

Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani-Fazli Says the Ministry Is Trying to Hold the Next Elections in the Country Electronically So That Enemies Could Not Chastise Iran's Election

IRAN NEWS

Iran Has Provided 20,000 Coronavirus Diagnostic Kits to Be Sent to Afghanistan in a Bid to Help the Neighboring Country in The Fight Against the Pandemic

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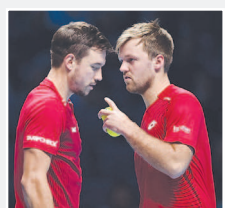


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SPORTS

French Open Champ Turns Shelf Stacker During Pandemic



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Iran Warns U.S., Allies Against Provocative Moves in Region

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Islamic Republic of Iran has warned against any disruption of security in the region saying that any adventurism will lead to a decisive reaction by the armed forces of Iran, the responsibility of which will fall on the hostile forces including the United States.

In a statement on Monday, General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran described the presence of the US military in the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman as a breach of security in the region, stressing that the formation of void US-led coalitions under the pretext of maintaining ship security is not only not helping, but also a dangerous move that disrupts peace and security of the region at the same time.

It said the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman, as important international waterways and major economic hubs, have always been safe paths for the movement of oil and merchant ships, and they have enjoyed the necessary security all through the past years. In this regard, the Islamic Republic of Iran, in cooperation with the countries of the region, has tried to maintain stability and calm at an acceptable level.

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COVID-19 Death Toll Hits 5,877 in Iran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Health Ministry Spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Tuesday that 92,584 people have been infected with COVID-19 virus, of whom 5,877 have unfortunately lost their lives.

In the past 24 hours, 1,112 new affected cases have been detected, increasing the total number of infections in Iran to 92,584, said Jahanpour.

He added that unfortunately, 71 coronavirus patients have died in a single day, bringing the total death toll to 5,877.

The Iranian official noted that 2,983 cases are in critical condition while 72,439 have recovered and been discharged from medical centers

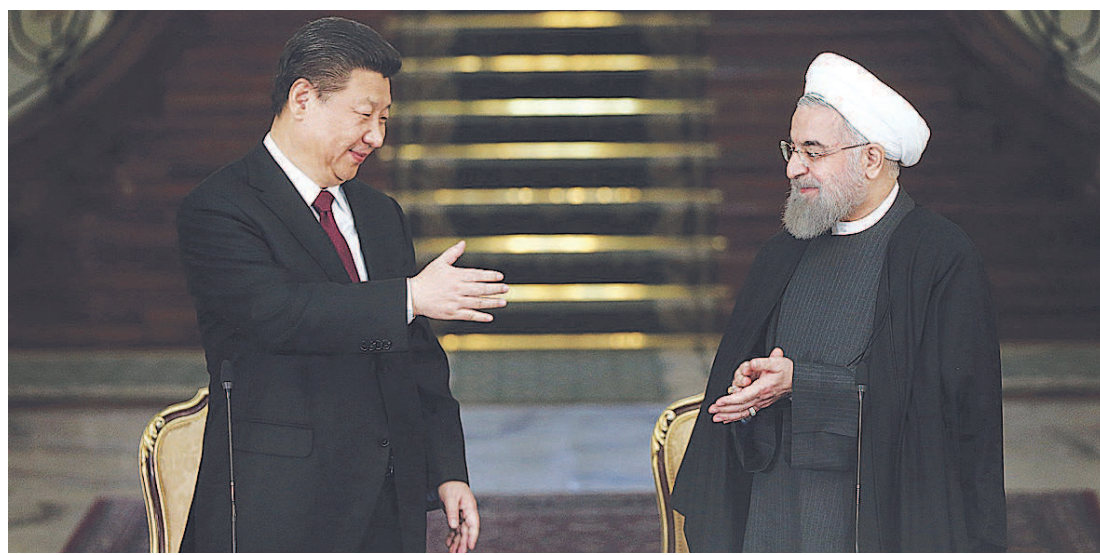
He went on to say that 442,590 tests have so far been carried out in Iran.

As of Tuesday, 3,066,417 cases of coronavirus infections were reported around the world, of whom 211,663 have died, while 923,448 have recovered.

Meanwhile yesterday, Brigadier General Nasrollah Fathian said that making Corona diagnostic kits is one of Iran's achievements, and several countries have asked to buy kits from Iran.

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Tehran, Beijing Rap Washington for Sanctions



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani and his Chinese counterpart have slammed the U.S. sanctions against the other countries while the deadly coronavirus has crippled people across the world.

President Rouhani said the world is in a situation where everyone needs help, but some people continue their unlawful and inhumane sanctions.

In a phone conversation with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday, Rouhani expressed hope that with the efforts and countering measures of countries like China, people see a world without sanctions.

Rouhani went on to point to the US interfering behavior, calling such actions a threat to security, peace and stability in the region.

"For Iran, the security of the region and waterways is important, but unfortunately, the risky behavior of the United States may disrupt the stability of the Persian Gulf region," he underlined.

In turn, the Chinese president Xi Jinping denounced the continuation of U.S. sanctions and its insistence on maximum pressure against Iran. He stated that unfortunately, some countries are seeking political benefits in these conditions, but China is ready to observe international regulations.

He further thanked the Islamic Republic for its assistance amid the outbreak of the coronavirus in China and announced Beijing's readiness to continue to help Iran contain the virus.

"The drop in the number of patients and deaths, and at the same time the increase in the number of recovering people in Iran show that the treatment programs have been useful and their implementation has been accurate," noted the Chinese president.

Referring to the initiative of the Islamic Republic called "Hormuz Peace Endeavour", the Chinese President said this plan is very useful for the security of the region. He added that the security of the Persian Gulf is essential for the international peace and stability.

In this telephone conversation, the two sides also called the relations between Iran and China strategic and special, saying that all-out bilateral trade ties are promising. Rouhani and Xi also called for further development of relations with the implementation of bilateral agreements and carrying out joint infrastructure projects.

The presidents of Iran and China further expressed sympathy and solidarity over the loss of a number of citizens due to COVID-19 disease and wished success in controlling the pandemic.

In the end, they also touched upon boosting health relations between Tehran and Beijing to confront the coronavirus and exchange of experiences and research achievements.

U.S. to Face Tough Battle in Extending UN Iran Arms Embargo Diplomats

LONDON (Dispatches) - Diplomatic sources at the United Nations say Washington has a tough challenge ahead at the Security Council (UNSC) if it pushes for an extension of the world body's arms embargo against Iran through recourse to a process set out in a multilateral nuclear deal that the U.S. controversially abandoned in 2018.

The agreement — officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) — was signed in 2015 between Iran and six major world states and endorsed by UNSC Resolution 2231.

However, the U.S. unilaterally withdrew from what President Donald Trump called "the worst deal ever" in May 2018 and re-imposed anti-Iran sanctions. It has also been coercing the remaining signatories to the JCPOA to follow suit.

Under UNSC Resolution 2231, the UN arms embargo on Iran — in place since 2006/2007 — will be lifted in October 2020. The US has repeatedly expressed its anger at the possible termination of restrictions on Iran's import and export of arms.

Iran says a recent U.S. call on the world body to extend an arms embargo on Tehran is yet another attempt by Washington to divert attention from its economic terrorism.

On Tuesday, diplomats told Reuters that Washington is planning to use a threat to trigger a return of all UN sanctions against Iran as leverage to get the Security Council to prolong the arms embargo on Tehran.

A U.S. official, who was speaking on condition of anonymity, said Washington has shared its strategy with Britain, France and Germany, who are permanent Security Council member states and parties to the Iran deal.

The diplomats said the scheme has not been shared with the remaining 11 council members, including veto-wielders Russia and China, the two other signatories to the JCPOA that are deemed certain to oppose the arms embargo on Iran.

Reports say if the Security Council refuses to revive the embargo, the US will try to trigger a so-called snapback of all UN sanctions on Iran by claiming that it is still a party to the JCPOA and that Iran is in significant violation of the nuclear pact.

The New York Times said on Sunday that US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was laying the groundwork to present a legal argument to the UN that Washington remains a "participant state" in the JCPOA.

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ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



Noor-1 Satellite Is Our Armed Eye

Today there are some countries in the world that instead of having two eyes, they have some more eyes over their heads in the sky and we, the Islamic Republic of Iran, after waiting over years have succeeded in having some eye over our heads to monitor our surroundings which is able both monitor and search.

