

**Health Ministry Spokesman Yesterday
Confirmed 47 More Fatalities
Yesterday, Bringing the Nationwide
Death Toll of the Coronavirus to 6,203
As New 976 Infections Were Detected
Over the Past 24 Hours**

IRAN NEWS

**Pointing to the Failure of Some
Western States in Containing
The COVID-19 Outbreak, Iranian
Majlis Speaker's Special Aide
For International Affairs
Expressed the Country's
Readiness to Its Experiences**

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Mosques to Be Reopened In 132 "White" Counties

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani says mosques will be reopened as of tomorrow in 132 "low-risk" counties, and schools may also reopen later this month.

The president noted Sunday that mosques will reopen in low-risk or "white" towns and cities as of tomorrow, but schools will remain closed until late May at least.

"The number of businesses being reopened is increasing. Today, we decided to reopen mosques and Friday Prayers congregations as of tomorrow in 132 towns and cities which are regarded as 'white' areas, or 'low-risk' areas as some put it," he said. However, he added, health protocols should be observed all along.

"This is while they abide by health protocols. I believe there are two beautiful things with regards to mosques where [health] protocols are observed: the spiritual beauty, and the beauty of discipline and order and the enforcement of regulations," he said.

"Let me put it this way. Two acts are being done at mosques: an obligatory act and a religiously rewarding act. When worshippers maintain their distances, they are doing an obligatory action."

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U.S. JCPOA Attempts Lack Legal Grounds

LONDON (IRNA) - Iranian Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna said U.S. attempts to establish itself as a JCPOA participant lack legal basis because the American President Donald Trump has already ended US' participation.

"The U.S. attempts to establish itself as "JCPOA participant" have no legal grounds. Para 10, UNSC Res 2231 is a reflection of para 1.2 Annex IV of the JCPOA which enumerates "JCPOA participants", Kazem Gharibabadi wrote in the official Twitter account of the Permanent Mission of Iran to UN-Vienna.

"Trump ended The U.S. participation in JCPOA issuing a Presidential Memoranda on May 8, 2018: "... and I am today making good on my pledge to end the participation of the United States in the JCPOA," he added.

"The U.S. has also ended its participation in practice, it has not participated in the meetings within the framework of the JCPOA since its unilateral withdrawal from the Deal," Iranian diplomat noted.

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Extension of UN Arms Embargo to Kill JCPOA



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - A senior Iranian official warns the illegal extension of the UN arms embargo on Iran will drag the already moribund Iran nuclear deal into permanent death.

Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Vice Admiral Ali Shamkhani said in a tweet that Washington's attempt to circumvent UN Security Council Resolution 2231 will deal the coup de grace to the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"This virus of sanctions is a tool used by the White House to maintain the United States' declining hegemony," he added.

The top official also lashed out at the European signatories to the JCPOA for failing to act decisively.

"On which side is Europe standing: Saving face and boosting multilateralism, or accepting humiliation again and contributing to unilateralism?" he asked rhetorically.

#JCPOA will die forever by circumventing 2231 Resolution & continuing #Iran's illegal weapons sanctions. Sanctions' virus is the US tool for survival of its declining hegemony. What will #EU do: Save dignity & support multilateralism or Accept humiliation & help unilateralism?

His comments came after U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo vowed a few days ago to use all means available to extend a UN arms embargo on Iran.

A ban on selling conventional weapons to Iran ends in October under UN Security Council Resolution 2231 that endorsed the JCPOA.

U.S. Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook said on Thursday that Washington had drafted a Security Council resolution on the issue and was "hopeful" the 15-member body will extend the arms embargo on Iran before it expires.

However, Russia and China, both parties to the JCPOA, are unlikely to allow that with their veto power.

To circumvent the veto, the U.S. will argue that it legally remains a "participant state" in the nuclear deal only to invoke a "snapback" that would restore the UN sanctions, which had been in place against Iran prior to the JCPOA's inking.

This is while the U.S. unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA in May 2018 and re-imposed the anti-Iran sanctions that had been lifted under the agreement.

U.S., Saudi Arabia Trying to Revive Daesh in Iraq

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iraq's Badr organization, which is part of the country's Popular Mobilization Forces or Hashd al-Sha'abi, says the US and Saudi Arabia are seeking to reactivate Daesh, adding that recent attacks by the Takfiri terrorist group serve that aim.

Speaking to Arabic-language al-Maalamah news agency, Mohammed Mahdi al-Bayati, a senior leader in the Badr Organization, revealed fresh attempts by Washington and Riyadh to facilitate the return of fugitive Daesh militants to Iraq.

The latest deadly terrorist attacks, which were conducted on Iraqi soil with the US and Saudi backing, were part of a plot to bring Daesh back, he added.

Bayati also noted that renewed US-Saudi support for Daesh is similar to that of 2014, when the Takfiri outfit unleashed a campaign of death and destruction in Iraq and overran vast swathes in lightning attacks.

He further raised concerns about possible terrorist attacks in the provinces of Salahuddin, Kirkuk and Anbar.

Early on Saturday, Daesh terrorists mounted a coordinated assault in the Salahuddin town of Mekeeshfa and the city of Balad, killing at least 10 Hashd al-Sha'abi fighters.

At least 10 Iraqi fighters from the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), also known as Hashd al-Sha'abi, have been killed in an attack by the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group. Hashd al-Sha'abi said its forces had killed and wounded a number of Daesh elements and managed to push them back in the area.

Iraq's Prime Minister-designate Mustafa al-Kadhimi paid tribute to families of the victims.

"It is with great sadness, we received news of the martyrdom of a group heroes from among the Hashd al-Sha'abi who died defending their homeland in the face of ISIL (Daesh) attacks in the Mekeeshfah and Balad areas north of Baghdad."

In the early days of the Daesh's reign of terror, Hashd al-Sha'abi fighters played a major role in reinforcing the Iraqi army, which had suffered heavy setbacks against the Takfiri elements.

In November 2016, the Iraqi parliament voted to integrate Hashd al-Sha'abi into the military in amid US efforts to sideline the group.

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ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



Americans Will Suffer Casualties in Persian Gulf

In recent weeks, Persian Gulf has experienced very perilous days because of the U.S. forces, deployed on the warships and frigates in the region.

Reacting to the U.S. forces, and President Donald Trump's bluff-like remarks who said he had ordered the American military to shoot and destroy any Iranian vessels that harass U.S. navy ships, the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran in a statement described the presence of the U.S. 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 U.S.-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.

The statement 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.

All neighboring countries in the Persian Gulf are fully aware that 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 U.S. Navy in the region are against the customary international law.

It also said Iran has sounded necessary warnings to the U.S. to put an end to its provocative moves and adventurism which their presence in the region obstructs peace and stability and spreads tension and insecurity. It warned them that any provocative act and conflict in the current condition is considered against the international rules and regulations.

This adventurism and tension in the region by the U.S. comes at the time Americans have repeatedly experienced Iran's defensive capabilities and its didactical responses.

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Unemployment Rate Moves Down at 10.7%

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's statistics office says joblessness dropped by 1.5% in the year ending late March.

The Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) has issued its latest figures on unemployment in Iran, saying the country's average joblessness rate for the year ending late March edged down to stand at 10.7 percent.

The SCI report, covered in a Saturday report by the official IRNA agency, said that annual unemployment rate dropped by 1.5 percent compared to figures recorded in March 2019.

It said the number of jobs in the country increased by 430,000 over the period to reach a total of 24.274 million.

The services topped the list of economic sectors with highest rate of employment at 50.3 percent, followed by the industries at 32 percent and agriculture at 17.7 percent, showed the SCI figures.

The youth unemployment rate, or jobless people in the age group of 15-24, was around 26 percent, said the report, adding the 17.9 percent of people between 18 and 39 were unemployed over the past calendar year.

Both age groups reported lower joblessness rate compared to the previous 12-month period, it said.

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Gov't to Publicly Sell Shares of Four State-Owned Oil Refineries

TEHRAN (IFP) - Government spokesman says shares of four refineries will begin to be offered to the public soon.

Ali Rabii said public offerings of shares of oil refineries in Isfahan, Tehran, Tabriz and Bandar Abbas will start on June.

He noted among the key measures adopted by the government to spur economic growth is to offer state-held shares and stocks.

This initiative, he added, will trigger re-investment in the economy and industry, which is the key contributor to the boosting of production, stimulation of employment and new investments.

“The government is pursuing the strategy of offering shares and handing over state-run companies as another step towards downsizing the government and expanding the public sector and private industrial sectors in the country,” he added.

Anti-Israel “Quds Day” Rallies Over Pandemic Called Off

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran says the International Quds Day rallies, annually held across the country on the last Friday of Ramadan, will only be held in 132 “white” counties and “low-risk” areas this year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Deputy Head of the Coordinating Council for Islamic Development said on Sunday “Certainly, this year we will not ... hold Quds Day rallies nationwide due to the outbreak of the virus.”

Nosratollah Lotfi added that there will be a march as in previous years, but only in low-risk cities. In these counties, the march will be the same as in previous years, but after Friday prayers.

He further mentioned various plans have been proposed on how to hold the ceremonies this year.

