

Iran's Governor at OPEC, Hossein Kazempour Ardebili, Went Into a Coma at a Hospital in Tehran After Suffering a Brain Hemorrhage, an Official at the Oil Ministry Said

IRAN NEWS

Trucks Lined up at the Iraqi Kurdistan And Iranian Border as It Partially Reopened for Trade on Sunday (May 3), Months After It Was Shut to Curb the Spread of the Coronavirus

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U.S. Dangerous Policies Disrupting World Order

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Islamic Republic of Iran has warned about the U.S. approach in dealing with political issues saying such an approach is a dangerous one that will disrupt international order.

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Seyed Abbas Mousavi said the United States has proved it does not adhere to any of its international obligations, and violates its obligations wherever its interests are at stake.

In a press briefing held through video conference on Monday, Mousavi added amid the corona prevalence where everyone should support the World Health Organization, the U.S. regime is rudely threatening this international body at this critical stage, threatening to cut off its budget.

Referring to the anniversary of the withdrawal of the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the foreign ministry spokesman said Washington withdrew from the JCPOA on May 8, 2018, and somehow violated this multilateral agreement; therefore, it is not a member of this agreement anymore.

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Majlis Slashes Four Zeros From National Currency



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Majlis yesterday passed a bill allowing the government to slash four zeros from the rial, after a sharp fall in the value of the currency.

Under the approved bill, Iran's national currency will be changed from the rial to the Toman, which is equal to 10,000 rials.

The bill needs to be approved by the Guardian Council before it takes effect.

Iran's state TV said the Central Bank of Iran will have two years to "pave the ground to change the currency to Toman".

Addressing to the open session of Majlis in defense of the bill, the governor of Central Bank Abdolnaser Hemmati said that because of the inflation in the past five decades, rial and dinar have lost their stamina and actually toman has replaced them in the society and people use toman in their daily trades and they even equals 50 tomans to 50,000 tomans.

On the cost of destroying old banknotes and printing new ones, he said there are some eight billions of banknotes circulating in the country and five billions of them are banknotes with value less than 2,000 tomans and by this approval and cutting four zeros, the bank can circulate one- and two-toman coins.

Hemmati reiterated that currently the bank destroys one billions of banknotes annually which its annual cost is around 400b tomans.

He reiterated that protecting the reputation of the national currency is very important, adding that currently the gap for changing rial with currencies like dollar and euro is very high. He admitted that the ration between national currency with dollar is 0.000006 which is a very weak one in the world.

Hemmati added that cutting the zeros will revive usage of coins in the country, adding that currently the per capita of banknote in the country is 102 and the figure for the coins is just 26 while the per capita of coins in other countries is three times more than Iran.

He once again reiterated that cutting zeros has no impact on inflation and they are other factors which are crucial in inflation.

Hemmati reiterated that replacing the current banknotes with the new ones will be gradual while both rial and toman will be valid during the transition period. After that phase, all financial commitments based on the rial will be fulfilled in toman, he stressed.

The idea of fewer zeros has been floated for almost 16 years. The initiative to change the currency was first proposed by the government in August.

Iran Manages COVID-19 Amid Sanctions Climax

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

RASHT - Iran has relatively managed coronavirus outbreak amid sanctions and economic problems climax, Iranian Minister of Health, Treatment and Medical Education Saeed Namaki said.

Addressing a meeting to commemorate martyred healthcare defenders late on Sunday, Namaki said it is an honor for Iranians, who accompanied by their national consensus and empathy, were able to contain the unbridled and terrible disease.

He expressed hope for Iranians to be able to reach better achievements in managing COVID-19 disease.

Namaki also sympathized with the bereaved families of the martyred healthcare defenders and appreciated their patience and cooperation with medical staff.

The deadly coronavirus radiating from Wuhan, China, in December 2019 has affected millions of people across the world.

Iran has taken numerous steps to stop the spread of the disease, ranging from closing down schools and universities to cancellation of cultural and religious gatherings. It is also constantly disinfecting and sanitizing public places.

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Iran Has Most Powerful Chopper Fleet in West Asia

TEHRAN (IFP) - Commander of Islamic Republic of Iran Army Aviation, Brigadier General Yousef Qorbani, said Monday the country has the largest helicopter fleet in the West Asia which gives it an upper hand.

He went on to say that visitors from friendly and neighboring countries, who have visited the Army Aviation facilities, have approved this claim.

"Not only in numbers, but also in combat and deterrent power we are the most powerful in this region. At the same time, with the huge helicopter fleet at our disposal, we have the fifth largest chopper fleet in the world."

"Today, despite sanctions, we have created many opportunities in the aviation industry," added Qorbani in an interview with Fars News Agency.

He further mentioned that Iran has upgraded the choppers firepower to suit the conditions of today's wars, in a way that Iranian choppers will no longer fire at the enemy at close range, but they target the enemy in the form of Fire and Forget.

"Over the past few years, a great deal has been carried out in collaboration with the defence industry. We have our own weapons infrastructure in the army aviation."

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Afghanistan Urges Iran To Lift Visa Restrictions

TEHRAN (ILNA)- Afghan Ministry of Immigration has called on Iran to lift visa restrictions in the pandemic era to stop illegal travel to Iran of the Afghan citizens.

A statement by the Afghan Ministry of Immigration, which was released on Sunday expressed concern about report of deaths of Afghan nationals in the current of cross-border illegal trip to Iran.

Iran cites the emergency occasion of the pandemic era for visa refusal in line with the health protocols.

The Afghan Ministry said that it expects the Iranian diplomatic officials to remove all causes of illegal cross-border trips.

The statement further noted that Iran and Afghanistan should create a practical solution to prevent the illegal travel of Afghan citizens across the border between the two countries.