Satellite Noor-1, which was put into the orbit with smart prudence of Aerospace Division of the IRGC amid the western media's hype and all restrictions, has made our public stunningly more discerning and today we watch and monitor the world better than yesterday. If this satellite had been put into the orbit one year earlier, the performance of Martyr Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani with enemies would have differed totally. What we can do. We were behind in terms of time but fortunately did it because such satellites can provide capabilities for Iran's military forces to monitor all military moves of enemies and facilities of other countries, and also by having such a tool in the space, the country will be able to guide missiles, drones and other military equipment via it, and it is another achievement, added to achievements of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Beside the launch and placing the satellite in the orbit there was another important issue which was less noticed by the media and it was the missile message which "Qased" carrier signaled. It implicitly signaled messages to friends and foes. This missile which put the satellite into the orbit 425 kilometers above the earth is double-functional. It means it can be also used as weapon. In other words, this satellite carrier is a ballistic missile with capability to fly long distances between continents and it seems IRGC's main reason for this launch, amid the U.S. all-out pressures, was to convey an important strategic message that if Iran has announced officially range of its missiles is 2000 kilometers, that range has difference with its existing capabilities.

Today all armies in the world are fully aware that if a country can successfully test a three-phase satellite carrier, it means the country has reached which level of technology. The sensitive point in this technology lies in this matter that nuclear ballistic missiles are very similar to this type of satellite carrier because in the first stage after trajectory and flying some miles, the post-boost is released from the boost phase and later the terminal phase is released from the post-boost and puts the satellite in the orbit but they only differ in this function that ballistic missiles carry nuclear warheads and satellite carriers only satellites.

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Palestinians Capture Israeli Military Drone

GAZA (Dispatches) - The Palestinian resistance group, Hamas, says it has captured an Israeli military drone flying over the Gaza Strip.

According to Palestinian media, the drone was "shot down" by Hamas forces east of the city of Dir al-Balah.

The Israeli military claims the unmanned aerial vehicle captured by Hamas is a "Skylark" that has "crashed" during an "operation" over the Gaza Strip.

It further claimed that the UAV crashed due to "technical error", but it ruled out the possibility that potentially sensitive information would be leaked from the drone.

The United States says it is "prepared to recognize Israeli actions to extend Israeli sovereignty" in the occupied lands belonging to Palestinians.

Along with the drone seizure, a high level of Israeli military vehicle traffic was also reported along the Gaza border.

The Israeli regime regularly uses drones for reconnaissance and assassination operations, involving violation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese airspace.

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850 Armenia Citizens Have Moved From Iran

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - During a discussion on the impact of the coronavirus on the region, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Armenia to Iran Artashes Tumanyan today said 850 citizens of Armenia have moved from Iran to Armenia to this day.

He recalled that two flights to Armenia were carried out on March 26 and 28. “After those flights, it became clear that two infected citizens had also traveled to Armenia on March 26. Upon their arrival, they were isolated, and now they have already recovered. Border traffic has been regulated amid the state of emergency and, most importantly, cargo transportation isn’t interrupted,” Tumanyan added.

U.S. Rants on IRGC Satellite Launch Irrelevant

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian lawmaker has dismissed allegations by Washington that Tehran’s recent satellite launch was in breach of UN Security Council Resolution 2231, saying it was in fact the United States that violated the UN document by abandoning a 2015 multinational nuclear deal.

Alaeddin Boroujerdi, a veteran member of the Iranian Parliament’s Committee on National Security and Foreign Policy, said Monday “America’s rants that Iran’s [placing a satellite into orbit] breaches UNSC Resolution 2231 are irrelevant.”

He made the remarks in response to last week’s allegations by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo that Iran needed to “be held accountable for” the launch of a military satellite because the move was not consistent with Resolution 2231.

“Americans showed their opposition to the [UNSC] resolution by withdrawing from the JCPOA, and the Europeans proved they were incapable of adhering to the agreement by failing to implement it,” said the Iranian lawmaker, referring to the nuclear deal officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has called on the United Nations Security Council to renew its 1 arms embargo on Iran before it expires in October.

Resolution 2231 endorsed the multilateral nuclear accord which was signed between Iran and the major world powers, including the United States, in 2015.

Pompeo’s new claims came days after Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) successfully placed the Islamic Republic’s first ever military satellite — dubbed Nour-1 (Light 1) — in its designated orbit on April 22, aboard a rocket which was also the country’s first three-stage launch vehicle to successfully deliver its load.

Boroujerdi further said major countries like Russia and China had already dismissed



US claims about Iran’s achievement, adding that the launch shows Iran has maintained its independence despite being under “extensive American sanctions.”

He said the launch was in line with the “inalienable right” of Iran or any other country to take steps towards scientific progress by relying on its own capabilities.

By conducting the launch, Iran proved that “reliance on national capabilities free from dependence on major powers can guarantee much greater success.”

He said that the satellite launch disrupted equations in the region and enhanced the position of the Islamic Republic.

The launch “gave the hope to the countries of the region that relying on national capabilities is better than dependence on major world powers since those power are only concerned about safeguarding their own interests,” he added.

“The anger of the Americans and Western countries on the one hand and the delight of the Iran’s and the resistance front ..., on the other, further prove the significance of such a great triumph,” Boroujerdi said.

The legislator reaffirmed that Iran’s policy remained defensive in nature and said, “We oppose any aggression against any country and, as we have repeatedly stated that, we will not allow any of our national interests to be violated.”

Iranian, South African Presidents Discuss U.S. Sanctions, Coronavirus on Phone

TEHRAN (MNA) – In a phone conversation on Tuesday, the Presidents of Iran and South Africa emphasized the development and deepening of relations, especially trade and economic relations, between the two countries, as well as sharing experiences and information on the fight against coronavirus.

Referring to the good history of economic cooperation between the two countries, the two presidents stressed the need to use new capacities to develop cooperation and implement joint projects.

The Presidents of Iran and South Africa also stressed the need to strengthen international cooperation in countering U.S.’ anti-human sanctions, as well as inhumane crimes against the oppressed Palestinian people, and to work for peace and stability in Syria and Yemen.

Rouhani also referred to the illegal and inhumane actions of the United States against the Iranian nation, adding, “Unfortunately, in a situation where we are facing the epidemic of coronavirus in the world and views should be changed towards relations with countries, the United States is stepping up illegal sanctions against the Iranian people and is violating global health regulations in addition to international law, and even preventing the exchange of healthcare products for Iran.”

Referring to South Africa’s membership as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Rouhani stressed, “We expect the United Nations and the international community to emphasize more on opposing U.S. unilateralism and illegal sanctions against Iran.”

The South African President Cyril Ramaphosa also stressed, “We are fully aware of the illegal actions of the United States against Iran and we will continue to support Iran.”

“Now is the time to work together against the common enemy (coronavirus), and now is not the time to impose sanctions and increase pressure on other nations,” he said.

Tehran, Zagreb Denounce Unilateralism Amid COVID-19 Outbreak

TEHRAN (IFP) - The presidents of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Croatia have stressed the need for collaboration and assistance of all countries in the current difficult conditions saying that the unilateral behaviors of certain countries must be confronted.

Referring to the unlawful, irrational and inhumane behavior of the United States in withdrawing from the 2015 nuclear deal and imposing sanctions and maximum pressure on the Iranian nation, President Hassan Rouhani said the continuation of this behavior is anti-human.

Tehran expects European countries to deal with such behavior and take a tough stance, Rouhani added.

For his part, Croatian President Zoran Milanovic called the U.S. increase of sanctions and pressure on Iran “inhumane” in such a difficult situation.

He further pointed to the good relations between Tehran and Zagreb, and the importance of developing and deepening relations with Iran.

“As a country with a long history and a unique position in the region, Iran is of special importance for Croatia,” he added.

The Presidents of Iran and Croatia also expressed solidarity with the people of the two countries in the difficult conditions of the combat with Corona, and called for the sharing of experiences and capabilities to contain the disease.

OPCW Report on Syria Chemical Attacks One-Sided, Biased

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry has denounced as “one-sided” a recent report by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) about a series of suspected gas attacks in Syria’s western region of Hama in 2017.

Seyyed Abbas Mousavi, Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesman, said in an interview with the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) on Monday that the initial report published by the OPCW’s team on the use of chemical weapons in Syria was “biased, one-sided, non-independent, and outside the jurisdiction and scope” of the Hague-based organization.

In an 82-page report earlier this month, the OPCW’s Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) claimed Syrian government forces had been responsible for the alleged chemical attacks on the militant-held town of Lataminah in Hama province during the last week of March 2017.

It alleged that in a span of one week, Syrian fighter jets had twice dropped bombs containing sarin nerve agent on the village and a helicopter had targeted its hospital with a cylinder containing chlorine, affecting scores of people.

Syria dismisses the latest OPCW report on the alleged chemical attacks in the western town of Lataminah as misleading, and based on fabricated sources.

According to the report, the team had based its investigation on a range of evidence, including witness testimonies, videos, forensic reports on

recovered munitions scraps, medical records and satellite imagery.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran, as the biggest victim of chemical weapons in the contemporary period, condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone at any place and time and under any circumstances,” Mousavi said.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman added that the OPCW’s report on Syria and the type of reasoning and conclusion it provides indicated that the report was prepared and compiled under external pressure, and the sources used in the report had, to some extent, been provided by some terrorist groups and so-called humanitarian organizations, such as the White Helmets.