“In cities such as Tehran and provincial capitals, there is a plan for a car march where motorcyclists will fly a flag and people will follow them. Another plan is to determine specific routes with social distance, and each direction would be taken over by one organization.”

Meanwhile, Ramazan Sharif, Head of the Intifada and Holy Quds Central Office in Iran, said in a press conference that it is predicted the enemy would launch a media hype on the occasion of Int'l Quds Day, and it is already clear what their scenario is.

“Tehran is the main city, and if rallies are not supposed to be held in Tehran we



should announce it clearly and focus on the media and getting messages from resistance figures,” Sharif said.

“As far as we know, the leader of Islamic Revolution will have a speech about Quds, and it would be a good thing if we could have Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh or one of the resistance figures as a guest,” continued Sharif.

The Quds Day, officially known as International Quds Day, is an annual event that has been held on the last Friday of Ramadan upon the initiative of the Islamic Republic of Iran since 1979 to express support for the Palestinians and oppose Zionism and Israel.

Quds Day is also held in many other countries, mainly in the Arab and Muslim world, with protests against Israel’s occupation of Jerusalem al-Quds. Rallies are held in various cities by both Muslim and non-Muslim communities around the world.

Tehran Condemns ISIS Attack On Iraq’s PMU Forces

TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Ministry spokesman has strongly condemned the ISIS terrorist group’s criminal and cowardly attack in Iraq that resulted in the martyrdom of a number of fighters from the Popular Mobilization Forces (also known as Hashd al-Sha’abi) in the holy Muslim month of Ramadan.

In a statement on Sunday, Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran Seyed Abbas Mousavi offered condolences and expressed sympathy with the Iraqi government and proud nation over the martyrdom of the PMU forces.

He also expressed hope that the Iraqi government and nation’s rapport and diligence would help great Iraq immediately get rid of the few weakened remnants of the evil ISIS terrorist group, which has been created and is being supported under the auspices of certain governments.

“History has shown that the pure blood of combatants in the path of God will never be wasted, and the revenge will be taken for such pure blood, which has contributed to the growth of Islam, justice and truth,” he added.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran supports the Iraqi efforts to fight against terrorism and establish peace and stability in that country, and rejects and condemns any measure aimed at upsetting stability and calm in Iraq,” the spokesperson underlined.

At least ten members of Iraqi PMU forces were killed in an attack carried out by the ISIS terror group in the Arab country’s Salahuddin province on Saturday.

ISIS has intensified its attacks in Iraq amid Baghdad’s call on the U.S. to pull out its forces from the Arab country.

Workers Urged Not to Allow White House’s Cream to Come True

TEHRAN (IP) – Majlis Speaker stated that the workers did not allow the White House rulers’ dreams to be interpreted in Iran.

Ali Larijani, who had recently contracted coronavirus, attended the open session of parliament on Sunday morning.

He thanked all the workers who have tried hard to meet the needs of the country during the difficult period of the coronavirus epidemic.

He added, “The workers in this battle and in the

conditions of US sanctions against Iran are managing the country with round-the-clock efforts and did not allow the dream of the White House rulers to be interpreted in Iran.”

He thanked all the doctors, nurses, medical staff of the hospitals, and the Ministry of Health for their efforts and bravery, noting: “The fact that 80 percent of those affected by coronavirus have been recovered is the result of the planning of the Ministry of Health and everyone else.”

Khatam ul Anbia Headquarters, Active in Coronavirus Crisis

TEHRAN (IP) - Head of Khatam ul Anbia Headquarters Saeed Mohammad has said that although Khatam ul Anbia Headquarters is known as an engineering and construction headquarters, it did not stop its activities in Coronavirus crisis.

Saeed Mohammad in an exclusive interview with Iran Press said that although Khatam ul Anbia is considered as an engineering headquarters, it did not stop its activity in the Coronavirus epidemic.

“Amid the spread of the Coronavirus, we planned and produced 53,000 masks per day. Moreover, we produce 2100 protective gowns, and 25,000 food packages have been distributed in various provinces plus 80,000 hygienic packs”, he added.

He went on to say that in 354 points on the suburb of Tehran, financial aid has been given too, and now with Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation’s cooperation, we cook and distribute 9,000 packed food portions.

“1000 packed food portions are also cooked and distributed in Qom,” Mohammad highlighted.

“Khatam ul Anbia Headquarters is ready to have this plan in other provinces with Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation’s cooperation if needed,” he concluded.

Trump Is Very Wrong About Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on Sunday his personal assumption is that Donald Trump is very wrong about Iran, he doesn’t know Iran and the Iranian people and he thinks

he is smart whereas the fact is to the contrary.

Mousavi made the remarks on a TV news line show last night.

He said that Trump is suffering from weakness as narcissism and disobedience to expert opinions taking instinctive and quick decisions.

He said that extremist and deviant views are everywhere, but we should not pay attention to the margins; we have independent and humble foreign relations and that the Islamic Republic of Iran is proud of being an independent country.

“The principle of Iran’s foreign policy is to act on independent relations.”

The view of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is to look at and act in line with the national interests.

“We helped China a little bit earlier when the epidemic emerged in China and we sold some goods; our people expressed their sympathy with the Chinese people in the early stage of coronavirus epidemic in China. The people made a video about the humanitarian crisis in China and the Chinese responded to us when coronavirus emerged in Iran,” Mousavi added.

He said that Iran is not indifferent toward persecution of other nations by the U.S. administration, adding, “We are reacting to the level of friendship or animosity of countries.

Asked to comment about the U.S. activities in the airspace, he said that the U.S. is really looking to pollute the space for covetous agenda.

Sistan and Baluchestan Border Market Reopens

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian Customs spokesman said former border market located in the south of Sistan and Baluchestan Province was reopened on Saturday.

Roohollah Latifi said this common border with Pakistan started work and will be active on even days.

He added that based on Islamabad’s decision, Iranian export products which are mostly foodstuff will be transported to Pakistan through this border.

Latifi noted that 20 big trucks and 50 small trucks are permitted to transfer goods every day.

He went on to say that the common border with Turkmenistan is still closed, but all limitations have been lifted for Iranian trucks to transit goods to Uzbekistan.

Germany Unable to Withstand U.S. Pressures

TEHRAN (MNA) – An Iranian lawmaker says that Germany is a weak country regarding politics and cannot stand against the United States’ pressures.

“Although Germany is the most powerful country in the EU regarding the economy, as far as politics is concerned, it is a weak country that cannot stand against U.S. pressures,” Alaeddin Boroujerdi, a member of Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said.

The remarks come as Berlin has recently designated Lebanon’s Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, banning all of its activities in the country and ordering raids on sites police say are linked to the group.

“It is a great surprise that Germany, with its position in Europe, is not still aware that Hezbollah is part of Lebanon’s sovereignty and is present in the country’s government and parliament,” he said, noting that the Berlin decision is like others designating part of the German government as a terrorist entity.

This is a violation of Lebanon’s sovereignty, said the MP, adding, “This is by no means acceptable and the German government should apologize the Lebanese people and government for this offense.”

This designation, he continued, has no effect on Hezbollah’s activity but will destroy Germany’s face in the public opinion of Lebanon and the Islamic Ummah.

Boroujerdi also hoped that Berlin would soon reconsider its decision.

Afghanistan New Transit Route for Iranian Goods to Central Asia

KABUL (IRNA) - Iran’s commercial attache to Afghanistan said on Saturday that under the current situation, Afghanistan can be a new route for the transit of Iranian goods to Central Asian countries, especially Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Mohammad Mahdi Javanmard Qassab said that using of Afghanistan’s capacity to transit goods to Uzbek and Tajik markets and Iran’s access to the two countries’ markets is of special significance under the current situation.

“Since Afghanistan is a member of the Carne Tir Convention, Iranian companies can make good use of the capacity of Afghan transport firms to transport goods to Central Asian countries,” he said.

Javanmard Qassab said that currently five to six containers or trucks are moving from the Milak border to Afghanistan to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan each week, but this amount of transit goods is very low and should be increased.

Iran will not ignore Afghanistan’s capacities in the field, as the two countries share good cultural and economic commonalities, which will be beneficial to both countries in future, he said.

Referring to spread of coronavirus in regional states and closure of borders of the countries, Javanmard Qassab said that under such difficult circumstances, the border between Iran and Afghanistan was not blocked for trade goods and was open.

The advantage of using Afghan route for transit of goods to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan is that when Iranian trucks pass across the Milak border, the goods reach the target countries in four to five days, he said.

Export Development Working Groups to Be Established in Provinces

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry has it on the agenda to establish working groups for developing non-oil export in various provinces across the country, Head of Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) announced.

Hamid Zadboum said due to the significant role of the country’s provinces in developing export goals and to benefit from the potentials and capacities of the provinces in increasing non-oil exports, the industry ministry has decided to establish the mentioned working groups in the country’s provinces and hold meetings weekly.

The official noted that given the country’s current situation and considering the restrictions created by the U.S., non-oil exports play an important role in strengthening the production sector, maintaining employment, and meeting the needs for foreign currencies. Therefore, developing non-oil exports has been focused on seriously as one of the major axes of the industry ministry’s programs for the current calendar year, Zadboum said.