The statement was issued at a time when Iran declared start of consular services to Afghans several weeks ago, noting that consular services and visa issuance via air will be resumed.

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PMU Repels Several Daesh Attacks

TEHRAN (PressTV)- The Daesh Takfiri terrorist group has launched several attacks across Iraq as the Kata'ib Hezbollah resistance group warns of a Saudi-U.S. plan to revive the group.

The Arabic Al-Mayadeen news network reported on Sunday that Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units' 21st Brigade thwarted a Daesh assault on the al-Eith region of the eastern Salahuddin Province.

The PMU's 47th Brigade also repelled a Daesh operation in the Jurf al-Sakhar region in the central Babil province, resulting in one PMU casualty.

Another attack in the eastern Diyala province, however, led to five casualties among the country's pro-government tribal units, according to a security official.

Earlier on Sunday, a Daesh operation seeking to infiltrate the central Karbala province from the western Anbar province was forced to retreat with casualties following the intervention of Iraqi security services.

Iran strongly condemns a criminal and cowardly attack by the Daesh terrorist group in Iraq that killed 10 PMU fighters.

Iraqi forces also launched numerous raids on Daesh terror cells on Sunday.

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Taliban Stage Deadly Bomb Attack in Afghanistan

KABUL (Dispatches) - Taliban militants in Afghanistan have detonated an explosive-laden vehicle near an outpost housing members of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) and Army forces in the country's Helmand Province.

Omar Zwak, a spokesman for Helmand's provincial governor, confirmed that the deadly bombing occurred on Sunday night in the province's Nahr-i-Saraj district. One report said at least five soldiers had been killed and five more wounded out of an estimated 150 members of army and intelligence forces that were at the station.

Another report cited an unnamed intelligence officer who survived the attack as saying that he had personally helped pull out at least 18 bodies from under the debris caused by the blast at the site on Sunday night.

The Afghan Defense Ministry said that the driver of the car had been detected and shot by the guards before reaching the building and that he detonated the bomb outside his target of Yakhchal post.

The Taliban have claimed responsibility for the attack.

"Dozens of members belonging to the enemy forces have been killed and wounded in the attack," claimed Qari Yousuf Ahmedi, a spokesman for the group, which is notorious for its exaggerated statements.

Afghan government forces in the last two months have suffered heavy casualties across the country due to an increased number of Taliban attacks. A new report shows that the Taliban militant group has stepped up its attacks on Afghan forces since signing a peace deal with the U.S..

More than 900 Afghan forces have been killed in the past weeks, according to official government sources.

The deadly Taliban attacks on Afghan forces come despite a peace deal between the militants and the United States in February. They also come in the middle of a drawn-out prisoner exchange with the government that was stipulated by the deal.

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Veep Stresses Investment In Iran's Education

TEHRAN (IP)- First Vice President said every country's driving force of the development is its labor force which is derived from the country's education system thus investment is necessary.

Congratulating Teachers Week to the Iranian teachers' society, Iran's First Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri said on Monday, "We are all indebted to the teachers."

Jahangiri said that society follows the development process by educating teachers, noting that either developments or recessions of a country are influenced by the education system, because the main factor of development, which is manpower, is the fruit of the education system.

Europeans, UNSC Not to Accompany U.S. in Breaching Int'l Rules

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHEAN - United Nations Security Council's members won't breach the international rules and accords with accompanying the US regime, the Government spokesman Ali Rabieci noted.

Rabieci, regarding the possibility of the Europeans' accompany with the U.S. new game to extend the arms embargo against Iran on October 18th, 2020, and the future of JCPOA with regard to Iran's government response, stated, "The JCPOA's remained signatories will pursue the case and it is our perception that the United Nations Security Council's members will not accompany the U.S. in its illegal manner."

He said this is what Iran's first take on based on the bilateral talks and public opinion and because they are fully aware of the consequences.

He added Europeans and the United Nations Security Council's members won't breach and break the international rules' principals and accords "agreements" with accompanying the U.S. regime.

Regarding the SNSC possible measure against the JCPOA, Rabieci stated it will be unprecedented for the UN body to take action against an agreement that itself endorsed. By such an action, the Security Council will devalue the body.

Iran has different options on the table how to react and respond but it is early to say what reaction it will take, he pointed out. The government spokesman noted that Iran is evaluating various scenarios meticulously to react.

This governmental official said, "I do repeat the Islamic Republic of Iran's defense industry is independent and self-sufficient and will react to others' miscalculated manner."

Spokesman referred to the latest measures of the Iranian government to guarantee the health of the Iranian scientist Sirous Asgari, who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, saying that Iran's Interests Section is pursuing the case in the U.S.



In response to question about the situation of the Sharif University of Technology Professor Sirous Asgari, who was arrested in the United States, Rabieci said at his weekly press conference on Monday that the U.S. manner in this regard is disgraceful.

He said if the Iranian scientist receives negative COVID-19 test results, he will be discharged from the U.S. jail.

The revealed reports indicate how the U.S. cares and treats its people, he said, adding that it is shameful and the U.S. is better to stop this behavior.

Rabieci said that 83 percent of Iranians have observed and followed health protocols, adding that however, 63 percent of those living in the capital have complied with the health protocol.

He stressed that health protocols should be observed over 90% to curb the coronavirus outbreak.

The spokesman referred to dividing the country into three zones of White, Yellow, and Red, adding, "The government is constantly changing the categories of cities, and only high-risk jobs are closed in white zones."

Rabieci said that all ministers have been told to put the above 90% ready projects into operation during the current year.

He referred to the export of N95 and three-layer facial masks, saying: "The Ministry of Health is supposed to fill its reserves for a few months, so the rest will be allowed to export."