Stressing that Iran is deeply concerned about the stigmatization of the OPCW’s independence and legal personality as a specialized organization with a technical nature, Mousavi said the county disagrees with the formation of an investigation team by OPCW and views this issue as contrary to the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and in contradiction with the UN Security Council’s exclusive mandate to maintain international peace and security.

While appreciating the Syrian government’s constructive cooperation with the OPCW, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman underlined that, “The time has come for Syria’s chemical case to be handled away from politicization, political pressures, and falsified and biased mechanisms.”

Lavrov, Zarif Dismiss U.S. New Plot for JCPOA as “Unfeasible”



TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov discussed the latest plot devised by Washington to put more pressure on Iran.

In a phone conversation on Tuesday, both sides agreed that the US ‘delusional’ plan for Iran nuclear deal is ‘unfeasible, according to a statement issued by the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

According to a report by the New York Times, Washington is preparing a legal argument that the U.S. is still a participant to the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran in order to put more pressure on Iran. “Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is preparing a legal argument that the United States remains a participant in the Iran nuclear accord that [U.S.] President [Donald] Trump has renounced,” reads the report, adding, that the new plan is “part of an intricate strategy to pressure the United Nations Security Council to extend an arms embargo on Tehran or see far more stringent sanctions re-imposed on the country.”

Earlier on Monday, Zarif took to Twitter to condemn the new U.S. plans, urging Pompeo to “Stop dreaming”. He noted that U.S. has already declared “ceasing U.S. participation” in the JCPOA.

Zarif and Lavrov also conferred on the latest political developments in Afghanistan and efforts to achieve a political reconciliation in the country.

Iran to Export Coronavirus Serology-Based Diagnostic Kits

TEHRAN (ISNA) - Iran’s vice president for science and technology, Sorena Sattari announced the export of domestically produced coronavirus serology-based diagnostic kits for the first time.

“Based on an agreement with Ministry of Health and Medical Education, the license for export of the first coronavirus serology-based diagnostic kits will be issued,” he said.

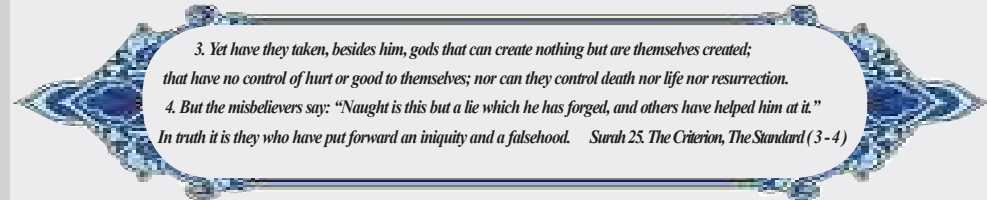
He made the remarks during President Hassan Rouhani’s meeting with the directors of Iranian science and technology parks and knowledge-based companies, held via video conference.

Sattari said, “In the field of fighting coronavirus, we have reached a stage that we can export related products. Some of these products, such as thermometer device and ICU equipment have not been produced domestically before the coronavirus outbreak, but we are now self-sufficient in producing them”.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:08
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:39
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:12



Iran Offered \$2.3b In Insurance to Exporters Last Year

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Head of Iran's export guarantee agency (EGFI) says the body has provided more than \$2.3 billion worth of insurance to export shipments from Iran over the past calendar year ending late March.

Afrouz Bahrami said that the EGFI, an export credit agency by definition, had effectively replaced banks and lenders who face hurdles underwriting and backing the Iranian exporters because of the US sanctions on the country.

"In this field, the fund has replaced the banking system and has managed to clear hurdles (faced by) engineering and technical services sector in the country through issuing the guarantees (for export)," said Bahrami.

Bahrami said that the EGFI is planning to further expand its risk coverage for Iranian exporters in the current calendar year, saying insurance schemes would also cover political risks that may befall the exporters and their shipments.

She said political risk coverage would include full compensations for exporters who have seen their assets confiscated in the destination country or those who face problems in transfer of money into Iranian banks because of the sanctions.



Iran says non-crude exports, including goods, services and energy, has generated \$60bn in revenues.

Iran's exports of various non-crude products and services increased over the past calendar year mainly because of a series of government measures that are aimed at offsetting the impacts of the American sanctions on the country's direct sale of oil.

Officials believe the non-crude sector of the economy has generated around \$60 billion in revenues since Washington imposed its sanctions on Iran in November 2018.

The main export items from Iran include various petrochemical products, followed by metals and raw minerals, agrifood and handicraft.

Bahrami also pointed to the Supreme Leader's naming the year "Surge in Production, saying that to materialize the slogan, it is necessary to pay attention on three important factors of boosting supply, instigating the demand and improving the business environment.

Eurasia Reduces Tariffs on 10 Iranian Exports Items to Zero

RASHT (IRNA) - Eurasia has granted tariff exemptions to 10 Iranian export items within the framework of preferential trade since April 1, according to a local official at Industry, Mine and Trade Organization of Gilan Province.

Mohammad Feyz, who was speaking to IRNA on Tuesday, said that the exemptions will remain in place until June 30.

He said that the exemptions are being granted to recover the negative effects of the spread of COVID-19 and prevent the shortage of such items in the member-states of the union.

The official expressed hope that the exemptions will lead to an increase in exports as well as a surge in production amid tough US sanctions on the country and the COVID-19 outbreak.

KSC's Humanitarian Aids to Deprived Layers of Society

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Khouzestan Steel Company in line with its social responsibility has started its humanitarian aids among the deprived layers of the people in the society.

The CEO of the company Mr. Ali Mohammadi said that the company has started distribution of humanitarian aids among the deprived people in the province. He said that since the Supreme Leader's demand for helping those people who have been affected by the Coronavirus, the company in line with its social responsibility has started distributing hygiene items as well as food staff among deprived people in Ahwaz and Karoun.

He said that the country has put behind several crises, and making the cruel sanctions ineffective and defeating the floods in two years ago all indicate the strong determination among the company's staff.

Mohammadi reiterated that strong determination is the only way for defeating the virus, adding that by observance of hygiene protocols and social distancing, the country can overcome the virus, noting that since the outbreak of the virus, the company has formed a specialized committee.

He said that the company has voluntarily started its aids in the deprived areas in Ahwaz and Karoun as well as some villages in the province by disinfecting as well as distributing over 5,000 hygiene packages among the deprived people in the town of Karoun.

He further said that on the eve of Holy month of Ramadhan and in compliance with the Supreme Leader's remarks, the company started distributing some food staff packages and some 20,000 packages have been distributed and it will continue.

Mohammadi also urged the personnel of the company to observe the hygiene protocols and advice till the containment of the virus.



Iran-Armenia Power Transmission Project in Process



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Armenian ambassador to Tehran said that the power transmission project between Iran and Armenia was in the process despite the coronavirus pandemic.

Armenia's ambassador to Iran Artashes Toumanian said in an online meeting on Monday that the coronavirus outbreak had no effect on the joint projects of Iran and Armenia.

He underlined that his country continued to prepare for welcoming 60 technicians for the construction of the third line of power transmission project from Iran to Armenia.

Iran and Armenia have had friendly relations for decades so that Iran became Yerevan's sixth important trade partner in 2017 and promoted to the fifth place next year.

Tehran, Baku Transportation During Quarantine Reviewed

BAKU (IRNA) - Officials of the Iranian and Azerbaijan Republic discussed online issues of transportation between the two countries in quarantine.

According to the State Customs Committee of Azerbaijan Republic, Azeri delegation was headed by Deputy Chairman of the State Customs Committee Javad Qasemov during the online talk which dealt with the conformity of freight transportation through the two countries' border crossings with the quarantine regime used in connection with the spread of coronavirus and the regulation of vehicle traffic and transfer of goods across the border.

The officials also reviewed technical issues regarding transfer of cargo to the joint auto-making company 'AzKron' in south of Baku to ensure sustainable activity of this production unit.

AzKron, one of the biggest production units in Neftchala, 168 km south of Baku, is currently producing several models of passenger cars.

The Government of the Azerbaijan Republic, in the form of preventive measures against the outbreak of the coronavirus, announced a one-month quarantine until May 6 throughout the country, banning travel in this country with a population of nearly 10 million people.

Iraq Reopens Shoushmi Border With Iran

TEHRAN (ISNA) - Iraq announced that it will reopen Shoushmi border with Iran's Kermanshah province on Tuesday.

Iraqi Kurdistan region's Customs Administration said that it was agreed to reopen Shoushmi border between Kurdistan Regional Government and Iran today.

Iraqi Kurdistan region's Customs Administration in an official letter to Sulaymaniyah's Customs Administration announced that Shoushmi border will reopen today according to Economic and Finance Minister's request and Iran and Iraq will resume their trade exchanges through this border crossing.