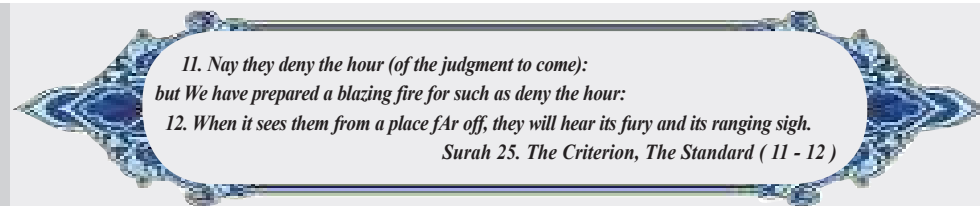
He further pointed to improving the country’s non-oil trade balance, increasing the durability of exported goods, increasing the diversity of exported goods and markets, increasing the complexity of exported goods (in terms of value-added and technological content), and increasing the capabilities of the private sector as some of the major programs envisioned in the roadmap for promoting non-oil exports.

According to the official, the “Export Development Working Group” was formed under the responsibility of Industry Ministry and the Secretariat of the Trade Development Organization, and all organizations and institutions related to the field of non-oil exports, including Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), Transport and Urban Development Ministry, Export Development Bank of Iran, National Standards Organization, Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), Chamber of Cooperative, and Agriculture Ministry are attendees of this



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:13
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:32
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:07



EIKO Inching Towards Producing Coronavirus Vaccine

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Director of Executive Headquarters of Imam's Directives (EIKO) says the headquarters is inching towards producing the Coronavirus vaccine and the country can rival with major countries in vaccine production.

Speaking in the opening ceremony of "Beneficence and Empathy Maneuver" yesterday, Mohammad Mokhber said that EIKO has begun process for producing the Coronavirus vaccine, adding that Iran in terms of producing vaccines competes with other countries and there is a huge chance for producing the Coronavirus vaccine in the country.

He added that since the first day of the outbreak of the virus, the headquarters began work on producing the vaccine and it is getting close to produce it.

Mokhber reiterated that some medicines for treating the Coronavirus-infected patients are now produced in the country and its production happened just in two weeks. On producing masks, he said that the production capacity for mask has reached 4m and fortunately today the country needs no import and it will soon turn into a mask exporting country.

He also said that the headquarters also produced testing kit which is unable to diagnose the disease in 24 hours and the country currently needs



no import of testing kit.

Mokhber added that the value of the headquarters' actions and productions stood at 27,000b tomans.

He also said that the headquarters also had donations and financial support worth 1100b tomans.

Meanwhile, he refuted some allegations that the properties and assets of the headquarters worth \$90b, adding that he is ready to sell all properties of the EIKO for just \$3b and through installments.

Mokhber further said while in many countries like UK and the U.S. and some European countries the number of death toll because of the Coronavirus is significant, Iran could manage it, and blamed those who question Iran's statistics on the number of Coronavirus death toll or infected-patients and called it baseless.

He noted that while in some countries for buying toilet paper people stood in long queues and even killed each other, Iran by mobilizing its capabilities and facilities could manage it and condition is now becoming normal.

Gov't Allows Issuance of \$1.12b Worth of sukuk Bonds

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The government has authorized a decision to issue up to \$1.12 billion worth of new sukuk securities to fund various projects in the current fiscal year.

The decision signed off by Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri allowed government departments and municipalities across Iran to issue up to 180 trillion rials of sukuk, the Islamic sharia-compliant bonds, for the purpose of finishing infrastructure projects until the end of the current calendar year in late March 2021.

Iran's Interior Ministry would oversee issuance of around 80 trillion rials (nearly \$500 million) worth of securities by municipalities and their subsidiary organizations, said the decree signed by Jahangiri.

It added ministries of oil, industries and energy would be allowed to issue 35 trillion rials (nearly \$218 million) worth of sukuk for investment in major projects. Oil and gas projects would be prioritized in the plan and the Oil Ministry can issue the securities in foreign currencies, it said.

Government companies, which also include major oil and gas firms operating energy facilities, will be allowed to issue 65 trillion (over \$400 million) rials of sukuk for projects that are justified from "technical, economic, financial and environmental" points of view, said the decree.

Issuing sukuk has become a popular tool for investment attraction in Iran especially at a time of a major boom in trade in the country's stock markets.

Investors prefer the government-backed bonds mainly because of their high yields and the fact that they are concentrated in established industries like energy and mining.

Experts believe sukuk issuance can be key to efforts by the Iranian government to offset economic losses suffered from a series American sanctions imposed on the country's direct sale of oil.

EDBA a Launching Pad for Surge in Exports

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran's Export Development Bank (EDBI) by providing necessary resources for exporters, investors and importers in the overseas markets paves the ground for the sustainable economic development.

According to reports, EDBI is considered as a launching pad for Iran's exports and it can play a key role in surge in exports.

Head of Credit Affairs Directorate of the bank Mr. Reza Saedi Far says the bank granted over 84,359b rials of facilities to the exporting enterprises in different fields in last Iranian calendar year. He said a review of granted facilities by the bank in the past four years shows that the amount of facilities has grown by 73 percent.

He said that exporters in the mines and industry top the list of the companies received facilities with 41 percent and petrochemical and chemical sector by getting 32 percent, agro sector with 16 percent, technical and engineering services with 10 percent came next respectively.

Since the main task of the bank is to boost non-oil exports especially regarding small and medium-sized companies as the major levers of exports, the bank's granted facilities to those companies have grown by 114 percent.

The bank took several measures last year in order to finance knowledge-based companies and earmarked 2,000b rials of credit for supporting them.

The bank granted facilities worth over 1,851b rials to the knowledge-based companies last year, adding that the volume of deposits of National Development Fund in the bank reached 10,000b rials last year which shows 150 percent growth.



Iran, EAEU Trade Volume Tops 5m Tons

TEHRAN (MNA) – After a six-month period since the implementation of the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Iran's trade volume exchanged with the Union exceeded five million tons.

"After six-month period since the execution of PTA with EAEU, Iran's total trade volume with the Union topped more than five million tons at large," said Seyyed Rouhollah Latifi, spokesman for the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

Some 5,104,984 tons of products, valued at \$1,782,577,719, were exchanged between Islamic Republic of Iran and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)'s member states from Oct. 27, 2019 to April 24, 2020, he added.

In this period, Islamic Republic of Iran exported 1,344,377 tons of products, valued at \$539,612,456, to EAEU's member states, he said, adding, "of total volume of products exported from the country to EAEU, Russia, Armenia and Kazakhstan accounted for 53, 23 and 16 percent share of Iran's total export volume respectively."

He went on to say that 3,760,607 tons of products, valued at \$1,242,965,263, have been imported into the country since implementation of PTA between Iran and EAEU.

Negotiations Between Iran and Venezuela Is Still Ongoing

TEHRAN (ILNA)- The Chairman of the Association of Iranian Exporters of Technical and Engineering Services said that "As far as I know, negotiations are underway between Iran and Venezuela, but so far nothing has been done."

The Iranian official, Mohammad Reza Ansari said "Cooperation between the two countries will be limited to refineries", adding that negotiations have not yet taken place.

"The price of a possible contract is not yet known and is being calculated," he added.

He confirmed that oil products and refinery products are likely to be barter with goods.

Last day, Bloomberg reported that out of cash and desperate for help in propping up its oil industry, Venezuela is raiding its gold vaults and handing tons of bars to Iran, according to people with direct knowledge of the matter.

Speaking at a State Department news conference, United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo claimed aircraft of privately owned Mahan Air, Iran's largest airline, in recent days delivered supplies to Nicolas Maduro's government.

And also, French media quoted U.S. envoy for Venezuela affairs Elliott Abrams claiming that Venezuela pays for Iran oil services in gold.

NICICO Now a Permanent Member in ISSA Mining

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of National Iranian Copper Industries Company (NICICO) says after non-stop efforts, the company as the first Iranian company was accepted as the permanent member in the mining section of International Social Security Association (ISSA Mining).



Dr. Ardeshtir Saad Mohammadi said that since last year, the company has focused all its activities on boosting the level of occupational safety, adding that the company believes that any move and measure towards the surge in production should be based on boosting the occupational safety in the working place and protecting the health of human capital.

He emphasized that Iran's copper industry in terms of safety is one of the best industries in the country and the number of accidents in this giant and mother industry of the country has declined sharply.

He added that to improve the level of safety, two major events happened in this sector last year, adding that the first was holding of conference on safety of mines and the second event was holding safety start-up weekend for safety.

He then pointed to holding the two-day conference on safety in mines where the Secretary General of ISSA Mr. Helmut Ehnies was present and NICICO could become an honorary member of the ISSA.

Saad Mohammadi reiterated that after constant efforts by the company it could be the first Iranian company which became the permanent member of ISSA Mining, adding that it will boost safety and productivity in the copper industry.

He then detailed holding the safety start-up weekend which was welcomed by start-ups in the country and top ten ideas in the safety were chosen.

99 Opportunities, Threats for Industry in Post-Coronavirus Era

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The Deputy Industry, Mine and Trade Minister and Head of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) in a meeting announced the organization



predicts 99 opportunities and threats ahead of industry sector in the country for the post-Coronavirus era.

