economic stimulus plan, providing direct cash transfer to poor senior citizens and women and free foodgrain and cooking gas to give relief to millions hit by the lockdown.

The central bank cut the key interest rate by 75 basis points to make loans cheaper and provided Rs 1 lakh crore of liquidity to the market. Also, a moratorium on repayment of loans for three months has been provided.

The government has suspended the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code for 6 to 12 months to give breathing space to companies trying to secure the necessary financing, renegotiating loans, and attempting to secure other reliefs from banks.

In Pakistan, when Prime Minister Imran Khan announced the lockdown last month, there was little resistance initially from the private sector. But, as it prolonged, unrest slowly started brewing among small businesses and shopkeepers who feared that they may not sustain the prolonged closure.

To pacify their concerns, the government announced a Rs 1.2 lakh crore rescue package to help businesses and vulnerable people. Separately, the government has decided to allocate Rs 7,500 crore for small and medium enterprises.

"We have given Rs 20,000 crore in tax refund to various businessmen so that they have money with them," Khan said. Pakistan's central bank has reduced the interest rate from 13.25 to 9 per cent since late March in response to the demand from the private sector. It has also agreed to give concessional loans at 4-5 per cent to businesses.

Bangladesh has announced a USD 11.6 billion stimulus package to support the economy, with a primary focus on supporting the manufacturing and service sectors, agriculture and social safety nets. "This support package is equivalent to 3.5 per cent of our GDP," Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said on Friday.

The Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association has said that orders worth about USD 3.2 billion were cancelled or suspended, affecting over 2.3 million workers. The textile sector, a major forex earner, directly employs more than 4.5 million people, mostly women.

Sri Lanka's economy, hit by the COVID-19, is struggling to overcome the crisis. On March 31, the central bank announced a USD 250 million refinancing facility for



banks, enabling them to expand their lending capacity by Rs 40,000 crores to businesses, offer loan repayment moratoriums and provide working capital at 4 per cent interest.

Sri Lanka is also planning to enter into an agreement with the Reserve Bank of India for a currency swap worth USD 400 million to boost the foreign reserves and ensure financial stability.

Nepal's business sector is expected to suffer a loss of around USD 1.25 billion due to the halting of economic activities during the lockdown, says Umesh Lal Shrestha, Vice President Associate, Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industries.

Nepal's tourism sector is the worst hit by the pandemic. The Hotel Association of Nepal has projected that the hotel business income will decline by 90 per cent in 2020 and has asked the government to adopt special measures to protect the industry.

The government has cancelled the "Visit Nepal Year 2020" that aimed to attract two million tourists, in view of the global pandemic. It has announced a relief package which includes a 25 per cent discount on electricity.

The Maldives government has announced an emergency 2.5 billion Maldivian rufiyaa (USD 161.8 million) stimulus package to shore up the local economy against the coronavirus pandemic, a local media report said.

The stimulus plan includes MVR 1.55 billion (USD 100 million) in emergency loans for businesses to meet short-term working capital needs.

The Bank of Maldives has announced a USD 2 million short-term financing facility for the tourism industry, which contributes to the bulk of the island nation's state revenue and foreign reserves. Bhutan's economy is having its worst year in the recent history with the GDP growth projected to decline by anywhere between 1-2 per cent depending on how long the pandemic lasts, Kuensel newspaper quoted economic affairs minister Lokenath Sharma as saying.

The government wants to continue construction of hydropower projects to minimize the impact from COVID-19 and revive the land-locked country's economy. Electricity constitutes about 13 per cent of Bhutan's GDP, the report said.

Afghanistan is a heavily aid-reliant and import-dependent economy. The coronavirus outbreak has further dented an already troubled economy.

The Afghan government has allocated about USD 25 million to deal with the crisis. The World Bank has approved a USD 100.4 million grant to support the war-torn country's weak economy.

Russia's Q2 Grain Export Quota Depleted

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia will suspend grain exports until July 1 only after the grain it has declared in its second-quarter quota has been shipped, the agriculture ministry said on Sunday.

Russia previously set the quota for grain exports of 7 million tons for April through June following the outbreak of the new coronavirus. This online grain export quota ran out on Sunday, data from the ministry showed.