In this letter, the administration stressed the need to follow health guidelines to prevent the spread of coronavirus.



Iran Ranks 1st in World for Drug Confiscation

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran ranked first among world countries for confiscation of illegal drugs in the last Iranian year (starting 20 March 2019), according to an official.

Secretary-General of Iran's Drugs Control Headquarters General Eskandar Momeni made the announcement on Tuesday, saying that 950 tons of narcotics were seized in the country last year, which is unprecedented in the history of Iran and in the world, and Iran had the highest confiscation last year.

In Afghanistan, however, less than 300 tons of narcotics have been discovered, he added.

About 74 percent of drug discoveries were due to intelligence measures, and more than 76 percent of drug confiscations were in the east of the country, Momeni said, adding that all of these measures have been taken while Iran has been under sanctions.

Iran has been able to have the highest drug confiscation even in sanctions conditions, he noted.

International Deputy of Iran Drug Control Headquarters Nasser Aslani said on April 23 that some 17,765 kilograms of illicit drugs consisting of 15,339 kilograms of opium and 1,186 kilograms of hashish, 428 kilograms of heroin, 577 kilograms of crystal, 53 kilograms of grass, 67 kilograms of morphine, and 116 kilograms of other kinds of drugs have been confiscated by police forces across the country in the last week.

Based on the United Nations reports, Afghanistan ranks first as the producer of opium and heroin in the world. Iran, being Afghanistan's neighbor, has always been the main route for smuggling narcotics to the Western world.

Iran is at the forefront of the fight against drug trafficking and thousands of Iranian forces have been so far martyred to protect the world from the danger of drugs.



Call for Constant Services with Observance of Hygiene Protocols

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Isfahan Province Water and Wastewater Company has urged his colleagues in the company to continue constant services to clients with observance of all hygiene protocols.

In the meeting for reviewing ways of earning revenues in the subscribers' section, Eng. Hashem Amini said that the outbreak of Coronavirus has created problems in the world but it does not lead to a hesitate in offering services to the subscribers.

He also said that all should get used to adopt the lifestyle with Coronavirus, noting that the world has gotten along well with this issue as people should continue their normal lives by protecting their health.

Amini also pointed to the rise in water consumption in the province due to the current condition, adding that the company has taken some measures to avoid disruption in water supply for its clients in the summer although the second water supply system has not come on stream yet.

He stated that the field of serving the subscribers is the frontline of serving the public, and pointed to the merge of urban and rural water and wastewater companies, noting that all should take advantage of this opportunity for more integrity and improving services to the people of Isfahan Province.

Amini then called for continuation of services to the public in line with materializing the organizational slogan with observance of all hygiene protocols.

Meanwhile in the meeting, head of subscribers' affairs department of the company read a report on the challenges ahead of the company after the outbreak of the Coronavirus.



Turkey Will Send Medical Gear to United States

ISTANBUL (Reuters) - President Tayyip Erdogan said that Turkey will send medical gear including protective suits and masks to the United States on Tuesday to help its efforts to contain the coronavirus outbreak.

“At a time when even developed countries are asking for Turkey’s support, we have offered our support to a wide geography, from the Balkans to Africa,” Erdogan told reporters following a cabinet meeting.

“Most recently, we are sending medical aid to the United States on Tuesday, consisting of surgical masks, N95 masks, hazmat suits and disinfectants,” Erdogan said, adding that the shipment would be delivered via a Turkish military plane.



Brexit Talks Can Still Be Done Within Agreed Timescale

LONDON (Reuters) - Talks to strike a deal on a post-Brexit relationship between Britain and the European Union can still be concluded within the agreed timescale, British Cabinet Office minister Michael Gove said on Monday.

Last week, EU’s chief negotiator Michel Barnier said discussions had made little progress and that Britain had set a tight deadline by ruling out an extension to the Brexit transition period beyond the end of 2020.

“We believe it is still entirely possible to conclude negotiations on the timetable that has been outlined,” Gove told a parliamentary committee.



Activists Cautious on Saudi Floggings, Death Penalty Reforms



RIYADH (AFP) - Human rights campaigners on Monday cautiously welcomed Saudi moves to abolish court-ordered floggings and end the death penalty for crimes committed by minors, but pointed out “loopholes” in the reforms.

The changes underscore a push by de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to modernise the ultra-conservative kingdom, long associated with a fundamentalist strain of Islam.

Long faced with scrutiny over its rights record, the kingdom has one of the world’s highest rates of execution.

It announced over the weekend it was ending the death penalty for those convicted of crimes committed while they were minors as well as effectively eliminating floggings.

“While the announced changes represent a major step forward, there remain questions about the extent of their implementation,” Adam Coogler, Middle East researcher at Human Rights Watch, told AFP.

“Saudi Arabia’s announced abolishment of the death penalty for child offenders and flogging punishment are not total, but appear to leave in a loophole for them to continue as punishments for certain types of crimes.”

Saudi Human Rights Commission president Awwad Alawwad said that instead of court-ordered floggings, convicts will receive fines or prison terms.

But flogging could still be applied as a “hudud” punishment, which under Islamic sharia law is reserved for serious offences such as rape, adultery or apostasy.

Saudi officials say hudud penalties are rarely meted out as many offences must be proved by a confession or be verified by several adult male Muslim witnesses.

Still, observers say the government is unlikely to abolish the penalties entirely as the move would rankle arch-conservatives.

Many hardliners are already irked by the kingdom’s sweeping liberalisation drive that has allowed activities once deemed un-Islamic -- cinemas, concerts and mixed-gender parties.

Citing a royal decree, the HRC said those convicted of crimes while they were under 18 will now receive a prison sentence of no longer than 10 years in a juvenile detention facility.

But campaign group Reprieve said “significant loopholes” in the reform still let prosecutors “continue to seek death sentences against children”.

It also remains unclear whether the new decree will be applied retroactively, the group added.

At least six men from the minority Shiite community are on death row on charges of taking part in anti-government protests as minors, during the Arab Spring uprisings.

United Nations human rights experts made an urgent appeal to Saudi Arabia last year to halt plans to execute them.

Saudi authorities have not said whether their sentences will be commuted. “These will be nothing more than empty words as long as child defendants remain on death row,” said Reprieve director Maya Foa.

“The kingdom continues to execute people convicted of attending demonstrations while they were still in school.”

But Alawwad insisted the decree is aimed at establishing a “more modern penal code” and said “more reforms” were coming.

Russia Overtakes China With Coronavirus Cases at 87,000

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia overtook China in the number of confirmed coronavirus cases on Monday when its tally climbed above 87,000, as pressure rose on the government to consider easing lockdown restrictions for businesses to help shore up the rattled economy.

Russia, the world’s largest country by territory, has been on lockdown since President Vladimir Putin announced the closure of most public spaces on March 25. These measures are due to expire on April 30 and Putin has not yet said if he plans to extend them.

Anna Popova, the head of Russia’s safety watchdog Rospotrebnadzor, told state television on Monday that, in her view, restrictions should be in place until May 12.

Earlier Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin asked his government to submit proposals by Thursday to ease some of the restrictions on businesses. Many firms have warned that they risk going bankrupt if the lockdown continues, and thousands of jobs have been laid off.

“As soon as situation will be changing for good, we would need to consider a step-by-step cancellation of restrictions on certain companies... operations,” Mishustin told an online government meeting.

On Monday, the authorities reported 6,198 new cases of the new coronavirus, bringing the total to 87,147, with 794 deaths.

Russia, one of the world’s top oil and gas exporters, is particularly vulnerable to the spread of the coronavirus at production sites. Most are located in remote areas accessible by only air, meaning the workers in close proximity, increasing their risk of infection.



U.S. May Seek Damages From China Over Virus

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S. President Donald Trump suggested on Monday that he may seek damages from China over the coronavirus outbreak which began in the Chinese city of Wuhan and spread around the world.

“We are not happy with China,” Trump said at a White House briefing. “We are not happy with that whole situation because we believe it could have been stopped at the source.”

“It could have been stopped quickly and it wouldn’t have spread all over the world,” he said.

“There are a lot of ways you can hold them accountable,” Trump said. “We’re doing some very serious investigations as you probably know.”

Trump was asked about a recent German newspaper editorial which called on China to pay Germany \$165 billion in reparations because of economic damage done by the virus.

Asked if the U.S. would consider doing the same, the U.S. president said “we can do something much easier than that.”

“Germany is looking at things, we are looking at things,” he said. “We are talking about a lot more money than Germany’s talking about.”

“We haven’t determined the final amount yet,” Trump said. “It’s very substantial.”

“This is worldwide damage,” he said. “This is damage to the U.S., but this is damage to the world.”

There have been more than 55,000 coronavirus-related deaths in the United States and the pandemic has shut down huge swathes of the economy, leaving tens of millions unemployed.