Speaking in a joint meeting of think-tanks of mineral sector of the country and industry section of IDRO, Mohammad Baqer Aali said that using the analyses of the think-tanks of IDRO and Industrial Management Organization in form 99 scenarios of opportunities and threats in the industry sector in post-Coronavirus era can help maximum flexibility in the production enterprises.

He said cooperation and support from upstream organs can pave the ground for tangible and better implementing the results of think-tanks' studies more than ever.

He said attention to the capacities of the fourth industrial revolution and necessity for materializing the surge in production are of the major recommendations of these think-tanks.

In the meeting where acclaimed economist Dr. Alinaghi Mashayekhi was present, participants discussed ways for coming out of the post-Coronavirus recession by stimulating demands in the country through creating investment movement.

In the name of God

SECOND ANNOUNCEMENT



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Prospective bidders specialized and experienced in the said area may visit Esfahan Steel Co.'s Website at www.esfahansteel.ir to get the tender documents no later than 06 May 2020 and deliver their bids to the following address no later than official closing time (i.e.3.00 pm) on 17May ,2020.

Public Relation of Esfahan Steel Co.

S Korea Says Troops Exchange Fire Along N. Korean Border

SEOUL (AP) — South Korea says its troops have exchanged fire with North Korea along their tense land border.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff in Seoul says North Korean troops fired several bullets at a South Korean guard post inside the heavily fortified border between the countries on Sunday.

The military says in a statement South Korea fired two rounds in response after issuing a warning broadcast. It says South Korea suffered no casualties.



Court Blocks Bolsonaro Move To Expel Venezuelan Diplomats

BRASILIA (Reuters) - A Supreme Court judge issued an injunction on Saturday suspending for 10 days a decision by Brazil's right-wing President Jair Bolsonaro to expel Venezuela's 30 diplomats and consular staff.

Bolsonaro and Brazil's Foreign Ministry had given Venezuela until Saturday to remove its diplomats in the latest chapter of worsening relations between the ideologically opposed neighbors.

Justice Luis Roberto Barroso took up an injunction request from a Workers Party lawmaker that argued the expulsion could violate Brazil's Constitution, international agreements on human rights and the Vienna Convention on diplomatic relations.



Spaniards Flock Outdoors as Europeans Ease Lockdowns



MADRID (Dispatches) - Spaniards took to the streets to jog, cycle and rollerskate for the first time following 48 days of confinement on Saturday as some European nations cautiously eased coronavirus lockdowns while Russia reported a sudden surge of infections.

As governments weigh lifting restrictions to restart economies, US authorities brought some hope by approving an experimental drug for use on coronavirus patients. The decision was the latest step in a global push to find treatments and a vaccine for the coronavirus, which has left half of humanity under some form of lockdown and pushed the world economy towards its worst downturn since the Great Depression in the 1930s.

The virus has now killed more than 242,000 people worldwide, according to an AFP tally of official figures, and infected 3.4 million since it first emerged in China late last year. With signs the pandemic is slowing in the hardest-hit nations, European countries and some parts of the U.S. have begun to lift restrictions to try to inject life into economies crippled by weeks of closure. From Madrid to Mallorca, Spaniards flocked to the streets as they were allowed to exercise and walk freely outside after the government eased seven weeks of strict lockdown in a country with one of the highest number of fatalities at more than 25,000.

"After so many weeks in confinement, I badly wanted to go out, run, see the world," said financial advisor Marcos Abeytua in Madrid. "Yesterday, I was like a child on Christmas Eve."

Near the city's Retiro park, residents were out running, sometimes in groups. Crowds of joggers mingled with cyclists and skateboarders in Barcelona's seaside neighbourhood. Spain, Germany, Austria and Scandinavian nations are gradually easing lockdowns as virus cases slow though they will keep social distancing measures, the use of masks and testing to try to track infections.

France, which will lift parts of its lockdown on May 11, on Saturday extended a health emergency by two months until late July as it reported 166 new deaths, its lowest single-day toll in more than five weeks.

"We are going to have to perform a long-distance run," Health Minister Olivier Veran said.

After a two-month shutdown, Italians on Monday will be allowed to stroll in parks and visit relatives. Restaurants can open for takeaway and wholesale stores can resume business.

"We must maintain social distancing, maximum hygiene levels, and masks. We've done our bit to the best of our ability. From Monday, it's up to you," emergency response official Domenico Arcuri said. Italy -- with the second most fatalities after the United States -- reported Saturday that its daily death toll had jumped by 474, the highest in nearly two weeks.

Italian media said the total included 282 previously unaccounted deaths outside hospitals. But in Russia, authorities reported the largest spike in their coronavirus cases with new infections rising by nearly 10,000 in a single day.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, in his first detailed comments about his bout of coronavirus, said doctors were prepared to announce his death last month after he was taken to intensive care. "It was a tough old moment, I won't deny it," he was quoted as saying by the Sun on Sunday newspaper. "They had a strategy to deal with a 'death of Stalin'-type scenario."

Virus cases have been confirmed in 195 countries, including 1.5 million cases in Europe alone. But they're likely only a fraction of true cases as testing is still limited. The United States has the most deaths with more than 66,200, followed by Italy with 28,710 and the United Kingdom with 28,131.

Russia's Coronavirus Cases Hit New High

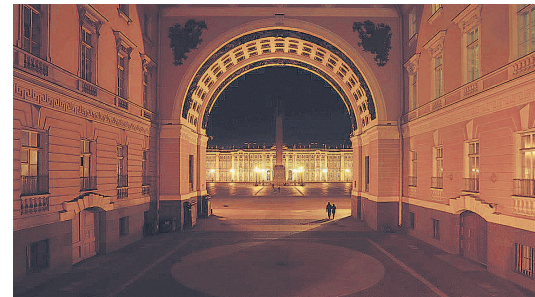
MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia reported 9,623 new cases of coronavirus on Saturday, its highest daily rise since the start of the pandemic, bringing the total to 124,054, mostly in the capital Moscow, where the mayor threatened to cut the number of travel permits.

The death toll nationwide rose to 1,222 after 57 people died in the last 24 hours, Russia's coronavirus crisis response centre said, after revising the previous day's tally.

Russia has been in partial lockdown, aimed at curbing the spread of the novel coronavirus, since the end of March.

In Moscow, people who have not obtained a special permit for free movement, are only able to leave their homes to shop, walk their dogs and dispose of garbage.

President Vladimir Putin has ordered the restrictive measures, called non-working days, to continue until May 11 inclusive, when the country finishes celebrating the Labour Day and Victory Day holidays.



Venezuela Prison Riot Death Toll Rises to 47

CARACAS (AFP) - The death toll from a prison riot in western Venezuela has risen to at least 47, with 75 wounded, an opposition politician and prisoners' rights group said Saturday.

"At the moment we have been able to confirm 47 dead and 75 wounded," deputy Maria Beatriz Martinez, elected from Portuguesa state where the Los Llanos prison is located, told AFP.

The Venezuelan Prison Observatory (OVP) rights group also gave the same tally, calling the violence a "massacre," and both confirmed that all of the dead were detainees.

The disruption began Friday when inmates at the prison, located in the city of Guanare, began destroying "the security fences around the perimeter" in a "massive escape attempt," according to an army report on Friday seen by AFP. It also said the prison's director was wounded.

Martinez, however, refuted the account, stating the uprising was staged by a group of prisoners "because they did not have access to food."

With the coronavirus pandemic raging, visits from family and friends -- who often bring food and medicine to inmates -- have been greatly reduced.



The identities of the dead were verified "through the morgue, thanks to relatives who recognized the dead in photos that were shown to them on a computer," said Carolina Giron of OVP.

According to the organization, 97 deaths occurred in Venezuelan prisons in 2019, 70 percent of which were due to diseases such as tuberculosis and a lack of medicine.

More than 330 cases of coronavirus, including 10 deaths, have been recorded in Venezuela, but authorities say there have been no cases in the country's prisons.

The initial toll Friday from the riot was 17 dead and nine wounded.

Mexican Families Protest at Hospital Hit by Coronavirus

ECATEPEC (Reuters) - Families in a poor satellite city of Mexico's capital with one of the country's most number of coronavirus cases have protested to demand news of sick relatives and return of bodies of the dead after videos surfaced showing cadavers at a hospital.

One video of the Las Americas general hospital in Ecatepec that was posted to social media showed several bagged bodies on stretchers, some in a small room and others outside lined against a courtyard wall.

"The only thing I demand is that they give me the full body of my son," Maria Dolores Carrillo told television program Imagen on Friday evening after her son died at the hospital.

Another video from Friday showed upset family members who had apparently forced their way into the hospital. They shouted in a crowded hallway in a confrontation with police, demanding news of their relatives.

Fernanda Garcia, 48, said she saw the group become upset after hospital staff said they would not be releasing patient information. "The family members became angry because many had been here for days without news of their relatives."

Her husband died at the hospital on Friday evening

after being admitted with respiratory problems, and his body has since been delivered to the family, she said.

Ecatepec, a working class city of more than 1.7 million inhabitants outside Mexico City, has registered 407 confirmed cases of the coronavirus and 28 deaths, according to data from Mexico's health ministry.

It is among the Mexican municipalities worst affected by the virus, which initially hit the more affluent parts of Latin America but is now spreading in poor neighborhoods.