Pointing to the difficult situation of wage earners in the country, Iranian Government Spokesman added: "But the working community is committed to the production cycle."

Iran, Pakistan Hold Virtual Meeting for Joint Cooperation Against COVID-19

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - A video conference of health ministers of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan was held on Monday with the aim to strengthen joint cooperation and share experiences in a bid to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic.

A statement issued by Pakistan's Health Ministry spokesperson said that Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Health Dr. Zafar Mirza and Iranian Minister of Health, Treatment and Medical Education Saeed Namaki during a virtual meeting discussed the prevailing situation due to the coronavirus outbreak and bilateral relations.

The statement said: "The Ministers of Health of Iran and Pakistan in the video conference shared the steps and measures taken by each other's governments to manage the outbreak of coronavirus."

It said the purpose of today's meeting was to share experiences between the two neighboring countries to overcome the coronavirus.

During the meeting, Dr. Mirza praised the effective measures taken by the Iranian government against the Coronavirus.

He said that Pakistan has established the National



Command and Operations Center to overcome the challenge of COVID-19, adding that the center monitors the situation on a daily basis.

He informed the Iranian minister that the Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan monitors the situation himself. He told Minister Saeed

Namaki that the first coronavirus case was reported in Pakistan on February 26.

During the meeting, Iran's Health Minister Saeed Namaki highlighted the close and fraternal relations between the two countries.

He said that Iran as a national policy promoted social distancing and is ready to share its experience with friendly and neighboring Pakistan.

Dr. Mirza added that Pakistan has conducted more than 213,000 tests so far, and in the past 24 hours, nearly 10,000 corona tests have been performed in different parts of the country, trying to bring the screening level to 20,000 a day.

According to the National Command and Operation Center, the number of COVID-19 patients in Pakistan has soared to 20,186 with 5,590 recoveries and 462 deaths.

Prominent Iranian Literary Translator Najaf Daryabandari Dies

TEHRAN (IFP) - Acclaimed Iranian author and translator Najaf Daryabandari, who had translated many of the world's outstanding literary works into Persian, has died at the age of 91.

Daryabandari began his translation career at the age of 18 with short works by William Faulkner.

Translation of some of Ernest Hemingway's masterpieces, such as "Farewell to Arms" and "The Old Man and the Sea" are among his masterworks.

Other works by Najaf Daryabandari include the translation of "The Prophet and the Madman" by Gibran Khalil Gibran, "Ragtime" and "Billy Bathgate" by Edgar Lawrence Doctorow, "A Rose for Emily" and "As I Lay Dying" by William Faulkner and "A History of Western Philosophy" by Bertrand Russell.

Daryabandari received the Thornton Wilder Prize from Columbia University for translating American literary works.

In 2017, Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization (ICHTO) named Daryabandari as a "Living Human Treasure".

Dresden Mayor Congratulates Shiraz Day

SHIRAZ (IRNA) - Dresden Mayor Dirk Hilbert in a message to his counterpart in the Iranian city of Shiraz Heidar Eskandarpour and its people congratulated National Day of Shiraz.

Despite the fact that I know the "meaning of coronavirus outbreak for us, I hope you can celebrate this important day" in this difficult time and with no tourist, Hilbert wrote in his message.

"I hope that the citizens" and the civil management of Shiraz will have more power and motivation, he added.

He wished for overcoming the crisis soon and returning to normal life.

Shiraz and Dresden signed MoU three years ago.

Since then both sides have established technical cooperation in civil management, transportation, and civil services.

Every year on May 5 (15 Ordibehesht), people of Shiraz celebrate its national day.

The reason behind such a celebration is the beauty of Shiraz at this moment.

20 New-Born Babies Test Positive for Coronavirus in Iran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - An advisor to Iran's health minister says 20 babies have been born with the coronavirus in the country so far.

Shahla Khosravi, advisor to Health Minister in Midwifery Affairs, said it is not known yet why the babies are infected with coronavirus.

Khosravi mentioned it must be studied why the coronavirus passes from mother to fetus.

She also added that 500 pregnant women with corona disease have been hospitalized across the country, but fortunately they all have recovered.

"In addition to these 500 women there were about 200 outpatients whose health conditions improved too."

Speaking at a video press conference on Sunday, she also added that at the beginning of the corona epidemic midwives volunteered to care for corona patients, and the hospitals that were designated for childbirth were given more workload.

"The greatest role of midwives in this crisis was the triage of pregnant women while suspicious mothers were separated and referred to other hospitals. Midwives have been dealing with corona patients, so they had problems at the beginning, but these issues were resolved over time," she added.

Elsewhere in her remarks, Khosravi congratulated the country's midwives on the World Midwifery Day, which is annually marked on May 3.

According to Khosravi, midwifery is a very tough job because they have to control the mother's anxiety and stress and take care of her health.

Amid the coronavirus crisis, these people had to manage their own stress and reduce the stress of the mothers at the same time. The midwives had to treat the patient in such a way that the mother could tell her symptoms, she underlined.

3,000 Tons Aquatic Food Exported Through Chabahar Port

CHABAHAH (IRNA) - Makran coasts in Chabahar and Konarak of Sistan-Baluchestan Province have important capacities in fishery industry and have exported over 3,000 tons aquatic food to Malaysia, Hong Kong, UAE, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Taiwan, Pakistan, Russia and Oman over the last Iranian year.

Having access to open waters, various fishery piers, exports facilities, industrial towns and suitable lands for farming shrimp are among the most important development area in Sistan-Baluchestan Province.