Pelosi Endorses Joe Biden for U.S. President

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Joe Biden won the endorsement for U.S. president Monday of Nancy Pelosi, who hailed him as a “voice of reason” capable of leading America out of the coronavirus crisis.

Pelosi was the last leading Democrat to endorse formally Biden’s run for the White House against Republican Donald Trump in November. “Today I am proud to endorse Joe Biden for president of the United States because he will be an extraordinary president,” the speaker of the House of Representatives said in the pre-recorded message.

Biden, who served as vice president under former president Barack Obama, had already emerged as the Democrats’ presumptive nominee after decisive primary victories in a string of primaries before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down much of the country. His main rivals, including Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, have dropped out of the race and endorsed Biden as has Obama.

In her statement, Pelosi lauded the former senator from Delaware as a man of “empathy, grace and courage” and “a leader with the humility to seek expertise in science and the confidence to act on it.”

“As we face coronavirus Joe Biden has been a voice of reason and resilience with a clear path to lead us out of this crisis,” she said.

Haftar Claims Mandate From the People

BENGHAZI (AFP) - Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar said Monday he had “a popular mandate” to govern the country, declaring a key 2015 political deal over and vowing to press his assault to seize Tripoli.

In a speech on his Libya al-Hadath TV channel, he said his self-styled Libyan “army” was “proud to be mandated with the historic task” of leading Libya.

“We announce our acceptance of the people’s will and mandate and the end of the Skhirat Agreement,” he said, referring to a 2015 United Nations-mediated deal that produced the unity government.

He did not make clear whether an elected parliament in the country’s east, a signatory to the deal, backed his move -- or what its future role would be.

Haftar has so far drawn his legitimacy from the administration based in the country’s east, and last April his forces launched an assault to seize the capital Tripoli, in the west, from the Government of National Accord. He said Monday his forces would work “to put in place the necessary conditions to build the permanent institutions of a civil state”.



But an adviser to the UN-recognised GNA rejected Haftar’s speech on Monday. “Haftar has once more exposed his authoritarian intentions to the world,” Mohammed Ali Abdallah said.

“He no longer seeks to conceal his contempt for a political solution and democracy in Libya. His statement tonight is the final, desperate act of a defeated man.”

Haftar had already indicated in 2017 that the Skhirat deal had “expired”.

Last Thursday, he asked Libyans to choose an institution to govern the country after the end of the Skhirat deal. He also tabled the possibility of a “constitutional declaration”, raising fears that the country could end up being partitioned.

Plunged into chaos with the toppling and killing of longtime dictator Moamer Kadhafi in 2011, Libya has largely come under the control of Haftar’s forces in the east and armed groups backing GNA in the west.

Haftar’s offensive to seize Tripoli ground to a stalemate that has left hundreds dead and some 200,000 displaced.

Brazilians Divided on Impeachment of President Bolsonaro

BRASILIA (Reuters) - Brazilians are split on impeaching President Jair Bolsonaro despite a majority believing accusations by the former justice minister that Bolsonaro tried to interfere with the federal police’s work for political gain, a poll conducted on Monday showed.

Pollster Datafolha found that 48% oppose impeaching Bolsonaro while 45% of those surveyed want to see him impeached, a difference within the margin of error of the poll.

Sergio Moro, a popular minister because of his record fighting corruption as a federal judge, resigned as justice minister on Friday, accusing the president of attempting to interfere in sensitive police investigations involving family members.

Bolsonaro said the accusations were unfounded.

For 52% of those polled by Datafolha, Moro was telling the truth and only 20% said they believed Bolsonaro’s account.

While Brazilians are split on Congress removing the president by impeachment, the number that believe Bolsonaro should resign has risen to 46% from 37% in the previous poll at the beginning of April. Those opposed to his resigning have decreased to 50% from 59%.

A main reason for discontent with Bolsonaro has been his handling of the coronavirus epidemic, whose gravity he has downplayed as the death toll rises in Brazil. The poll found 45% consider his handling bad or terrible against 27% who think he has done a good or excellent job.

The Datafolha poll showed that Bolsonaro has hung on to his core support, with the positive approval rating of his government rising to 33% from 30% in December. Its negative numbers have risen to 38% from 36% four months ago.

Datafolha polled 1,503 people by telephone on Monday. The poll has a margin of error of 3 percentage points up or down.





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5bdrs, S/p
S, J, & pkg
marble floor
Fully Furn

Parsian

Apt (\$2500)
Farmanieh
260sq.m, 3bdrs
S/pool, S, J
Nicely Furn

Shahrak-e-Gharb (\$1400)
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EU to Offer Banks Capital Relief

LONDON (Reuters) - Banks in the European Union are to get more capital relief to help companies struggling in the coronavirus pandemic and avoid crippling provisions for loans hit by a looming deep recession, sources said on Monday.

The bloc's financial services chief Valdis Dombrovskis is expected to propose this week that the EU will "emulate in some form" a move by the Federal Reserve to allow banks to ease how they calculate their leverage ratio, sources familiar with the package said.



U.S. Economy Could Contract 30% in Q2

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The U.S. economy could contract at its worst rate since the Great Depression later this year due to the coronavirus crisis, warned Kevin Hassett, who recently rejoined the Trump administration as a senior economic advisor.

The initial look at gross domestic product for the first quarter, out on Wednesday, will be a negative number, Hassett said on "Squawk Box." However, he said the real damage to the economy from the coronavirus will be revealed further down the road. "You're looking at something like minus 20% to minus 30% in the second quarter."

The average estimates in the CNBC Rapid Update economic survey, as of late last week, showed a 5.3% decline in first-quarter GDP and about a 29% contraction in the second quarter.

In a string of dismal data on economic growth as the coronavirus economic halt took hold, the government on Friday said that orders for durable goods plunged 14.4% in March.

Hassett, who last summer left his post as chairman of the White House Council of Economic Advisors after two years, said Monday he expects April's unemployment rate, released a week from this Friday, to surge to 16% or 17%.

The unemployment rate in March rose to 4.4% with nonfarm payrolls dropping by 701,000 as the monthly data from the government was only just beginning to show to the collapse already being revealed in weekly jobless claims.

Over 4.4 million more Americans applied for first-time jobless claims for the week ending April 18, bringing total filings for the past five weeks to 26.4 million, wiping out all the job gains seen after the Great Recession.

"The puzzle is incomes are staying relatively high and output is going to zero," Hassett said.

"If the virus does start to go away in a way that makes it so that most every state feels comfortable that it's safe to open up, then we really could be looking at a rapid recovery because the incomes are still there," he added.

BOJ Expands Stimulus as Pandemic Pain Worsens

TOKYO (Reuters) - The Bank of Japan expanded monetary stimulus on Monday and pledged to buy an unlimited amount of bonds to keep borrowing costs low, as the government tries to spend its way out of the growing economic pain from the coronavirus pandemic.

The step, which follows monetary easing only a month ago, puts the BOJ in line with other major central banks that have unleashed unprecedented amounts of monetary support as the health crisis stokes fears of a deep global recession. BOJ Governor Haruhiko Kuroda said the central bank was ready to act further to fight the impact of the novel coronavirus, which he said could do more harm to the global economy than the 2008 collapse of Lehman Brothers.

"The current crisis could have a bigger negative impact than the Lehman shock. The government and the central bank obviously need to work together, particularly at a time like this," Kuroda told a news conference.

The BOJ also sharply cut its economic forecast and projected inflation would fall well short of its 2% target for three more years, suggesting its near-term focus will be to battle the crisis.

To ease corporate funding strains, the BOJ said, it will boost three-fold the maximum amount of corporate bonds and commercial paper it buys to 20 trillion yen (\$186 billion).

The central bank also clarified its commitment to buy unlimited amounts of government bonds by scrapping a loose guidance to buy them at an annual pace of 80 trillion yen.

"The BOJ will purchase the necessary amount of government bonds without setting an upper limit" to keep long-term interest rates around its 0% target, it said in a statement. Kuroda rebuffed the view held by some analysts and politicians the BOJ's bond buying was directly aimed at financing huge government spending.

German Exports In Freefall as Numbers to Hit Lowest Ever

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Despite being one of the strongest in the world, Germany's economy has been hit hard by the COVID-19 outbreak. Although Germany's death toll has not reached the levels experienced in Italy and Spain, the Institute for Economic Research (IFO) lowered the export market expectations from -19 to -50 in April. The number is now at the lowest value ever measured.

The IFO said: "The coronavirus crisis is striking the German economy with full fury. Demand for industrial products has collapsed."

"Companies have never been so pessimistic about the coming months."

The institute also revealed last week the business climate index of firms from across the economy dropped to 74.3 in April.

This represents two horrific drops in the country's business climate index over the last two months.

In February, the index stood at 96 before it dropped to 85.9 in March as the virus began to take hold of Europe's largest economy.

Due to the lockdown across the country, the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) said unemployment in the country is set to rise by 520,000 and will exceed three million this year.

The country's stock market, the Dax performance Index is still recovering from a monumental fall in February.