State of Mexico authorities said in a statement that the Las Americas hospital, which is run by the state health ministry, would try to hasten the delivery of bodies to families.

"Coordination with funeral homes in the area has been strengthened with the aim to speed up the delivery of bodies and avoid the saturation in the Pathology Area of the Las Americas hospital," the State of Mexico government said.

Officials also they would work to improve communication with families, but that hospital visits were prohibited to prevent the coronavirus from spreading.



Trump Says Glad Kim Jong Un Is Back, and Well



WASHINGTON (AFP) — U.S.

President Donald Trump said Saturday he was "glad" about the reappearance of Kim Jong Un and that the North Korea leader is apparently healthy.

"I, for one, am glad to see he is back, and well!" Trump tweeted, following Kim's first public appearance in nearly three weeks after intense speculation that he was seriously ill or possibly dead.

North Korean state television showed Kim walking, smiling broadly and smoking a cigarette at what the North said was the opening of a fertilizer factory on Friday in Suncheon, north of Pyongyang.

Rumors about Kim's health have been swirling since his conspicuous no-show at April 15 celebrations for the birthday of his grandfather, the North's founder -- the most important day in the country's political calendar.

His absence triggered a series of fevered rumors and unconfirmed reports over his condition.

Kim's disappearance from public view came as Pyongyang's talks with Washington over the North's nuclear arsenal are at a standstill, despite three meetings between Kim and Trump.

If Kim had been incapacitated or dead, it would have increased uncertainty over the process.

Trump had downplayed reports of Kim's poor health and possible demise.



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(adviser)

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fireplace
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600sq.m, pkg
S/p, Sauna, J
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

(\$3000)
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S/p, S, J, pkg
maeble fl, F.F

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(\$2200) 3bdrs, S/p

(\$8000)
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Spain to Launch 16b Euro Reconstruction Fund

MADRID (Reuters) - Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Saturday his government would approve a 16 billion euros (14.05 billion pounds) reconstruction fund to help regional authorities deal with the social and economic damage from the coronavirus.

Speaking at a press conference, Sanchez also announced that the use of masks on public transport would be compulsory from Monday.



Russian Oil Output Jumped To 11.35m bpd

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia raised oil and gas condensate output in April to 46.45 million tons, or 11.35 million barrels per day (bpd), from 11.29 million bpd in March, Interfax reported on Saturday, before it makes cuts this month under a global supply pact.

The report, which cited Energy Ministry data, showed April's figure was the highest monthly average output since January 2019, when it was 11.38 million bpd.

Reuters uses the barrels/tons ratio of 7.33.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Russia and other allied producers, a group known as OPEC+, agreed last month to cut their combined oil output by about almost 10 million bpd, or 10% of global supply in May and June to tackle the economic fallout from the new coronavirus.

The United States, Norway, Canada and Brazil may add cuts that would bring the total reduction to 20 million bpd, or 20% of global supply, although the coronavirus crisis has driven down demand by as much as 30%, driving down prices.

Russia is expected to cut its oil production by 2.5 million bpd from a baseline of 11 million bpd in May and June.

This number exempts production of gas condensate, or light oil. Russian energy ministry does not disclose gas condensate production separately.

Russia's mid-sized oil producer Tatneft said on Saturday it produced 1.994 million tons of oil in April, down from 2.442 million tons in March.

The reduction amounted to around 90,000 bpd, or 16% from March. It did not say why it reduced output last month.

Tatneft cut output because storage capacity is full and European demand is weak, according to sources and data seen by Reuters last week.

The company operates in Tatarstan in central Russia which became the country's main oil province in the 1970s with output of 2 million bpd, helping the Soviet Union fund its arms race with the United States.

Russia has pledged to meet its commitments in full with output projected to fall to between 480 million and 500 million tons, or 9.6 million to 10 million bpd, this year, its first annual decline since 2008.

Natural gas production in April reached 55.14 billion cubic meters, a decline of 14.3% from the same month a year earlier, the Interfax news agency also reported.

It also said Russian oil exports increased 2.2% year on year to 83.79 million tons in the January-April period.

Austrian GDP to Shrink 8% This Year

VIENNA (Reuters) - Austria's central bank expects economic output to shrink more than twice as much this year as it forecast just a month ago as the coronavirus lockdown lasts longer than anticipated, its Governor Robert Holzmann said in remarks published on Saturday.

Holzmann said the central bank now forecasts an 8% drop in Austria's gross domestic product (GDP). It had previously foreseen a 3.2% drop in a "moderate" pandemic scenario, estimating that each week of lockdown cuts annual GDP by more than \$2 billion.

Although Austria's conservative-led government has said it was one of the fastest countries in Europe in reacting to the coronavirus threat, putting its lockdown in place seven weeks ago and being one of the first to start loosening it on April 14, Holzmann said the central bank still had to increase its estimate of the fallout.

"This (earlier) forecast was based on the then mild scenario of a five-week lockdown and a five-week step-by-step reopening phase. The conditions have changed in the meantime," Holzmann told the Salzburger Nachrichten newspaper.

"Our current scenario predicts - assuming a 13-week lockdown and a 10-week loosening phase - a fall of eight percent in economic growth," Holzmann was quoted saying.

"We hope that the truth will be somewhere between these two scenarios and that the lockdown and the loosening phase will go by more quickly," he added.

If those phases are shorter, the economic impact will be smaller, he said. It was not clear what the central bank considers the start and end of the lockdown - in the past it has appeared to use an earlier start date than when the bulk of the restrictions took effect around March 16.

Illustrating the uncertainty in forecasting the pandemic's impact, economic think-tank Wifo, which compiles GDP data for the government, said last week GDP would fall 5.2% this year but added it could also fall around 7.5% in a more pessimistic scenario.

Austria's coalition government of conservatives and Greens has announced an emergency aid package of up to 38 billion euros (33.35 billion pounds) to keep companies and the economy afloat while limiting the increase in unemployment.

It is now putting together an investment package to boost growth that would bring forward existing plans for tax cuts for low and middle incomes as well as spending on as-yet unspecified environmental measures.



Malaysia Facing Worst Economic Recession in Its History

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia is weathering its worst economic recession in its history just as other developed nations are facing deep downturns due to the Covid-19 pandemic and Movement Control Order (MCO).

Finance Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz said the recession has not only affected the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) but also contributed towards a rise in unemployment.

"The important thing here now is how fast we can manage this (Covid-19) pandemic situation. If we can manage the situation swiftly, our nation's economy and development could also recover swiftly.

"I am not sure when we could come up the vaccine for Covid-19, but with the help of the people, the government and everyone involved, we can help manage the situation and help the economy recover," he said.

Tengku Zafrul said this during a live special interview on TV3 at Sri Pentas here. He also revealed that the economic recession has impacted the nation's income, with the country hemorrhaging RM2.4 billion daily.

Tengku Zafrul added that in the first two weeks of the MCO, the country's economic growth, which was previously at two per cent, declined to 0.5 per cent; and within the five weeks of the MCO being implemented, the GDP is expected to decline between three and four per cent.

"If there was no Prihatin Rakyat Economic Stimulus Package, the decline in the GDP would be more pronounced. The Prihatin package can generate up to 2.8 per cent for the GDP.

"Therefore, this package is important to help the economy recover in the short and medium term," he said.

On oil prices, Tengku Zafrul said the price for a barrel of crude oil is between US\$20 and US\$25. Due to its current low price, the nation's fiscal deficit has increased from 4.7 per cent to five per cent. "We need to remember that during the global financial crisis of 2009, our budget deficit stood at 6.7 per cent. If we look at the Prihatin package and the crude oil price, our deficit is estimated to be between 4.7 per cent and 5 per cent," he said.

On Malaysia's current debt status ratio to its GDP, Tengku Zafrul said it stands at about 51 per cent (the ceiling being 55 per cent).

Asked if there is a need to revise the country's debt ceiling limit, Tengku Zafrul said at the moment, there is no necessity. This is because the country's overseas debt is between two and three per cent.

"The overseas ceiling debt is about RM35 billion but we have more space. The most important thing here is that all countries are facing the same problem. They have to borrow or carry out fiscal stimulus measures to help their people and their economies," he said.

Tengku Zafrul also said the government will announce an economic recovery package by the end of this month and the budget will be tabled in November. On whether the government is rushing into opening the economy with the Conditional MCO, which will come into force on May 4, and if some quarters had pressured the government to do so, Tengku Zafrul answered in the negative.

IMF Approves \$220m in Coronavirus Aid for Afghanistan

KABUL (Dispatches) - The International Monetary Fund approved \$220 million (Dh808m) in emergency assistance for Afghanistan to help the country cope with the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

The disbursement will help Afghan authorities plug an urgent balance of payments gap in 2020 and fund pandemic-related spending on health and social relief, the Washington-based lender said in a statement on Friday. Discussions on a new IMF arrangement may start "soon," depending on how the pandemic evolves.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has hit hard Afghanistan's economy," Mitsuhiro Furusawa, the IMF's deputy managing director and chair, said. "The shock has generated a large balance of payments need. Emergency financing from the IMF under the Rapid Credit Facility would help meet this urgent need and create room for pandemic-related spending, including by catalyzing donor financing."