"After all the grain declared for export within the quota has been exported, exports of wheat, rye, barley and corn to countries which are not members of the (Russia-led) Eurasian Economic Union will be stopped until July 1," the ministry said in a statement.

Russia's customs stopped issuing new declarations - documents for exports - after the quota was depleted, it added. The quota ran out quickly this weekend as traders rushed to secure customs documents for shipments in May and June, analysts said on Saturday, adding that supplies from the world's biggest wheat exporter would continue despite the fact.

The high speed at which the quota was snapped up showed these were not real export orders but a consequence of getting the necessary paperwork in place by traders rushing to ensure they have a place in this quota.

In reality, Russia's April grain exports are seen at around 4 million tons, leaving almost 3 million tons for exports in May and June even though the quota is formally exhausted, IKAR and SovEcon, two leading agriculture consultancies in Moscow, said this weekend.

It remains officially unknown who exactly obtained these declarations in the quota, but the Russian Union of Grain Exporters, whose members include two trade firms with three supplies to Egypt's state buyer GASC in May-June, believes there is no risk to Russian exporters being able to fulfil their contracts.

The union "sees no problem in the fulfilment of Russian exporters' obligations with GASC", the head of the union, Eduard Zernin, told Reuters last week. "Everything will be settled," he said.

U.S. Airlines Receive Extra \$9.5b in Payroll Support

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. Treasury Department said on Saturday it has released \$9.5 billion in additional funds from the Payroll Support Program to U.S. air carriers, bringing to \$12.4 billion the total provided to the airline sector hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic.

In total, the government has disbursed grant funds to 10 major airlines and 83 smaller carriers.

Congress approved \$25 billion in grants for payroll assistance for passenger airlines. Treasury required major airlines receiving more than \$100 million in assistance to repay 30% in low-interest loans over 10 years and issue warrants equal to 10% of the loan amount.

Airlines must not cut pay or jobs through Sept. 30 as a condition of the grants and are barred from buying back stock or paying dividends and face restrictions on executive compensation.

SkyWest Inc Chief Executive Chip Childs told employees on Friday the airline expects to receive \$438 million from Treasury in payroll assistance.

"There is still much about the future and recovery that remains uncertain, and there is a very real possibility that we could be a smaller airline by the end of the year," he wrote in an email seen by Reuters.

The four largest U.S. carriers are receiving \$19.2 billion in total out of the \$25 billion - American Airlines Group Inc, Delta Air Lines Inc, United Airlines Holdings Inc and Southwest Airlines Co.

Treasury is awarding major carriers 50% of the grant funds initially and then releasing the remainder through July.

Treasury said additional money will continue to be

provided to approved applicants "on a rolling basis."

The department is still reviewing how to award \$4 billion in grants to cargo carriers and \$3 billion to airport contractors such as caterers.

Cargo carriers that receive \$50 million or less of payroll support and contractors that receive \$37.5 million or less "will not be required to provide financial instruments as appropriate compensation" for support, the department said.

The Treasury Department also published on Saturday the application form for companies deemed critical to maintaining national security seeking loans from a \$17 billion fund.

The fund has been mentioned as a potential source of funds for Boeing Co, which declined to say on Friday whether it would apply. Treasury said it wants companies to apply by May 1.

Treasury has an additional \$25 billion in loans it can award to passenger airlines and \$4 billion in cargo loans. Some airlines, including American, Delta and Alaska Airlines, have already applied.

Airlines may still need more money as U.S. air travel demand has fallen by 95% and shows no sign of improving.

On Friday, President Donald Trump said the U.S. government could pre-buy airplane tickets at a steep discount of 50% or more for travel for the next four or five years. "You infuse them with some cash. And in the meantime, we're flying the people of our country for ... a fraction of the cost," he said.

Airlines for America, a trade group representing major U.S. airlines, declined to comment.

Syria...

FROM PAGE 1

Syria has been gripped by foreign-backed militancy since March 2011. The Syrian government says the Israeli regime and its Western and regional allies are aiding Takfiri terrorist groups that are wreaking havoc in the country.

Syrian government forces have taken back many areas once controlled by the terrorist groups. The government and allied forces are currently busy fighting last bastions of militants in the northwestern province of Idlib and areas in the neighboring Aleppo province.