Managing Director of Sistan and Baluchestan fisheries Mohammad Shahlibar said 11 fishing ports including Tis, Konarak, Ramin, Zarabad, Pazam, Haft-e-Tir, Beris, Gwadar, Jod are active in the province.

Chabahar as Iran's only ocean port plays important role in developing trade, exports and imports and in fishing as well.

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei's special attention and the efforts made by President Hassan Rouhani's government have accelerated developing Makran Coasts, especially Chabahar Port, in a way that five big ships carrying basic goods, including wheat, barley, soybean, and corn took berth in one week.

The geographical location and the current atmosphere in Iran for developing Chabahar Port have made the Iranian port play a major role in national and international arenas.

Iran Keeping Eye on Enemy's Aerial Movement

TEHRAN (FNA) - Lieutenant Commander of Khatam al-Anbia Air Defense Base Brigadier General Qader Rahimzadeh said that Iran's air defense network incessantly monitors enemy movements in the air and will not allow anyone to disrupt security in the country.

"The presence of trans-regional countries causes insecurity in the region," Brigadier General Qader Rahimzadeh said.

"Iran's neighbors and trans-regional forces should know that all efforts taken by Khatam al-Anbia Air Defense Base are in line with preserving national interests and maintaining regional security and there is no way to maintain security and stability in the region except through cooperation among the regional countries" he added.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran will not initiate any war but if a war is waged with Iran, we will give a crushing response," he stressed.

Rouhani Lauds Iranian Medical Society, Producers



TEHRAN (IFP) - President Hassan Rouhani has commended the country's health society and the local producers of medical supplies for their significant role in the national battle with the novel coronavirus.

In remarks at a session of the cabinet of ministers, President Rouhani praised the Iranian medical staff and the production sector for their great contribution to the fight against COVID-19.

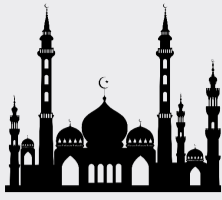
The president also called on people to keep observing the health protocols and instructions to contain the spread of the coronavirus and help reduce the fatality rate from the infectious disease.

President Rouhani further expressed satisfaction with the country's preparedness to export the medical supplies and equipment for coronavirus battle, and issued the necessary directives on the export of those products.

Elsewhere in the cabinet session, Minister of Health and Medical Education Saeed Namaki gave a report on the morbidity and mortality rate from COVID-19 in Iran and about the country's industrial capabilities to produce the medical supplies and equipment for containing the outbreak.

The cabinet of ministers further ratified a number of measures and plans, including the measures passed by the Women and Family National Headquarters on the criterion for family life.

The administration also ratified the statute of the Fund for Promotion of Handicrafts and Hand-Woven Carpets and Revival and Exploitation of Historic and Cultural Sites as part of efforts to support the handicrafts masters and artists. Upon another decision by the cabinet of ministers, the air pollution control equipment that the government of Japan has donated to the Municipality of Tehran would be exempted from value-added tax.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:14
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:31
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:06

13. And when they are cast, bound together into a constricted place therein, they will plead for destruction there and then!

14. "This day plead not for a single destruction: plead for destruction oft-repeated!"

Surah 25. The Criterion, The Standard (13 - 14)

FDI Iran Down At \$854m

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran says foreign direct investment shrank in year ending March by 22.5 percent at \$854 million.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) to Iran declined over the past calendar year to stand at \$854 million, says a new report.

Figures published on Sunday by ISNA news agency showed that FDI was down by nearly 22.5 percent in the year ending March 19 from \$1.102 billion reported over the previous 12-month period.

The report said the number of approved FDI schemes in Iran declined by a single digit to 82, adding that launching tobacco processing companies was the most popular field of activity for foreign investors in the country.

It said a bulk of the investment, around 98 percent, had been attracted to industrial plans and the rest had come to trade and mining projects.

The report said that the province of Zanjan, which borders the capital province of



Teheran, hosted the highest number of projects launched and funded by the foreigners, adding that some 18 percent of the total investment had been attracted to the province.

It added that the United Arab Emirates topped the list of countries with highest FDI to Iran with around 30 percent of the total yearly investment.

An earlier report by ISNA had shown that the Netherlands, China, Turkey and Germany had followed the UAE in list of countries with highest amount of FDI to Iran over the past calendar year.

The report, published last month, showed that almost half of the FDI schemes in Iran had been owned and operated by foreign investors and the rest had been carried out in the form of joint ventures. The decline in FDI to Iran comes as the government has introduced various incentives for facilitating foreign investment into the country.

Those incentives have been offered to offset the impacts of a series of American sanctions that have made it difficult for foreign investors to freely operate in Iran.

BMI's Key Role in ESCO's Value Chain Development

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Esfahan Steel Company

(ECO) in the past five decades has developed its value chain in steel production due to Bank Melli Iran's financing and earmarking credits and its own domestic experts.

According to the public relations office of BMI, ESCO has always had focal role in the national development and because of steel production, it has created important effects on other industries in the country so that birth and construction of different industries in the country have happened due to ESCO's production.

This industrial unit with production of over 35m tons of different steel parts, constructional and industrial products per annum and due to its skillful and experienced staff has played a key role in the national development. The company so far has met all its targets like self-sufficiency, indigenization, pick-up in production, expansion of capacities, earning forex and stopping raw sale.

Bank Melli Iran, in recent years and by its involvement in some important sectors of ESCO, which is a national valuable asset and the pole of steel production in the country, has had active participation, and through financing and opening LCs, it has helped and supported this big industrial unit on way of development.

Due to these supports, this industrial unit is feeding over 3,000 downstream units and creates thousands of job opportunities as well as meeting the domestic needs.

Head of Economic and Financial Department of ESCO Mr. Tahmoures Javanbakht in an interview hailed BMI for its important and effective actions for supporting national production and surge in production.