The coronavirus outlook and measures to contain it have worsened the country's economic outlook. Afghanistan's economy is forecast to contract 3 per cent this year, assuming the pandemic is contained by the third quarter, a major reversal from the 3.5 per cent expansion previously projected. The country's fiscal deficit will widen to 3.5 per cent of the gross domestic product due to urgent pandemic-related spending and revenue losses.

The balance of payments gap is estimated at \$857m or 4.5 per cent of GDP. Afghan authorities are also seeking financing from other sources to mitigate the impact on the already fragile economy, burdened by ongoing conflict and political uncertainty.

Afghanistan recorded 2,335 confirmed coronavirus cases and the death toll stood at 68, according to the Johns Hopkins University, which is tracking the pandemic globally. Worldwide, the number of coronavirus cases has exceeded 3.3 billion while the death toll reached 238,787 as of Saturday. A total of 1,053,419 people have recovered.

The pandemic has hammered the global economy, which is set to contract 3 per cent this year and is projected to slide into the deepest recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The outbreak has hampered international trade and paralyzed the airline industry and hospitality sector. "Trade has been disrupted and domestic activity has slowed sharply as measures have been taken to contain the virus," Mr Furusawa said. "As a result, the economy is set to contract in 2020, leading to a rise in unemployment and poverty."

The IMF urged authorities to accommodate emergency health spending and social relief to affected households by allowing a higher fiscal deficit and mobilizing donor grants. It also called for cutting non-essential spending and taking revenue measures to contain the fiscal deficit.



U.S. Oil Giants Cut Output as Exxon Mobil Reports First Loss in Decades

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - U.S. oil giants Exxon Mobil and Chevron said they were curtailing some production as they slash capital spending in response to an acute industry downturn in the wake of the coronavirus crisis.

Both U.S. oil giants announced the belt-tightening moves as they reported first quarter results, a period that saw oil prices retreat, but which preceded the first-ever drop in U.S. crude futures to negative territory in April. Results are expected to be far worse in the second quarter.

Exxon Mobil -- which reported its first quarterly loss in decades -- said it would curtail 400,000 barrels of oil-equivalent per day in the second quarter for "economic" reasons.

Exxon Mobil Chief Executive Darren Woods said the company expects a difficult second quarter, but he pointed to "encouraging" signs in China as it has begun to ramp up its economy following coronavirus shutdowns. Some U.S. states have also lifted shelter-in-place directives in recent days.

"The basic drivers of energy demand have not changed because of what we say today," said Woods, who added the company remained committed to investing in new energy projects in expectation of a rebound.

"It's a really a question of time," Woods told an analyst conference call, adding that the company could further trim its spending if needed. Shares of both companies fell, but Exxon Mobil dropped much more significantly as the company faced skeptical questions from analysts over its strategy.

Exxon Mobil reported a \$610 million loss for the first quarter, compared with \$2.4 billion in profits in the year-ago period. Revenues fell 11.7 percent to \$56.2 billion.

The loss included \$2.9 billion in non-cash costs on inventory and assets because of low commodity prices. Exxon Mobil reduced capital spending by 30 percent to around \$23 billion for 2020 and will trim operating expenses by 15 percent. The company will slow some projects in the U.S. Permian Basin and Mozambique, as well as expansions of downstream and chemical plants.

The oil and gas production that has been shut is short cycle and could be ramped up quickly if crude prices suddenly improve, company officials said.

Rolls-Royce Considering Cutting Up to 15% of Its Workforce

LONDON (Reuters) - British aero-engine maker Rolls-Royce Holdings is considering cutting up to 15% of its workforce, a source close to the company told Reuters, as customers cut production and airlines park planes due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The size of layoffs has been mentioned

internally by senior management, but is by no means finalized and there is a lot of negotiation still to be done, the source added.

The company's engines power Airbus SE and Boeing Co's widebody jets and Rolls-Royce is paid by airlines based on how many hours its engines fly.

The Financial Times earlier reported Rolls-Royce was preparing to lay off up to 8,000 of its 52,000-strong workforce.

An announcement on the final figure is not expected before the end of May, when the company will update employees, according to the FT report.

Last month, Rolls-Royce scrapped its targets and final dividend to shore up its finances to cope with the virus outbreak.

The company's Chief Executive Officer Warren East said in April Rolls-Royce would be looking at cutting cash expenditure, including salary costs across its global workforce by at least 10% this year.

Discussions with unions about the job cuts have just begun, the newspaper reported, citing sources.

The scale of job cuts is still likely to be larger than after 9/11 when the group cut 5,000 jobs and the vast majority of it is expected to hit the civil aerospace unit, the FT said.

While job losses are also expected in the unit's operations in Singapore and Germany, Britain's civil aerospace workforce is expected to bear the majority of the cuts, according to the report.

Unite, Britain's largest trade union, did not comment in response to a query from Reuters.

Five Minerals Hit Production Growth Last Year

TEHRAN (MNA) – Production volume of five selected minerals registered a hike in the last Iranian calendar year [ended March 20, 2020] as compared to the last year's corresponding period.

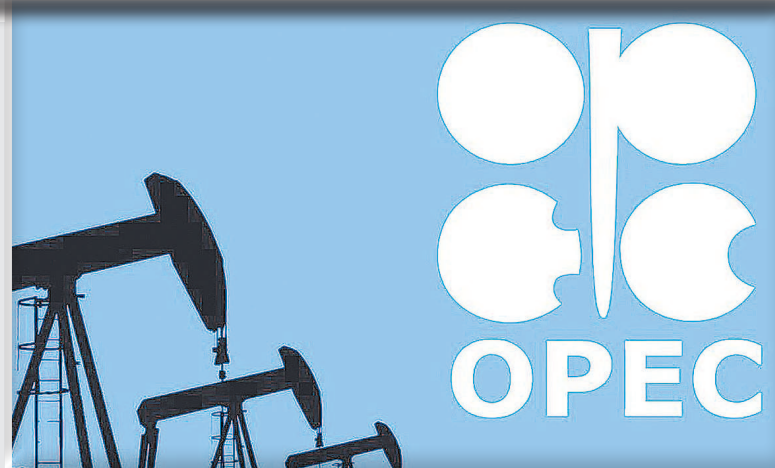
Production volume of three selected minerals decreased last year [ended Marc. 20, 2020] as compared

to a year earlier while production volume of nine minerals increased in this period.

Accordingly, aluminum ingot, alumina and coal concentrate recorded a 7.7, 2.3 and 7.9 percent decline respectively from March 21, 2019 to March 20, 2020, as compared to the same period of last year.



OPEC Output Hit 30-Year High During the Saudi-Russia Price War



Toward the end of April, the Saudis began to pare back in preparation for the new agreement, tempering their output average for the month to 11.4 million barrels a day, the survey showed.

Fellow Persian Gulf exporter Kuwait joined them in preemptive application of the curbs. Others, such as Nigeria, also began cutting early -- but only because a lack of customers and storage space forced them to do so.

The OPEC+ curbs, though adding up to a massive 9.7 million barrels a day, probably won't offset the massive contraction in demand. The global oil industry is bracing for the abrupt and disorderly shutdown of oil fields producing crude with nowhere to go.

Oil prices sank to their lowest since 2002 in London this week, falling below \$20 a barrel. The collapse was even more severe in the U.S., where futures briefly fell below zero last month because nobody wanted to buy expiring contracts.

LONDON (Bloomberg) --OPEC's crude production surged by the most in almost 30 years last month as its biggest members fought to dominate a global market devastated by the coronavirus crisis.

Saudi Arabia, the cartel's most powerful member, pumped a record of more than 11 million barrels a day as it waged a price war against its former ally Russia, a Bloomberg survey showed. Though they reached a truce by mid-April, striking a deal to cut vast amounts of supply, the Saudis continued to keep production high for much of the month -- even with demand suffering an unprecedented free-fall.

The kingdom's surge leaves OPEC nations with an even bigger glut to deal with now, with the brief price war adding almost 100 million barrels of additional supply into an already oversupplied market, according to Bloomberg calculations.

Production from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries soared by 1.73 million barrels a day in April, the biggest monthly increase since September 1990, according to survey data compiled by Bloomberg. It's based on information from officials, ship-tracking data and estimates from consultants including Rystad Energy AS and JBC Energy GmbH.

The organization pumped 30.36 million barrels a day in April -- almost four times the amount they need to produce on average this quarter, data from the International Energy Agency shows. In the same month that OPEC opened the taps, world demand slumped by almost 30 million barrels a day as lockdowns to contain the virus grounded flights and froze economic activity.

The price war erupted between Saudi Arabia and Russia in early March, when Riyadh failed to persuade Moscow that deep supply cutbacks were needed to deal with the loss of demand from the pandemic. The OPEC+ alliance they had led for three years, aimed at coordinating output to prevent surpluses, fell apart.

Seeking to either change Russia's mind, or at least defend its share of a shrinking market, Riyadh propelled output to a previously unseen 12 million barrels a day in early April.

Under immense pressure from its political allies in Washington, the kingdom then reversed course, reaching an agreement with Russia and the rest of OPEC+ on April 12 to slash supplies again. Those new cutbacks formally take effect on Friday.