Iran Records...

FROM PAGE 1

Speaking at a press conference held via video conferencing on Monday, Alireza Raisi stated: "To date, we have performed 35,000 outpatient tests, which are approved by the World Health Organization (WHO). There is a formula in the world that we need to find positive COVID-19 people, even with mild symptoms, and identify people associated with them."

"We have 369 sampling centers in the country, at this stage, we have to carry out 1.5 million outpatient tests. We must continue this process to fully control the disease," Raisi said.

"Our biggest concern is not the virus and the consequences of the disease but is the normalization of this disease. If people move towards normalization and think the disease is over, we will face problems," he added.

"I ask people not to think that we can overcome the disease without observing health principles," Deputy Health Minister said.

Iran Non-Oil...

FROM PAGE 1

The head of Islamic Republic of Iran Custom Administration (IRICA) said last week that despite the U.S. sanctions Iran managed to export commodities to 128 countries in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19) while importing from 112 trade partners.

As reported, Iran exported non-oil commodities to 40 European countries, 21 Asian countries, 28 African countries, and 12 American countries, while importing from 41 European countries, 31 Asian countries, 12 American countries, and 11 countries in Africa.

Pakistan's NTDC...

FROM PAGE 1

In its award / judgement, the tribunal dismissed all claims brought by the Iranian company and accepted several counterclaims of the NTDC amounting to approximately Rs714m with the interest at the rate of 7.925 per cent per year with effect from July 2018 to until full payment.

The dispute arose out of a contract between the Iranian company and the NTDC executed in February 2011 for the design, supply, installation, testing, and commissioning of 500 kV Guddu-Multan third circuit at Rahim Yar Khan 500kV substation. The NTDC terminated the contract due to persistent delays on the part of the Iranian contractor and the project was eventually completed by another contractor.

The Iranian firm initiated the arbitration in early 2017 claiming an amount of about Rs180m (\$1.1m) on account of unpaid invoices and damages.

The NTDC, apart from defending the claims, filed its own counterclaims on the basis of the Iranian company's delays, the costs incurred to complete the project by another contractor, and claims related to liquidated damages, mobilisation advances, customs duties and demurrage.

On the NTDC's counterclaims, the tribunal declared that company had validly terminated the contract as the Iranian firm was responsible for the delay in the project. Accordingly, it directed the Iranian firm to pay the NTDC Rs714m in different heads.

The NTDC is also entitled to the interest at the rate of 7.925pc per year for the Pakistani rupee portion of the damages awarded in its favour. The interest will accrue from July 6, 2018 and run until such time as payment of the award is made. Given the NTDC's near-total success on its counterclaims, the arbitrator also awarded NTDC 78pc of its legal and other costs in the arbitration.

"The last hearing at the ICC tribunal was held in October 2019 in which the judgement was reserved. Finally it announced its decision on April 24 this year," Mr Randhawa said.

Russia...

FROM PAGE 1

On Wednesday, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo claimed Iran "needed to be held accountable" for violating the UNSC resolution after launching its first ever military satellite earlier in the day.

This is while the resolution in question calls on Iran "not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such ballistic missile technology." Resolution 2231 was passed to endorse the multilateral Iran 2015 nuclear deal, which the US withdrew from in 2018, as highlighted by Ulyanov in his tweet on Sunday.

Ever since withdrawing from the nuclear deal, Washington has sought to couple widespread economic sanctions with provocative military deployments to the region in a bid to weaken Iran as part of a campaign of "maximum pressure".

Optimism Over Neuer Contract Extension

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bayern Munich sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic says he is "optimistic" about extending club captain Manuel Neuer's contract, adding in an interview with Sunday's Die Welt that discrepancies had been "clarified internally".

"So I hope we'll be able to extend Manuel's contract," Salihamidzic said, with the Bayern goalkeeper's current deal expiring in June 2021.

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Polish League Sets May 29 as Date for Re-Start

WARSAW (Reuters) - Poland's professional football league said it intends to re-start matches on May 29 and complete the season by July 19 after Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki gave the go ahead on Saturday for games to be played without spectators.