Exporting Coronavirus Test Kits To Germany, Turkey



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The vice president for science and technology says Iran is to export diagnostic kits that it has indigenously produced for identification of the new coronavirus patients to Germany and Turkey.

Speaking to IRNA on Monday, Sourena Sattari identified the devices as serologic test kits developed by Iranian science-based companies that have been granted export permits by the country's Health Ministry. Serologic testing is used for identifying antibodies in serum.

The country has become needless of importing most medical products related to coronavirus.

The Islamic Republic has reached such level of self-sufficiency in producing the devices that it can now export them to most countries across the world, he said.

The novel virus that can cause a potentially fatal respiratory infection called COVID-19 has killed more than 248,300 people worldwide, including 6,200-plus in Iran. It first emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year.

Sattari said the Islamic Republic is now capable of conducting as many as one million diagnostic tests on people, saying all such examinations are carried out using equipment of complete domestic manufacture.

He had announced earlier that test kits developed by the country could be ready for export in the fall, when the next wave of the virus' outbreak was expected to hit the international community.

NIDC, PECO Sign Agreement Worth \$60m

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) and Pezhvak Energy Engineering Services Company (PECO) signed an agreement worth \$60m to cooperate on the developmental project of Sepehr and Jufair oil fields in west of Karoun in Khouzestan Province.

According to reports, in a ceremony held on Sunday, the CEO of National Iranian Drilling Company Mr. Seyed Abdollah Mousavi, the CEO of Pasargad Energy Development Company (PEDC) Eng. Mehdi Mirmoezi and the CEO of Pezhvak Energy Engineering Services Company Mr Abbas Qobadi signed the deal. PECO is an affiliated company of PEDC.

The agreement has been drawn up based on the Iranian petroleum contract (IPC) and is considered as the first contract for developing hydrocarbon reservoirs which is signed in the year of surge in production between Iranian companies. According to the contract, NIDC will both drill developmental wells mentioned in the contract and offer the defined integrated auxiliary services in the project.

Addressing the ceremony, Mr. Mousavi pointed to the capacities and capabilities of the company as the biggest specialized parent drilling company in Iran's oil industry, adding that NIDC has had focal role in drilling of exploration wells in different fields in the country like Sepehr and Jufair and it has enough reservoir information and experience in such fields.

He noted that the company has chosen two of its

heaviest and modern

drilling machines Fath

93 and Fath 94 for

commencing the operation

and it will use necessary

equipment and experienced

experts in the operational,

technical and engineering

services sectors in order to

have a favorable cooperation

and interaction with Pezhvak

Energy Company based on

the fixed schedule.

He said the company is in

talks with Pasargad Energy

Development Company to

cooperate in drilling and

completing 10 more wells in

those fields, too.

Mousavi added that the company

simultaneously will continue

its cooperation with its other

government and private

partners in the project named

"development of 28 reservoirs"

and it will employ 15 drilling

machines and considerable

part of its potentials in offering

technical and engineering

services.

Later, addressing the ceremony,

the CEO of PEDC Mr. Mirmoezi

hailed NIDC as the biggest

drilling company in the

country, adding that NIDC

has enough capacities for

involving in field-based

projects both in the country

or abroad, expressing that

it is expected over 100 wells

to be drilled in the

developmental project in

Sepehr and Jufair fields.

He reiterated cooperation

between NIDC with private

companies will pave the

ground for progress and

development.

Meanwhile the CEO of

PECO Eng. Qobadi, for his

part, highlighted activities

of the company and its

activities regarding the oil

and gas projects.



Gov't to Roll Out Cheap Loans for Businesses in Late May

TEHRAN (PResstV) - The governor of Central Bank says cheap loans for businesses struggling with the new coronavirus pandemic will be available in late May as the country tries to cushion the economy against the impacts of the disease.

Central Bank of Iran Governor Abdolnasser Hemmati said that businesses and firms will receive the cheap loans based on the number of workers and staff they have preserved during the pandemic.

Hemmati said around 500 trillion rials (more than \$3.1 billion) will be granted to businesses that have suffered from the spread of the disease in Iran.

"These loans will be given to enterprises that have preserved their workforce," he said, adding that each firm will receive 120 million rials (around \$750) per person it has avoided to lay off during the pandemic.

Iran has rolled out various schemes to mitigate the economic impacts of COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus which have affected tens of thousands in the country.

Among them was a one-off cash handout worth \$62.5 that was delivered to nearly 20 million households last month.

On top of that, the government has offered up to \$130 in loans and cash to some seven million households who have been directly affected with the lockdown measures that were imposed in early March to contain the pandemic.

Nearly 100,000 have been tested positive for COVID-19 since the disease started in Iran in late February.

Online Persian Language, Iranian Studies Meetings Starts in Kazakhstan

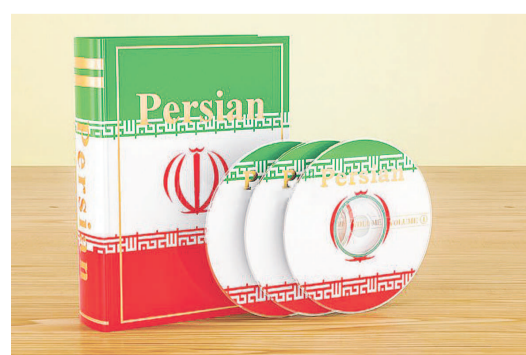
TEHRAN (IRNA) - Online meetings about "Iranian studies and Persian Language" started in Kazakhstan with the cooperation of Allameh Tabatabaee University, Iran's cultural attachés office, Saadi Foundation office, and the department of Persian Language at oriental studies of al-Farabi Kazakh National University.