Germany Leads the World on Taxes and Social Contributions

BERLIN (Dispatches) - It's the question almost everyone who works in Germany asked upon receiving their first payslip: "Where the #&#% did all my money go!?" And it seems we have good reason to be indignant: a recent OECD study has found that, taking both income taxes and social security contributions into account, no other industrialized country in the world places such a large financial burden on its citizens.

According to the OECD's annual "Taxing Wages" report, Germany has finally displaced Belgium as the world leader when it comes to wage taxes. Not one of the other 36 member countries has an income tax and social security burden higher than Germany's, which averages at 39.3 percent.

The OECD average is 25.9 percent. This means that single workers in Germany receive, on average, 60.7 percent of their wages, compared to 74.1 percent on average in the OECD.

Families in Germany, however, take home more of their pay, with a married single earner with two children recording a total burden of around 20 percent in 2019, including tax breaks and payments such as child benefits. This puts Germany only in the upper midfield, behind Lithuania, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands.

If you look at families where both partners are working, things look different again. According to the study, a family with two earners and two children loses a good 31 percent of their income to taxes and social security contributions - putting Germany in the top spot in the OECD, just ahead of Denmark on 30.7 percent. The OECD average is less than 20 percent.

The above-average burden in Germany is caused primarily by social contributions. If you take income tax on its own, Germany deducts 19.2 percent, only slightly more than the OECD average of 15.9 percent. Social contributions, on the other hand, make up a full 20.1 percent - double the OECD average of 10 percent.

The study's findings are likely to have implications for the ongoing dispute in Germany over taxation and the economic fallout of the coronavirus crisis - which the government claims it is able to fight, thanks to its substantial cash reserves. Nonetheless, many are calling for taxes in Germany to be cut to create more scope for investment and entrepreneurship.

Turkey Steps Up Medical Device Development Amid Virus

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Seeking to stem the hundreds of millions of dollars it costs annually to buy medical devices from abroad, Turkey has stepped up its efforts to develop and produce these devices within the country instead.

Expenses for importing medical devices such as respirators or X-ray systems reached more than \$8 billion in the last five years, while there has also been a gradual decline.

Over the last month Turkey also rushed to set up mass production of mechanical ventilators, devices critical for treating COVID-19 patients.

Defense and technology firms Baykar, Aselsan, and Arcelik supported medical technology firm BIOSYS' mechanical ventilator model rolling 100 units off the production line in just two weeks.

As part of the project, 5,000 units will be produced by the end of May. The price is around \$15,000-\$20,000 but Turkish-made units will cost less than half of that.

With severe shortness of breath a hallmark of the virus, the pandemic has raised the need for medical ventilators, resulting in a fresh impetus for defense, technology and automotive companies across the globe to research and manufacture the devices.

Meanwhile, Turkish defense giant Aselsan is focused on medical imaging devices, including magnetic resonance (MR) and X-ray machines.

It developed a mobile X-ray system and focused on mass production, according to information provided by Turkey's Defense Industries Presidency.

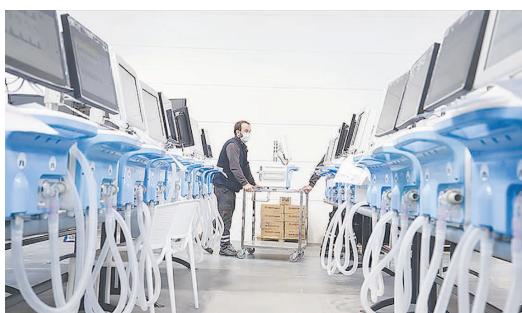
The system, which can be portable, is expected to be ready in one-and-a-half years, the presidency noted.

As part of its efforts, Aselsan produced several parts of the X-ray system domestically, such as the generator, collimator, detector, and cables.

The device was also designed by the defense giant.

Aselsan also focused on producing other medical equipment such as MR machines.

Turkey ranks first in the world with intensive care beds,



40 per 10,000 citizens, versus 28 per 10,000 on average among Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.

Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said Turkey has 25,446 adult intensive care beds as of March.

It had around 17,000 mechanical ventilators before the coronavirus

pandemic, while several major countries, such as the UK, have less than 10,000. And it has focused on building major hospitals throughout the country with a high patient capacity and modern medical devices.

While many developed countries provide very expensive healthcare, Turkey's healthcare system is all but free.

Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has infected more than 3.3 million people globally, all countries faced medical equipment and device shortages, which increased the importance of producing domestically.

Turkey exports masks, disinfectants, and protective suits, but dozens of countries have protectionist measures.

Selcuk Bayraktar, the chief technology officer at Baykar, said last week that countries' protectionist steps for domestic needs have damaged all of them except for Turkey.

Even the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization urged governments to act carefully in restrictions on exporting mechanical ventilators.

U.S. JCPOA...

FROM PAGE 1

"It has also violated all its commitments as a JCPOA participant and has spared no efforts to destroy it through re-imposition of sanctions and threatening others to be punished in case of trade with Iran."

Earlier, Head of Iranian President's Office Mahmoud Vaezi described enmity with JCPOA as the most obvious anti-Iran characteristic in the region and world, saying that the US government even with its maximum pressure campaign has failed vis-a-vis JCPOA's internal strength.

U.S., Saudi Arabia...

FROM PAGE 1

Mohanad Najim Aleqabi, director general of the Hash al-Sha'abi media war, told Al Maydeen TV channel Saturday that the Daesh attack in Salahuddin was carried out from four fronts.

Some of the equipment used by Daesh elements were new, he said, adding that most terror groups entered Iraq from Syria after the U.S. facilitated their passage. The fresh Daesh attack comes at a time when American forces are required to leave Iraq based on a parliamentary resolution approved in January following the US assassination of senior Iranian anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

U.S., Saudi Arabia...

FROM PAGE 1

The figures come against the backdrop of reports suggesting that the Iranian economy is emerging from the impacts of the American sanctions that were imposed two years ago and were meant curb the country's access to lucrative oil incomes.

Experts believe the sanctions have helped create more opportunities in the Iranian economy by diversifying it away from oil. Recent government data suggest sectors like agriculture and metals industries grew over the past calendar year helping create more jobs for the youth in the country. The yearly report published by the SCI on Saturday is a boost on figures for third quarter when unemployment rate had been measured at 10.6 percent, down 1.2 percent compared to December 2018.

Americans Will Suffer...

FROM PAGE 1

One unlikely finds any adventurism by the U.S. forces in the region which has not faced a final crushing blow. 2877 days of the Sacred Defense ended in grandeur and victory of Islam and Iran in the region. The fiasco of downing Iranian passenger plane over the Persian Gulf unmasked the U.S. in the region as bloodthirsty even assassination of martyr Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and his comrades portrayed a disgraceful and hateful face of the U.S. in the region so that even American Democrat Senator Chris Murphy on January 3 and after the assassination of Martyr Soleimani said that Soleimani's martyrdom could be more dangerous to the U.S.

Now we should ask us this question whether Martyr Soleimani's being alive has been more dangerous or his martyrdom. On Iran's new launch of satellite into orbit, Murphy says "The launch of military satellite is a proof that Trump's Iran policy just strengthens Iran and causes them to act more aggressively. In virtually every way, Iran is stronger today in the Middle East [West Asia], and America is weaker than 4 years ago."

Although the U.S. whose troops on the warships are currently infected with the Coronavirus, it does not stop its wickedness and creates tension in the Persian Gulf.

It seems that as most media outlets in the world have predicted and revealed both explicitly or implicitly that the U.S. would suffer casualties in the region, they have not said much nonsense. There is a proverb in Arabic language which says "Whoever tried the tried would repent having tried."



Mosques to...

FROM PAGE 1

"When they are saying their prayers at the mosque, they are doing a religiously rewarding action. In terms of priority, maintaining one's social distance is more important than attending mass prayers at the mosque, which is a religiously rewarding act," the president noted.

"So, when we see this compulsory duty and religiously rewarding act side by side, they become all the more beautiful when done together," he said.

Iran's president has urged the nation to be prepared in case the coronavirus outbreak might reach a peak in the future.

President Rouhani noted that enough medical equipment as well as basic commodities needed by people should be available, so that the general public will have no concerns in that regard.

He at the same time noted that enough equipment have been produced to meet domestic need for items needed to fight the coronavirus pandemic.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the president said figures show 94% percent of people, on average, have abided by health protocols, which shows people's respect for health directives.

The president also touched upon screening tests conducted nationwide to detect people infected with coronavirus.

"In the first phase, 78 million people were screened," he said.

The president underlined some 30 million people are also scheduled to be screened in the second phase, which, as he added, is more accurate.

Indonesia to Reopen Economy, Resume Normal Life by July

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesia is hoping to reopen the economy and resume "normal life" by July, according to government officials.

Doni Monardo, chief of Indonesia's COVID-19 task force, said earlier this week that the government expects to see a decline in new cases from June, after ramping up testing in April and May and implementing aggressive contact tracing and stricter isolation measures for people exposed to the virus. "In July we would be able to start a normal life again," he said.

The lead expert at the task force, epidemiologist and public health expert Wiku Adisasmito, stressed that minimizing the risk to human life must take precedence over reopening economic activity, which has come to a halt since the government introduced social distancing measures in mid-March.