In doing so, Poland became one of the first European countries to give a date for the resumption of the season which has been on hold because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Nadal Pessimistic Over Chances of Return to Normal for Tennis

MADRID (Dispatches) - Rafa Nadal has said he is very pessimistic about the possibility of tennis returning to normal any time soon because of the new coronavirus pandemic that shut down the sport last month.

Professional tennis has been suspended until the end of July, at the earliest, and the Spaniard said on Sunday that serious problems stand in the way of a resumption.

"From my point of view, I'm very pessimistic that the circuit can resume normal activity," the world number two said in an online chat organised by the Spanish Tennis Federation.

"In tennis, you need to travel every week, stay in hotels, go to different countries.

"Even if we play without an audience, to organise any event you need a lot of people involved, which cannot be ignored. At an international level I see a serious problem."

The coronavirus outbreak has decimated the world sports calendar, forcing the postponement of the Olympic Games, which includes tennis, and the cancellation of Wimbledon.

French Open organisers have rescheduled that event for the end of September, shortly after the U.S. Open, although Nadal said public health took priority over tennis tournaments.

"We have already said many times we are in a very difficult moment, for everyone," Nadal added.

"Step-by-step it looks like things are slightly less bad, but we've been through one and a half very tough months, lots of irreparable losses and other losses that are less important, but without doubt will cause suffering in society in the following months.

"I hope it will be months not years because it's also an economic issue as well. Lots of people are going to lose their jobs. These are sad moments when you see so many people dying."

Nadal, 33, said that even when tennis does resume the players will need to recover their fitness levels.

"It will be a very tough job to regain fitness and you will need lots of discipline and lots of suffering," he said. "The sooner we can resume activity the better. From the point of view about going back to competitions, I'm pessimistic.

"But there are many other things more important than tennis."

Spain has been especially badly hit by the virus with 223,759 infections and 23,190 deaths.



Nadal is due to play in a 'virtual' Madrid Open starting on Monday with 32 of the world's best players swapping rackets for gaming controls in a computerized version of the tournament.

Meanwhile Ash Barty is finding it tricky to maintain high intensity in training during the shutdown but the women's world number one is hoping she will be back to her usual self with the flick of a switch when tennis resumes after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like other sports around the world, professional tennis screeched to a halt in early March as the virus spread quickly around the world. It will not restart until at least mid-July.

While Australian Barty, whose partner Gary Kissick is a golfer, has seen her golf game improve during the lockdown in Brisbane, her tennis training is in "a little bit of a holding pattern."

"It's kind of tricky to train with the same intensity as always," Barty, who turned 24 on Friday, told the Sunday Herald Sun. "Obviously, we're still not sure when we'll go back.

Thiem Not Keen on Plan to Assist Struggling Players



LONDON (Reuters) - World number three Dominic Thiem has rejected the notion that the top tennis players should chip in to help lower-ranked competitors who are struggling financially due to the pause in tournaments because of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

World number one Novak Djokovic last week urged players to contribute to a fund set up by the sport's major governing bodies to help players affected by a shutdown which began in March and will continue at least until mid-July.

But Austrian Thiem said he felt there were sections of society that needed more urgent help during the economic crisis caused by the pandemic than his fellow competitors.

"No tennis player is fighting to survive, even those who are much lower-ranked. None of them are going to starve," Thiem told Austrian newspaper Krone on Sunday.

Thiem, 26, who has reached three finals at grand slams since 2018, losing each time, criticised the attitude of some players on the lower-tier Futures circuit, which he said meant they did not deserve handouts from the sport's top players.

Some NBA Clubs Can Reopen Facilities Friday

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - NBA team practice facilities will reportedly reopen Friday in states and cities where coronavirus pandemic stay-at-home requirements have been loosened, allowing players to conduct individual workouts.

ESPN reported that teams will remain banned from conducting group workouts or other activities, citing unnamed sources.

The May 1 move would allow players to return to team facilities in such states as Georgia, home of the Atlanta Hawks, and Oklahoma, home of the Oklahoma City Thunder, for fitness workouts in a safe and controlled environment.

The move, according to the report, does not reflect a new timetable for resumption of the 2019-20 season, which was halted March 12 when Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert was diagnosed with the deadly virus.

But it would mark a small first step on the road back to a possible completion of the regular season and playoffs, which typically last two months.