Orang Izadi of Allameh Tabatabaee University has been invited to al-Farabi Kazakh National University to teach the online courses.

The course will be taken by professors and students of al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages, and Kazakh State Women's Pedagogical University.

The online courses will include history and grammar of Persian, contemporary grammar of Persian, historical grammar of Persian, Iranian Languages, Old Persian, ancient cuneiform, Middle Persian, and stories of Bijan and Manijeh, as well as Rostam and Sohrab from Shahnameh.

According to the statistics of Saadi Foundation, there are 340 Persian Language Departments with 300 professors and 20,000 students in 61 countries. Kazakhstan has four Persian Language departments.



Iran Eyes 30 mcm/d CNG Distribution Capacity

TEHRAN (Shana) -- The deputy head of the National Iranian Petroleum Products Distribution Company announced the readiness of the infrastructure for development of the CNG industry in the Iranian Ministry of Petroleum and reaching a daily distribution capacity of 30 million cubic meters of the item.

Hamid Ghasemi Dehcheshmeh said that the infrastructure for the development of compressed natural gas (CNG) industry had been created in the Iranian Ministry of Petroleum and the company, adding efforts were needed in the conversion sector of the industry which were under way.

He noted that the Ministry of Petroleum had been supporting the industry since its incipience, adding so far 920,000 CNG-fueled vehicles have been produced in Iran and nearly 1.4 million others have been supported by the ministry for being converted into gas-run cars.

The official further said that 1.5 million public cars were to be converted to gas-run vehicles which would fully cover the public transportation sector.

New Zealand Reports No New Covid-19 Cases

AUCKLAND (Dispatches) - New Zealand on Monday recorded no new cases of the coronavirus for the first time since March 16 and less than a week after the Pacific nation ended a strict lockdown that appears to have contained the outbreak.

Director General of Health Ashley Bloomfield told a news conference the result was cause for celebration, noting the death toll remained at 20 with no additional virus-related fatalities.

"It is symbolic of the effort everyone has put in," Bloomfield told reporters.

"This is the first day that we had no new cases and we want to keep it that way."



Serbia to End State of Emergency

BELGRADE (Reuters) - Serbia will end its state of emergency over the coronavirus next week, as the rate of infections has slowed sufficiently, President Aleksandar Vucic said.

The lifting of the state of emergency - involving closure of borders and airports, a daily curfew, and weekend lockdowns since mid-March - should be ratified by the government-controlled parliament on Wednesday, Vucic said.

"Conditions have been met ... we should not have curfew by Thursday," Vucic said in a broadcast by the private Pink TV.

The Balkan nation has confirmed 9,464 cases and 193 people deaths from the COVID-19 disease, but infections have declined to under 5% of the thousands of people tested daily, epidemiologists say.



Global Coronavirus Cases Surpass 3.5m



SYDNEY (Reuters) - Global coronavirus cases surpassed 3.5 million on Monday, with deaths nearing a quarter of a million, although the rate of fatalities and new cases has slowed from peaks reached last month, a Reuters tally shows.

North America and European countries accounted for most of the new cases reported in recent days, but numbers were rising from smaller bases in Latin America, Africa and Russia.

Globally, there were 84,004 new cases over the past 24 hours, according to the Reuters tally that is based on official government data, taking total cases to just over 3.5 million.

That compares with around 3 million to 5 million cases of severe illness caused annually by seasonal influenza, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Still, while experts say actual coronavirus cases are likely higher than current reports, the trajectory falls far short of the Spanish flu, which began in 1918 and infected an estimated 500 million people.

Deaths related to COVID-19, the disease caused by the new virus, stood at 245,992. The first death was reported on Jan. 10 in Wuhan, China, after the virus emerged there in December.

The daily rate of new cases worldwide has been sitting in a 2%-3% range over the past week, versus a peak of around 13% in mid-March, prompting many countries to begin easing lockdown measures that have upended businesses and crippled the global economy.

The loosening of restrictions has proved controversial, as experts debate the best strategy to ensure there is no large "second wave" outbreak.

Health officials have also expressed concern about the rising case numbers in countries where there is a shortage of testing and a lack of medical facilities.

While the number of new cases has come off a peak of 104,495 reported in a single day last week, it is still at around 80,000 to 90,000 cases per day globally.

In the United States, around half the country's state governors partially reopened their economies over the weekend, while others, including New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, declared the move was premature.

In Britain, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who battled COVID-19 last month, said on Sunday the country was over the peak but it was still too early to relax lockdown measures.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has predicated a full lifting of curbs on widespread public adoption of a mobile phone tracing app and increased testing levels.

Experts caution that both cases and deaths from COVID-19 are almost certainly underreported. Cases may cause only mild symptoms and not everyone with symptoms is tested, while most countries only record hospital deaths, meaning deaths in private homes and nursing homes have not yet been included.

Trump Promises Covid-19 Vaccine by End of the Year

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - President Donald Trump relaunched his election campaign Sunday with a live television event inside the iconic Lincoln Memorial, promising an early coronavirus vaccine and urging Americans to put the pandemic behind them to embrace an "incredible" future.

With the two-hour long Fox News "town hall," Trump sought to wrap himself in the mantle of America's arguably greatest president -- and to persuade a nation battered by death and mass unemployment to look ahead.

"We can't stay closed as a country, we're not going to have a country left," he said on the show, where two moderators, as well as ordinary citizens via video, put questions to him in front of the monument.

"We're going to have an incredible following year," he said.

To a woman who called in expressing fear of financial ruin and eviction, Trump said her job would come back. "You get a job where you make more money," he said.