"I want to make sure that there is no trade-off between the economy and public health. We know how to bring the economy back to life, but what we don't know is how to bring our deceased patients back to life," Adisasmito said in an online press briefing on Thursday. "We are now in process of analyzing and mapping the scenarios to restart the economy."

More regions are imposing stricter social restrictions amid a surge in infections — many of which have been imported from badly hit areas including Jakarta. There have been more than 10,550 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Indonesia as of May 1.

England's Sri Lanka Tour Rescheduled for January 2021

LONDON (Reuters) - England's two-match test series in Sri Lanka, which has been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has been rescheduled for January next year, Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) CEO Ashley de Silva has said. England were scheduled to play tests in Galle and Colombo in March before the coronavirus outbreak shut down sport worldwide as countries introduced lockdown measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

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NFL Plans to Release a Full Schedule Next Week

NEW YORK (AFP) - The NFL will release a 2020 schedule next week that includes a full 17 weeks of games and no changes due to the coronavirus pandemic, a league spokesman told ESPN. NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy said the league plans to announce a September 10 season opener, a 16-game campaign with one bye week for all 32 clubs and a playoff run culminating with Super Bowl 55 in Tampa on February 7, 2021.

ITF Issues Guidelines For Post-Pandemic Events

LONDON (Dispatches) - No shaking, no showering, no sharing, no signing! Welcome to what the world of tennis could look like once government restrictions caused by the coronavirus pandemic have been lifted.

The International Tennis Federation (ITF) issued a set of guidelines for local and National-level competitions.

"They emphasize that decisions made by governments take precedence and that tennis (either competitive or recreational) should not be played until governments have sufficiently relaxed any restrictions that are currently in place," said an ITF statement.

The guidelines include arriving at venues already dressed and leaving immediately after the match. "Do not use the locker rooms or showers," says ITF.

Masks are to be worn while off-court, players and officials should maintain at least two meters between each other and handshakes are banned.

Each player is asked to use a personal set of balls — separately numbered. Ball boys and girls to wear rubber gloves, while at changeovers players must go around opposite sides of the net.

Players are also discouraged from signing autographs, taking selfies and warned not to share equipment, water bottles or food.

Tournaments should also only be singles and played without spectators.

"While following measures such as these will ensure that the risk from COVID-19 is minimized the guidelines are clear that it cannot be eliminated altogether," added ITF.

Meanwhile Germany's Dustin Brown said returning to competitive action at the Tennis Point Exhibition Series in Germany this week amidst the coronavirus pandemic was a surreal experience.

Brown, who famously beat Rafa Nadal at Wimbledon in 2015, is the highest-profile player in the eight-man field at the event being held at the Base Tennis Centre near Koblenz.

The ATP and WTA Tours remain suspended until mid-July at the earliest, but the event in Brown's home country, the first of three that will form the Exo Tennis Series, has at least offered the chance of some competitive action.

"It's nice to finally play, it's a little surreal to be honest, with everything that is actually going on in the world," former world number 64 Brown said after winning his opening two round-robin matches on Friday.

"With all the safety guidelines I think everyone has done pretty well, doing their



best. Even sometimes when it's not that easy. Very happy to be out here and have some fun."

The event is taking place without spectators, line judges and ball kids and there are no handshakes after the match.

Players arrive alone and have their own designated space in the venue to prepare. Once on court they sit at opposite sides during the changeovers. The event continues until Monday.

Matches on the indoor claycourt are played over a short format, first to four games and no advantage scoring.

Brown, speaking to the Tennis Channel who are streaming the action live, said in some respects it was a little easier.

"There is not that much pressure," the 35-year-old, who helped devise the format with Base Tennis owner Rodney Rapson, said. "It's hard to get up and train when you don't know when you can play so this event has definitely helped the mindset for the last couple of weeks, knowing something might happen."

"It's been a little light at the end of the tunnel."

Martinez to Stay in Charge of Belgium

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - Belgium coach Roberto Martinez has extended his contract through to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, ending weeks of speculation about a new deal, Belgian media reported on Saturday.

There was no official confirmation from the Belgian football association but newspapers said Martinez would stay in charge through to the next World Cup after negotiating a new two-year deal.

His contract was up after this year's European Championship, which has been shifted back a year because of the coronavirus crisis.

Martinez, 46, had already said in interviews over the last weeks he wanted to stay in charge in order to take Belgium to Euro 2021, where they are drawn in Group B and will play Denmark, Finland and Russia.

The team, who are top of the FIFA world rankings, had qualified in imposing fashion, by winning all 10 qualifiers, scoring 40 goals and conceding just three.

Spanish-born Martinez, the former Wigan Athletic and Everton manager, took Belgium to third place at the World Cup and is popular among the players, reports added.

All Table Tennis Competitions Scrapped Until End July

BERLIN (Reuters) - All table tennis competitions and events have been scrapped at least until the end of July due to the coronavirus, the international table tennis federation (ITTF) said on Saturday.

Following an update from its task force the ITTF said it was looking into potentially returning to action in August but would also need to cut costs. "The current period of suspension of all ITTF events and activities has been extended up until the end of July 2020," it said in a statement. "The situation is being monitored closely for an eventual restart of ITTF events in August 2020."

It said it was also cancelling all veteran tour events and Table Tennis X events for the entire year while looking into cost-cutting measures to meet the financial challenges.

"ITTF management have been asked to find ways to reduce operation costs overall, including the need for there to be some HR restructure in order to manage 2020 financial realities," it said.

The virus has wreaked havoc with the international sports calendar, forcing also the postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games and the Euro 2020 soccer championships to 2021. But it has also cut deep into international federations' finances putting their future operations in doubt.

League, Federation to Decide When La Liga Returns

MADRID (Dispatches) - Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said he hopes La Liga returns "soon" and it will be the leagues and federation that decide when after the government began easing coronavirus restrictions.

The sports ministry approved La Liga's plans on Thursday for clubs to test their players for the coronavirus before they return to training as the league looks to restart the season in June after it was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Spain, one of Europe's worst-hit countries with 25,100 deaths, imposed a strict lockdown in March, confining most of the population to their homes. Yet after 49 days, they have now allowed people to leave their homes for exercise.

Vettel Makes His Esports Debut in Legends Trophy



LONDON (Reuters) - Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel made his esports debut on Saturday in Legends Trophy races that also featured retired Formula One world champions Emerson Fittipaldi and Jenson Button.

The German has some time on his hands with Formula One's season stalled by the COVID-19 pandemic and organisers hoping to get going in Austria at the start of July.

The four times champion finished 15th and 12th respectively after being caught up in incidents on the virtual version of the Sepang circuit that hosted the Malaysian Grand Prix between 1999 and 2017.

While Vettel, 32, and Button, 40, are both actual Malaysian Grand Prix winners, 73-year-old Fittipaldi's time was in the 1970s when the real Brabham BT44s, simulated in the virtual race, were around.

The first race was won by Colombian former McLaren and Williams F1 driver Juan Pablo Montoya, a double Indianapolis 500 winner, while the second went to Mexican Adrian Fernandez.

Vettel's team mate Charles Leclerc has been active on various platforms from his Monaco apartment, even taking part in virtual lawn mower and truck races. The 22-year-old Monegasque has also won two Formula One virtual races and will take part in another on Sunday, which would have been the day of the postponed Dutch Grand Prix at Zandvoort.

FIFA Vice-President Ponders Calendar Year Season in Europe



ROME (Reuters) - FIFA vice-president Victor Montagliani has said that moving the European soccer season to the calendar year is a "possibility to be discussed" in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic which has brought football to a standstill around the world.

In an interview with Italy's Radio Sportiva, Montagliani, who is seen as a close ally of FIFA president Gianni Infantino, said the move would fit in with the 2022 World Cup being played in Qatar in November and December.

The head of world soccer's governing body himself has said that football will be totally different when it restarts and that the current stoppage could be a good chance to overhaul the overloaded calendar which is due to run until 2024.

"We have the opportunity because the World Cup in Qatar in 2022 will be played in November/December and that could be the idea," said Montagliani, who is president of the CONCACAF confederation.

"Here in the Americas, the season is already played according to the calendar year, perhaps it is a solution that could also be used in Europe and Africa, it is a possibility to be discussed at national and continental level," he said. "It is not an idea to be discarded, it can be a solution in view of the next two years and this winter World Cup".

Coronavirus Lockdown Has Been A Mental Battle



ZAGREB (Reuters) - Staying focused on the Premier League title race during the coronavirus pandemic lockdown has been a mental battle despite all individual efforts to maintain physical fitness, Liverpool defender Dejan Lovren has said.

"It hasn't been easy as we have been locked up in our homes for 46 days now," the Croatia international told Saturday's online edition of Sportske Novosti, the Balkan nation's leading sports daily (sportske.jutarnji.hr).

"The psychological aspect is the most difficult to overcome. I work out on my own as much as I can, I kick the ball around a bit with my son on our lawn, but training with the team is totally different."

The league, which has been suspended since March 9, remains in limbo and unable to take any steps until any government decision next week on possible changes to lockdown restrictions.

All 20 clubs held a conference call on Friday in which they looked at plans for a resumption of training later in May followed by a possible return to competitive action in June.

During the meeting, the clubs were informed that an eventual resumption of matches would only see them play only at neutral venues approved from a health and safety point of view.