The market stood at 13,579 on February 21 before dropping to 8,441 on March 18.

Although the price has risen 10,581 at the time of writing, the government has drawn up a huge €750billion (£653billion) support package.

Angela Merkel has also warned the country the pandemic is still at its early stages despite the lifting of lockdown measures in certain areas across the country.

Ms Merkel also stated that some of Germany's 16 states were moving too fast and that the country remained in a precarious position.

UK Considers Error Range for GDP Data Due to COVID Uncertainty

LONDON (Reuters) - Economic output figures could soon come with error ranges around them, to better capture uncertainty around an historic slump that is expected to follow Britain's coronavirus shutdown, statisticians said on Monday.

British gross domestic product figures were significantly revised during and after the 2008-09 financial crisis, and budget forecasters have already said this year's plunge in the economy could be even bigger.

"Depending on user feedback, we could implement the proposed confidence intervals around the latest estimates of calendar quarter GDP, which would be a marked departure from how we have previously communicated data uncertainty," the Office for National Statistics said.

A confidence interval represents the range within which the true value of a data estimate is believed to lie, providing a given degree of certainty, commonly 95%.

There is little precedent for countries publishing confidence intervals for headline GDP numbers, though the ONS already gives confidence intervals around some labour market, migration and population data.

Data revisions tend to be larger than normal at turning points in the economy.

During the global financial crisis, official data initially showed Britain's economy began to shrink in the third quarter of 2008, rather than the second quarter as shown later. They also incorrectly stated a new recession in late 2011.

Turning points are hard to measure because of changed patterns in how businesses respond to surveys and difficulty judging whether a sharp move represents temporary volatility or real change.

"This is likely to be particularly relevant over the next year in light of the recent shocks to the UK and global economy following the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the wider containment effort," the ONS said.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Monday it was still too risky to relax Britain's lockdown, imposed to try to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

The ONS said it would continue to state when the economy entered a 'technical' recession where there are two consecutive quarters of falling output, a simple definition widely used across Europe.

But it said this definition was sensitive to revisions in output, and that it was better to look at a mix of measures such as unemployment, household incomes and retail sales, as done by the United States' National Bureau of Economic Research.

The ONS said it would declare recessions only based on calendar-quarter figures, and not monthly GDP data introduced since 2008-09. Regional GDP data was also too volatile to declare recessions in parts of the United Kingdom.

Brazil 2020 GDP Outlook Falls to -3.3%



BRASILIA (Reuters) - The outlook for Brazil's economy deteriorated for an eleventh consecutive week, a central bank survey showed on Monday, and forecasts for the public finances pointed to record budget deficits amid the deepening coronavirus crisis.

The economy is now expected to shrink by 3.3% this year, according to the average forecast of over 100 financial institutions in the bank's 'FOCUS' survey, compared with last week's forecast of 3% contraction.

The government and central bank are sticking to their official forecast of zero growth for now, but are widely expected to revise that lower in due course.

The FOCUS survey also showed the government is expected to post a primary budget deficit this year of 6.2% of gross domestic product compared with 5% the week before, more in line with recent comments by Treasury and Economy Ministry officials.

Four weeks ago, economists forecast a primary deficit of 1.3% of GDP.

Average forecasts for the nominal budget deficit this year, which includes interest payments, deteriorated to 11.1% of GDP from 10% a week ago. Four weeks ago, the average forecast was for a budget shortfall of 6% of GDP.

Food Prices Across Syria Double in a Year

BEIRUT (AFP) - Food prices in war-torn Syria have doubled in the past year to record levels, 14 times the average before the nine-year-old conflict, the World Food Program said Monday.

"Over the past 12 months, the price of WFP's reference food basket has on average increased by 107 percent across Syria," the UN agency said.

"This is 14 times the pre-crisis average and the highest ever recorded," WFP spokeswoman Jessica Lawson told AFP.

Syria's war has devastated the country's economy since it started in 2011, and plunged 80 percent of its people into poverty, according to the UN.

Last week, millions of Muslims across Syria started celebrating the fasting month of Ramadan, many displaced from their homes and the large majority under lockdown to stem the novel coronavirus pandemic.

WFP said food prices had increased by 152 percent in the government-controlled province of Sweida, followed by 133 percent in the central regions of Hama and Homs, also under the control of Damascus.

The Syrian capital followed, with prices jumping by 124 percent in just 12 months.

In Damascus, an AFP reporter said that over the past month a kilogram of tomatoes had doubled in price from 500 to 1,000 Syrian pounds.

A bunch of mint or parsley was going for triple the price three months ago, he said.

Syrians in government-held areas have over the past year had to contend with price hikes, a fuel crisis and a plummeting Syrian pound on the black market.



The government has blamed Western sanctions for the economic crisis, but analysts also say severe capital controls in neighbouring Lebanon have contributed by hampering the influx of dollars to government-held areas of Syria.

In February, authorities in Damascus launched a smart card system to allow families to access a limited amount of sugar, rice and tea at a discount.

Damascus has officially announced 43 cases of the COVID-19 illness, including three deaths. The UN has announced one fatality in the northeast of the country.

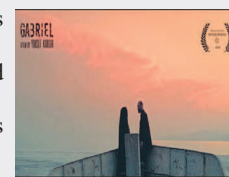
The war has killed more than 380,000 people and displaced millions from their homes.

"Gabriel" Takes Part in Ivy Film Festival in U.S.

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian short film, 'Gabriel' directed by Yousef Kargar, is supposed to be screened at the 2020 Ivy Film Festival in the U.S.

'Gabriel' has been selected from among 400 films from 45 countries and is scheduled to compete with works from the U.S., Brazil, Slovenia, Poland, UK, and Germany.

It narrates the story of a father who has to decide under difficult conditions between love, faith, and conscience.



Violence Increased in Afghanistan After U.S.-Taliban Deal

KABUL (AFP) - Violence surged in Afghanistan in the weeks after the United States and the Taliban signed a deal supposed to pave the way for a peace process, a UN agency said Monday.

Afghans had enjoyed a period of relative calm ahead of the February 29 accord, but the conflict resumed almost as soon as the deal was signed, and the militant group has since rejected multiple calls for a ceasefire during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan.

"The report tracks a disturbing increase in violence during March at a time when it was hoped that the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban would commence peace negotiations," the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said in a statement accompanying the release of its quarterly report.

More than 500 civilians were killed and over 700 injured during the first three months of the year, UNAMA said.

While casualty numbers rose in March, UNAMA noted that the overall toll for the first quarter of 2020 was down 29 percent from a year earlier, thanks to a lull in fighting in January and February -- including a week-long partial truce -- as U.S. and Taliban negotiators ironed out a withdrawal agreement.

Under the accord, American and other foreign forces have pledged to quit Afghanistan by July 2021 provided the Taliban stick to several security guarantees and hold talks with the government.

However, fighting spiked in March as the Afghan government and Taliban bickered over a number of issues, preventing negotiations between the two from opening.

"To safeguard the lives of countless civilians in Afghanistan and to give the nation hope of a better future, it is imperative that violence is stopped with the establishment of a ceasefire and for peace negotiations to commence," UNAMA chief Deborah Lyons said.



The Taliban rejected the figures, claiming the report "conceals the daily crimes" committed by the government and U.S. forces.

UNAMA did, however, note that pro-government forces were responsible for more than twice as many child deaths than the insurgents were during the first quarter, mainly due to air strikes and shelling.

Recent attacks have mostly been limited to rural areas and small towns. Under the framework of US-Taliban deal, the insurgents have agreed not to attack cities.

The release of the UN report comes hours after the U.S. special envoy who brokered a deal with the Taliban called for the militants to implement a humanitarian ceasefire while Afghanistan tries to tackle its worsening coronavirus crisis.

Australia Rejects Chinese Economic Coercion Threat



SYDNEY (Reuters) - Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne has cautioned China against attempts at "economic coercion" as Australia pushes for an investigation into the coronavirus pandemic that China opposes.

Chinese ambassador to Australia, Cheng Jingye, said in a newspaper interview on Monday the "Chinese public" could avoid Australian products and universities.

Australia last week called for all members of the World Health Organization (WHO) to support an independent review into the origins and spread of the coronavirus, and is lobbying world leaders.

China's foreign ministry has attacked the proposal. "Maybe the ordinary people will say 'Why should we drink Australian wine? Eat Australian beef?'" Cheng said in the interview published on the front page of The Australian Financial Review.

Cheng said it was possible that tourists may have "second thoughts" about visiting Australia.

"The parents of the students would also think ... whether this is the best place to send their kids," he added.

After energy exports, education and tourism are Australia's biggest export industries, with China the largest market.

Payne said in a statement on Monday that Australia had made a "principled call" for an independent review of the COVID-19 outbreak which started in the Chinese city of Wuhan.

"We reject any suggestion that economic coercion is an appropriate response to a call for such an assessment, when what we need is global cooperation," Payne said.