Most areas with NBA teams have more restrictive confinement measures remaining in place, so the league is telling clubs they will work to find alternative workout arrangements for players not in areas where they could report to team facilities.

With many NBA players not hunkered down in their club's home markets, it could happen that NBA franchises with open facilities allow players from opposing clubs to use gyms on a limited basis for solo workouts.

With Georgia reopening many businesses in the past few days, some players had asked team officials about the possibility of going to Atlanta and working out in gyms there, a move team general managers did not favor.

Some general managers, according to ESPN, expressed concerns about the safety of reopening facilities given that medical officials have been against the idea of reopening businesses.

Georgia's reopening move, for instance, came without the 14 days of diminishing coronavirus positive tests that were sought in federal guidelines of a multi-step process to reopening businesses across the United States.

Spanish Gov't Says No Guarantee Football Resumes Before Summer

MADRID (Dispatches) - Spain's health minister Salvador Illa said Sunday it would be "imprudent" to promise the football season would restart before the summer as the country took steps to ease one of the world's toughest coronavirus lockdowns.

"I can't tell you right now if professional football is going to be able to restart its activities before the summer. It would be imprudent on my part," he said during a daily briefing on the coronavirus pandemic. The minister sounded a note of caution over La Liga plans to test players for the virus before returning to training and resuming a season suspended on March 12, saying giving priority to footballers might breach government policy.

"The diagnostic tests of any kind must be made available to the regional governments," Illa said. Before players can return to the pitch they will have to undergo COVID-19 screening tests. They will then continue to be monitored on a regular basis.

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez announced Saturday that Spaniards will be allowed out for exercise and to take walks from next weekend, with the state of emergency extended this week until May 9. Unlike most other countries, since imposing a lockdown on March 14, Spain has not allowed anyone out for walks, jogs or bike rides, allowing them to leave home only to buy food or medicine, briefly walk the dog or for a medical emergency.



Tough for Murray to Win Another Slam

LONDON (Reuters) - The extended lockdown of tennis will help Andy Murray's return from injury but it will be "a big ask" for him to add to his three Grand Slam titles, according to former British number one Greg Rusedski.

Murray underwent hip re-surfacing surgery at the start of 2019 and resumed playing doubles in June before returning to singles action in August.

He did not compete at the U.S. Open but won the title in Antwerp in October — his first on the ATP Tour for two years.

Murray, 32, has not played a competitive match this year because of bone bruising near the site of his surgery.

With tennis unlikely to return until at least late July because of the coronavirus pandemic, the Scot has plenty of time to get himself 100 percent fit for when play resumes. Yet Rusedski says it will be tough for twice Wimbledon champion Murray to regain his former place in the so-called big four of men's tennis alongside Roger Federer, Rafa Nadal and Novak Djokovic. "The good news for him is that he's had more of a rest at this point," Rusedski told Sky Sports on Sunday. "Hopefully his body comes back, but to challenge week in week out with Nadal, Federer, Djokovic, (Stefanos) Tsitsipas is going to be hard. "Can he win matches. Can he possibly win a Tour event, yes he can do so. But to win Slams, that's three out of five sets, seven matches, that's a little bit difficult. It's possible he can get to a quarter-final, fourth round, but to go all the way with the surgeries he's had, that's a big ask.

"But I hope he proves me wrong, like he's done on several occasions."



Paris 2024 Olympics Plans Obsolete

PARIS (Dispatches) - Plans for the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris are "obsolete and outdated" in light of the coronavirus pandemic, IOC member and former French sports minister Guy Drut said Sunday.

Former Olympic champion Drut, who won gold in the 110m hurdles in 1976 and took silver four years before, added in a column for franceinfo that the Olympic Games needed to be "reinvented" to put them more in touch with reality.

"The crisis we're going through has a lasting impact on our daily lives, our way of life, our economy, our social pact, our choice of society," wrote Drut.

"It cannot and must not remain without effect on the imperative necessity which is to reinvent ourselves.

"The Olympic and Paralympic Games are no exception to this new context. They too must reinvent themselves."

The International Olympic Committee, jointly with local organisers, has been forced into delaying the 2020 Tokyo Olympics by one year to 2021 because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

But Drut, an IOC member since 1996, argued that postponement of dates was just the tip of the iceberg.