Saying Americans should start going back to beaches this summer and recommending that shuttered schools need to reopen in September, Trump forecast good news on the hunt for a vaccine.



Venezuela Foils an IncurSION by "Mercenaries"

CARACAS (AFP) - Venezuela's leftist government said Sunday it foiled an incursion from the sea, killing eight members of a group of alleged mercenaries bent on "terrorist acts" aimed at overthrowing President Nicolas Maduro.

Interior Minister Nestor Reverol said the group, which he said originated in Colombia, tried to land aboard fast boats before dawn in the northern coastal state of La Guaira but were intercepted by the military and special police units.

"Thanks to the opportune, effective action of our Bolivarian Armed Forces and special police action forces of the National Bolivarian Police, some were shot down and some were detained," said Reverol, speaking on state television.

Colombia denied any involvement.

Reverol said the group attempted to land on a beach at Macuto, about an hour north of the capital Caracas.

A massive air, sea and land search was underway for remnants of the attackers, he said.

Diosdado Cabello, deputy leader of the ruling Socialist Party, said later that clashes had so far resulted in "eight people dead and two detained."

Cabello said the operation was "orchestrated" by the United States and its Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), with support from its staunch South American ally, Colombia.

He said one of those killed was Roberto Colina, a former Venezuelan army officer linked to retired general Cliver Alcalá. Alcalá, a Maduro critic, hit the headlines in March when he surrendered to DEA agents in Colombia and was flown to New York after he was indicted along with a dozen others, including the president, on drug-trafficking charges.

One of the two people detained is a DEA agent, he said.

Greece to Ship Hundreds of Migrants to Mainland

ATHENS (Reuters) - Greece will move hundreds of migrants from a camp on the island of Lesbos to mainland facilities on Sunday as part of efforts to ease overcrowding, police and government officials said.

The European Union has asked Greece to move migrants most at risk of contracting the coronavirus from overcrowded camps on its Mediterranean islands.

Athens had opposed moving them all to the mainland, citing the absence of cases in the camps while the coronavirus was spreading elsewhere in the country.

"Authorities are getting ready to transfer a group of about 395 migrants seen as vulnerable later today to the mainland via ship," a police official, who declined to be named, said.

The group will leave the Moria camp on the eastern Aegean island, which is close to Turkey.

Greece has been the main gateway into the EU for people fleeing conflict in the Middle East and beyond.

More than a million people reached its shores from Turkey in 2015-16.

At least 110,000 people are living in migrant facilities - 40,000 of them in overcrowded camps on five islands.

"The goal is to transfer about 2,400 from island camps to mainland Greece," a Migration Ministry official said.

Greece, which adopted lockdown measures to try to slow the spread of the coronavirus on March 23, has had 2,626 confirmed cases since its first in late February.

The death toll has been 144, significantly lower than other countries such as Italy, Spain, France and Britain.

No coronavirus cases have so far been recorded in Greek island camps. But aid groups have urged Athens to evacuate the camps, warning that the risk of the fast-moving coronavirus spreading amid squalid conditions is high.



Bolsonaro Headlines Anti-Democratic Rally

BRASILIA (Reuters) - Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro attacked Congress and the courts in a speech to hundreds of supporters on Sunday as the number of coronavirus cases blew past 100,000 in Brazil, underlining the former army captain's increasing isolation as he downplays the impacts of the pandemic.

The right-wing Bolsonaro has drawn criticism from across the political spectrum for dismissing the threat of the virus in Brazil, which has registered 101,147 confirmed cases and 7,025 deaths, according to the most recent data from the Health Ministry.

On Sunday, dozens of public figures signed an open letter to the Brazilian government calling on officials to protect the nation's indigenous people, who often live in remote locations with limited access to healthcare.

At the same time, Bolsonaro faces the most serious political crisis of his mandate, after his justice minister, Sergio Moro, quit last week and accused the president of firing the federal police chief in a bid to appoint a personal ally to the post and meddle in sensitive investigations. Brazil's Supreme Court blocked Bolsonaro's pick for a new chief on Wednesday, enraging the president.

On Saturday, Moro, among Brazil's most popular public figures due to his tough stance on corruption, presented testimony regarding possible obstruction of justice by Bolsonaro. Hours before, the president called Moro "Judas" on Twitter, referring to the apostle who betrayed Jesus.

As Bolsonaro's relationship with legislators and the courts has cooled, he has become increasingly dependent on a cadre of advisers in his government who are active or former military.

As in an April rally also attended by Bolsonaro, demonstrators called on Sunday for the closing of the Supreme Court and Congress, and a return to authoritarian measures used during Brazil's 1964-1985 military government.

"We have the armed forces at the people's side: the side of order, democracy, liberty," Bolsonaro said in a speech transmitted live on Facebook.

"Enough interference. We're not allowing any more interference. Our patience is over."

Our patience is over." jor coronavirus hot spot.



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S/pool, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

Niavaran Villa (\$4000)
1000sq.m
4bdrs, S/p
S, J, yard
marble floor
Fully Furn

Niavaran (\$2400)
3bdrs, S/p, S, J, F.F

Elahieh Villa (\$5500)
1000sq.m, 4bdrs, yard

Darrous (\$1800)
160sq.m, 3bdrs
balcony, & F.F

Jordan (\$1300)
120sq.m, 2bdrs, S/p

Pasdaran bldg
4storey, 20bdrs, pkgs

Shahrak-e-gharb Apt
2bdrs, pkg (\$1400)

Vanak Office (\$30 per sq.m)
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Pakistan's Economy Cannot Afford a Prolonged Lockdown

LAHORE (Dispatches) - Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Sunday said the country could not afford a prolonged lockdown due to the economic condition, ARY News reported.