China is the largest export market for Australian wine and beef. During strained diplomatic relations with China in 2018, Australian wine faced import delays in China and some Australian beef exports were also previously suspended for a period.

The Chinese embassy in Australia has previously warned Chinese students about what it said were safety risks in travelling to Australia.

Payne said an "honest assessment" of the pandemic would seek to strengthen the WHO's role.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang dismissed calls for an investigation during a daily briefing in Beijing, though not commenting specifically about Australia. "China is the first country to report a COVID case, but it doesn't mean the virus originated in China," he told reporters.

"Some people are trying to hype up the so-called investigation that is inconsistent with an international atmosphere of cooperation and their political manoeuvring will not succeed." The novel coronavirus has infected 2.97 million people worldwide and killed more than 205,000, a Reuters tally shows.

Spain Eyes Looser Lockdown After Kids Return to the Streets

MADRID (Reuters) - Spanish authorities on Monday prepared to further loosen one of Europe's toughest coronavirus lockdowns and played down concerns that letting children outdoors after six weeks had led to crowds forming in public spaces.

Having suffered one of the world's deadliest outbreaks of the COVID-19 respiratory pandemic, Spain shut down public life on March 14 to curb its spread, but recently began to ease restrictions as it reined in the infection rate. The government is now preparing to phase out further restrictions on mobility.

In the most significant relaxation of the lockdown yet, on Sunday children under 14 were granted one hour of daily supervised outdoor activity if they adhered to social-distancing guidelines and stayed within 1 km of their homes.

Health Minister Salvador Illa told a news conference the first day under the new regulations had gone well and the behaviour of most people had been "exemplary," though again stressed the need for all to observe social-distancing rules.

Some local authorities had complained parents were allowing their kids to flout the regulations, and TV footage showed large crowds gathering in parks and on boardwalks across the country.

In the capital Madrid, police deployed drones to patrol

recreational areas, broadcasting the new rules over loudspeaker and monitoring for any breaches.

"The rules are there to protect your children's health," Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska said, adding he had received reports of entire families out strolling together and children playing in groups, both of which remain prohibited.

At a press briefing in Barcelona, Catalan regional interior secretary Miquel Buch called for more nuanced regulations such as allowing children of different ages out at different times to avoid crowds.

He also said that, in future, the Spanish government should set aside specific times for vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, to be outdoors.

A long-awaited study into the prevalence of the coronavirus among the Spanish population began on Monday. Directed by the Carlos III institute for health, it aims to test 36,000 families for the presence of antibodies generated to fight off the virus.

It should help researchers identify people who were infected but never tested because they did not become ill enough to seek medical attention or never developed symptoms.

The testing will help the government gauge the real extent of the epidemic, taking into account also those who may be immune or resistant to the infection.

U.S. to Face...

FROM PAGE 1

It is "part of an intricate strategy to pressure the United Nations Security Council to extend an arms embargo on Tehran," the report said.

Reuters, however, cited the UN diplomats as saying that Washington's plan will likely be challenged since the US is no longer a party to the deal. "It will be dead on arrival," a Security Council diplomat predicted.

"It's very difficult to present yourself as a compliance watcher of a resolution you decided to pull out of," a European diplomat said. "Either you're in or either you're out."

Another European official said, "It's going to be messy from a Security Council standpoint because, regardless of what (Britain, Germany and France) think, Russia and China are not going to sign up to that legal interpretation."

Iran Warns U.S...

FROM PAGE 1

The statement reads, "Dangerous moves that disrupt the shipping safety began when the adventurous and terrorist country of the United States and some of its allies came to this sensitive region. The United States, with its risky traffic and military bases in the region, is practically the source of lawlessness, menace, and insecurity. The Islamic Republic of Iran has repeatedly warned the global and international community about destabilizing moves of the United States that disrupt regional order and security which are in violation of international law and regulations."

It added, "The past Iranian solar year can be considered the peak of evil and insecure movements of the US in the region. Under the untrue pretext of shipping security in the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman the United States formed multiple coalitions in the region. With the deployment of warships and the increase and deployment of the military forces, it has been posing a lot of risks, and took actions contrary to the customary international law and the law of the sea."

The statement continues, "Disruptive and provocative military operations, combat exercises, shooting, territorial aggression, unnecessary inspections of ships and vessels, imposing psychological insecurity on fishermen and traders, preparing grounds for freedom of action for smugglers, polluting the marine environment and endangering marine aquatic life by the use of nuclear propulsion is only part of the risky and unconventional measures of the US Navy in the region that are against the customary international law."

"In some cases, the security guards of the Islamic Republic's Army and the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps have been on the verge of colliding with them."

Therefore, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran considers the presence of the United States and its allies to be unlawful and the source of peril and insecurity in the region. The Islamic Republic calls on them to comply with international law and rules, as well as the rules of the Islamic Republic, while passing Iran's exclusive economic waters. They must also avoid any adventurism, and moves that are against safe and harmless navigation. They should avoid false narratives of their risky behaviors as well.

The Islamic Republic of Iran strongly believes and has always stated that the countries of the region have the necessary capabilities to maintain security in the Persian Gulf, the vital waterway of the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman, as well as the transfer of energy. Fake regional coalitions led by the United States not only do not help maintain stability and security in the region, but also disrupt regional order and security.

On the other hand, the only safe and secure alternative to consolidate peace and stability in the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman is the withdrawal of US troops and their allies as disruptive centers of peace and stability in the region. Maintaining security of the region must be handed over to the regional countries in cooperation with each other. The General Staff of the Armed Forces urges the United States and its allies to stop the escalation of tensions and insecurity in this strategic region of the world by ending provocative and dangerous actions. The AFGS warns them to avoid any tension and conflict and to respect international rules and regulations when crossing the exclusive economic waters of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Oman Sea and the Persian Gulf and the airspace of these areas, including the FIR (Flight Information Region) and the ADIZ (Air Defence Identification Zone).

As repeatedly stated, Iran has not initiated, and will not initiate any tensions and conflicts in the region, but it always defends its territorial integrity with constant readiness, strength and decisiveness. Obviously, any adventurism, harassment and provocative action will lead to a decisive response from the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the responsibility of which will fall on hostile forces including the United States.

Noor-1 Satellite Is...

FROM PAGE 1

The important difference between them is that Iran's satellite carrier is launched from a mobile launcher which has stunned the West. It is important to mention that in the past, satellites used to be launched from the Imam Khomeini Aerospace Base in Semnan Province and any move in the base was monitored by western satellites and they were fully aware of the launches. Analysis from the previous unsuccessful launches show that likely their failures might be because of their management under the Ministry of Information and Communications and those magnifiers fixed on the launchers.

Now Iran not only has put aside its JOPCA obligations and accelerated enrichment but also has stepped up its missile technology and all these developments show the failure of U.S. President Donald Trump's maximum pressures.

Today it is crystal clear to all that Iran, as the strategic depth of resistance axis against the world hegemony, by employing its own made strategic missiles is turning into a big deterrent power in the region and the world, and it can concurrently transfer its tactical and strategic capabilities to its regional arms and it can dictate its policies through them without any concerns from enemies and ill-wishers' attacks.

The armed eye that today Iran has placed in the space provides this chance to the country to monitor any development and change in the world with necessary speed, accuracy and time and it can have accurate evaluation from the behind-the-scene of any decision either good or bad or any happening .

COVID-19 Death...

FROM PAGE 1

Head of coordinating executive operations at the National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus, Brigadier General Fathian gave an update on the latest counter-Coronavirus efforts in Iran via video conference.

Fathian stated, "We have 6 strong points in the country, including having a wise, brave and comprehensive leadership, having intelligent and law-abiding people, having a strong and integrated health system, a strong Basij, IRIB and also the armed forces. From the first day, all of those that were needed to counter the Coronavirus played a major role in the country. More than 20,000 medical staff and over 100,000 nurses in the country have done a great job in this regard."

Palestinians Capture...

FROM PAGE 1

Hamas has confiscated Israeli drones several times, either after they crashed due to technical problems or in the wake of shooting them down.

An Israeli surveillance drone has been shot down while flying over southern Lebanon.

The resistance group has warned the Tel Aviv regime against escalating tensions, warning that it would face the consequences.

The Israeli military frequently bombs Gaza, with civilians being the main target of such attacks.



British GP Will Not Take Place in Front of Fans

LONDON (Dispatches) - Silverstone owners said on Monday that no spectators would be able to attend the British Grand Prix due to the coronavirus pandemic but the race is still scheduled to go ahead.

The French Grand Prix scheduled for June 28 was cancelled on Monday but while organisers have not yet made a final decision on postponing or cancelling the July 19 British race, Silverstone managing director Stuart Pringle paved the way for a behind-closed-doors race.

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MotoGP Boss Optimistic Of July Season Start

LONDON (Dispatches) - MotoGP chief Carmelo Ezpeleta said on Monday he was hopeful the season would start in July after having to cancel or postpone the opening eight races due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Right now we are optimistic to make a season between July and November," Ezpeleta, the CEO of MotoGP promoter Dorna, told broadcasters BT Sport.

"If it's possible then we will be able to but it depends on the situation because we need to take care about different things," he added.

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SPORTS

WEDNESDAY APRIL 29, 2020

French Open Champ Turns Shelf Stacker During Pandemic

PARIS (Dispatches) - A year after winning the men's doubles title at Roland Garros, German tennis player Kevin Krawietz is helping out during the coronavirus pandemic by stacking shelves in his local supermarket.

"I've been working for a discount supermarket on a 450 euros (\$488) basis for a few weeks now," Krawietz, who won the 2019 French Open title with Andreas Mies, told Der Spiegel magazine.

Munich-based Krawietz, world-ranked 13th in doubles, says that as a pro he has a special permit to "train three or four times a week" at a local tennis hall.

The 2020 tennis season has been badly hit by the coronavirus and the French Open has been postponed from May until September.

When not training, Krawietz, 28, is busy stacking shelves during the pandemic. Germany currently has 155,193 cases of the virus and 5,750 deaths so far.

"I sort out the shelves, make sure the sausage and cheese is well stocked and sort out the empty boxes," he explained.

"Last week, I was on security duty at the entrance, spraying shopping trolleys with disinfectant."

Krawietz had been considering "a normal job", but "thanks to coronavirus, I now have the opportunity to do so".

He says the experience gives him a greater "appreciation" of his career as a tennis pro.

"My colleagues are sometimes in the shop from half past five to fill the shelves," he said.

"I, on the other hand, have had the luxury of being able to turn my hobby into my profession."

Krawietz and Mies enjoyed a breakthrough year in 2019, backing up victory in Paris by reaching the semi-finals of the US Open.

Before that however, Krawietz admits often having struggled to make ends meet, "some years I finished in the red".

"Once I won a little over a thousand euros in prize money for a tournament in Italy, that was my weekly salary," he added.

"I have to pay tax on that, take out travel expenses and the fee for a coach. There was not much left."

He backed Novak Djokovic's recent calls to set up an aid fund to help low-ranking pros struggling financially.

"That can certainly help some players survive," said Krawietz.

"But all in all it would be nice if



we - independent of coronavirus - could make it possible to make a good living out of the sport even beyond the Top 100."

Meanwhile Australian Darren Cahill, the coach of two-times Grand Slam winner Simona Halep, has backed the idea of merging the men's and women's tours, saying it would make tennis simpler for both players and fans.

Roger Federer called for a merger between the two governing bodies on Wednesday on social media with the men's ATP Tour Chairman Andrea Gaudenzi and his women's WTA Tour counterpart Steve Simon both welcoming the suggestion.

Cahill, who has also previously worked with Andre Agassi and Lleyton Hewitt, said uniformity in rules and rankings will help all stakeholders.

"I think, hypothetically, it would be a pretty good position for a tennis player to be in, because you know that every single decision being made is made in the best interest of the game," Cahill told the National newspaper.

Ronaldinho Says Arrest, Confinement Has Been Hard



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Former Brazilian football star Ronaldinho said on Monday that his arrest and subsequent house arrest in Paraguay for using a false passport was "a very hard blow".

"I would never have imagined myself in such a situation," said the former Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain striker in an interview with the Paraguayan newspaper ABC.

Ronaldinho and his brother Roberto de Assis Moreira are accused of entering Paraguay in possession of false passports.

"I was completely caught off guard when I found out that these passports were not valid," Ronaldinho said in his first public statement since his arrest two days after arriving in Asuncion at the beginning of March.

After more than a month behind bars, the 2005 Ballon d'Or winner and his brother paid bail of \$1.6 million (1.48 million euros). Since April 7 they have been under house arrest at the Palmaroga Hotel in the historic centre of the Paraguayan capital. Ronaldinho said he hopes to be released "as soon as possible" after cooperating with the Paraguayan police investigation.

Cycling Should Knock A Week Off Grand Tours

MADRID (Dispatches) - Spain's Alejandro Valverde said on Monday cycling should shorten its three grand tours by a week to free up space in the new calendar drawn up due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The postponed Tour de France has been rescheduled to start on August 29, with the sport's two other major races, the Giro d'Italia and the Vuelta a Espana, due to follow before the end of the year.

But a number of one-day races are yet to be given dates and the International Cycling Union could struggle to fit them all in.

"What they should have done was cut each grand tour by one week," Movistar rider Valverde told Spanish journalists.

"It's an unprecedented year and it doesn't make sense to have all the grand tours raced over three weeks because then we'll go very long into the season."

"With 15 days of racing, that would be enough for the fans to enjoy it and so the races can survive," the 40-year-old added.

Valverde won his only grand tour in his native Spain in 2009, but in recent years has won a series of major one-day races including Liege-Bastogne-Liege twice and the 2018 world championship.

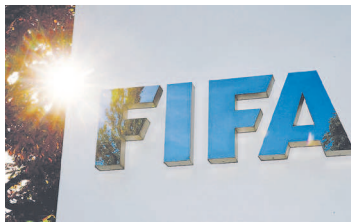
"It's normal that the Tour takes priority. They decided something else and we have to accept it but if it were up to me, I would have reduced the grand tours, and put some other races in between."

Lakers Returned \$4.6m to Coronavirus Relief Fund

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The Los Angeles Lakers have returned about \$4.6 million obtained from a U.S. government program meant to help small businesses recover from the coronavirus pandemic shutdown, ESPN reported Monday.

The NBA club, valued by Forbes magazine at \$4.4 billion, told the sports television network in a statement they returned the money after learning the \$349 billion in the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program had been exhausted within two weeks, with hundreds of thousands of small businesses unable to get access.

FIFA Proposes Five Substitutes When Play Resumes



ZURICH (Dispatches) - FIFA said on Monday it is proposing five substitutions per match when football resumes, to help players cope with the increase in the number of games.

The world governing body has sent its proposal to the International Board (IFAB), the guardian of the laws of the game, which has to approve it before it can be implemented by national leagues, a FIFA spokesman said.

"When the competition resumes, the calendars will be overloaded with a higher than usual number of matches," he said.

"The safety of the players is one of FIFA's priorities. One of the concerns is that the high frequency of matches may increase the potential risk of injuries," he added. To address these concerns, FIFA has made a proposal to the IFAB to "temporarily relax Law 3 of the game to allow for a greater number of substitutions. Each team could make five substitutions during regulation time plus a sixth substitution during overtime."

The proposal would need to be studied quickly by the IFAB as some leagues are planning to resume after stopping play because of the coronavirus pandemic in early May.

The measure could remain in force throughout the 2020-2021 season and also apply "in theory" during next summer's European championships, according to a source close to FIFA. "If this measure is validated by the board, each league and each body will be able to decide whether or not to apply it and in the competitions of its choice," added the FIFA spokesman.

UEFA Releases 236m Euros to Aid Member Federations



NYON (Dispatches) - UEFA said on Monday it had allocated 236.5 million euros (\$256 million) to its 55 member associations to help overcome the financial impact caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Each national federation will receive 4.3 million euros which can be used towards "its own priorities in light of the negative impact of the coronavirus on football at all levels," the body said in a statement. The funds come from UEFA's HatTrick assistance program which was created in 2004 to support development projects for each member federation. The program will have distributed 2.6 billion euros by 2024, UEFA said.

"Our sport is facing an unprecedented challenge brought about by the COVID-19 crisis. UEFA wants to help its members to respond in ways that are appropriate to their specific circumstances," said UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin.

"As a result, we have agreed that up to 4.3 million euros per association, paid for the remainder of this season and next, as well as part of the investment funding, can be used as our members see fit to rebuild the football community."

Last week European football's governing body released almost 70 million euros in benefit payments to clubs struggling financially during the health crisis.

Umar Akmal Gets Three-Year Ban



DUBAI (Dispatches) - Controversial Pakistani batsman Umar Akmal was banned Monday from all forms of cricket for three years after pleading guilty to failing to report match-fixing approaches, the country's cricket board announced.

Umar, who turns 30 in May, last month withdrew a challenge to the charges.

The batsman's ban is effective from February 20, when he was provisionally suspended by the board under its anti-corruption code, which states a player must report being approached to fix games.

The decision was announced by a disciplinary committee after a brief hearing of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), which charged the player with two breaches.

"The PCB referred the matter to the chairman of the disciplinary committee after determining that the batsman had not requested a hearing," said the board.

Asif Mahmood -- the PCB's anti-corruption and security director -- said authorities took no "pleasure in seeing a promising international cricketer being declared ineligible" for three years on corruption charges, but defended the ban as necessary.

"I request all professional cricketers to stay away from the menace of corruption and immediately inform relevant authorities as soon as they are approached," Mahmood added.