Talking to media in Lahore, he said that daily wagers and labourers have been suffering most from the coronavirus lockdown situation. The foreign minister

said that Prime Minister Imran Khan is monitoring the Covid-19 situation and the government will ease restrictions by following the situation.

"Countries including the United States, Spain, and Italy are now taking steps to ease restrictions. These countries were hit hard by a coronavirus and they are now moving towards to open different sectors," he added.



Economists Predict Turkey Running out of U.S. Dollars by July

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey is burning through its reserves of foreign currency in a futile attempt to prop up the collapsing lira, and may run out of U.S. dollars by July, economists told Arab News.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is also facing a double economic challenge from the coronavirus pandemic — the soaring cost of lockdowns and movement restrictions to curb the spread of the virus, and the fact that COVID-19 will prevent the usual summer tourist boom.

The Turkish lira has lost 14 percent of its value since January, and about 36 percent over the past two years. Last week it plunged past the psychologically significant level of seven to the US dollar.

In response, Turkey's central bank has supplied \$32 billion in foreign reserves for state banks to support the lira in the first four months of this year, the same as the whole of last year.

The central bank's own hard currency reserves fell to \$25.9 billion in mid-April from about \$40 billion at the start of the year.

One foreign exchange trader estimated that the central bank's reserves fell into negative territory last week, by \$2 billion. "No country can withstand such rapid reserve losses for a long time," the trader said.

Analysts at TD Securities have estimated that Turkey may run out foreign currency reserves as early as July if the pressure on its currency keeps intensifying.

Central bank governor Murat Uysal has admitted that the COVID-19 pandemic has produced "extraordinary conditions" in which there may be volatility in the bank's financial buffer. But Wolfango Piccoli, a political risk analyst at Teneo Intelligence in London, said the bank's policy was unsustainable because it had insufficient resources left to manage the downturn.

"Even if it manages to get swap lines from the U.S. Fed, that would only give some time, but will not fix the ongoing financial problems," he told Arab News.

"And these swap lines will be of very limited amount, and are unlikely to provide a significant breathing space for the currency."

Piccoli said Turkey's monetary and fiscal policies lacked credibility in the eyes of markets, and attempts by the central bank to sustain the lira make that lack of credibility even worse.

Turkey is also facing the collapse of its tourism industry. The central bank's latest annual inflation report projects that "the loss in tourism revenues will bring important reflections on growth, employment and the current accounts balance."

Loss of tourism revenues for the remaining three quarters of the year may reach \$25 billion.

Experts also note that about two-thirds of these tourism revenues are collected in the summer months, which will be also a "lost period" because of the continuing effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

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

BEIJING (Reuters) - China's March crude oil imports from top supplier Saudi Arabia fell 1.6% from a year earlier, while purchases from No.2 supplier Russia rose 31%, Reuters' calculations based on customs data showed on Sunday. China's March crude oil imports rose 4.5% year on year to 9.68 million barrels per day (bpd) as refiners stocked up on cheaper cargoes despite falling domestic fuel demand and cuts in refining rates due to the impact the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shipments from Saudi Arabia were 7.21 million tons, or 1.7 million bpd, data from the General Administration of Customs showed. That was down from 1.73 million bpd a year earlier and average daily imports of 1.79 million bpd during the first two months of this year.

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

While state refiners mostly maintained deep production cuts in March to reduce their fuel stocks, independent plants cranked up run rates as the oil price plunge triggered partly by Saudi and Russian pledges to increase supply boosted refining margins. Saudi Arabia and other members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries as well as other producers have since reached a new agreement on output cuts, helping to lift oil prices off historical lows but with many saying that deeper reductions will be needed.

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

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

Also, data showed China's imports from Iran at 255,779 tons, down 88.9% from a year earlier.

Below are details of imports from China's key suppliers. Volumes are in million tons, with the percentage changes calculated by Reuters.

Algeria Refuses to Borrow From IMF to Ease Financial Crisis

ALGIERS (Dispatches) - Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune has declared his country will not approach the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for loans, despite a financial crisis triggered by a collapse in global oil prices and coronavirus lockdowns.

"Accumulating debt harms national sovereignty," Tebboune told reporters in a meeting with Algerian media, broadcast yesterday.

Algeria fell into heavy debt with the IMF during the 1990s, an episode Tebboune referenced in his address.

Algeria is heavily dependent on oil production, which generates over 90 percent of its export receipts.

A collapse in hydrocarbon prices this year — caused by plunging demand due to societal lockdowns designed to combat the spread of coronavirus, and exacerbated by a brief price war between key players Russia and Saudi Arabia — is putting even greater pressure on Algeria's external accounts.

Even before this year's crisis took hold, Algeria's foreign exchange reserves had fallen to \$62 billion at the end of 2019, from \$180 billion in 2014.

But Tebboune stressed he prefers "to borrow from Algerian citizens, rather than the IMF or the World Bank."

He also expressed reluctance to borrowing from foreign banks, saying that doing so prevented Algeria from making its position clear on issues including the fate of the Palestinian cause and Western Sahara.

Tebboune also said that several "friendly" nations had offered loans, which had been declined for the time being. He did not name these countries.

He ruled out relying on extra printing of the local currency by the central bank, noting that this could cause inflation.

Tebboune also revealed plans to develop new natural resources, including uranium, gold and phosphate, with the help of foreign investors, after the end of the health crisis caused by the novel coronavirus.

"The novel coronavirus has frozen several plans and projects. But they will be launched after the health crisis is overcome," he said.

A sharp fall in oil and gas revenue in recent years has deepened the country's financial problems, widening the budget and trade deficits.

Algeria still relies heavily on energy earnings despite previous announcements that it would carry out reforms and develop the non-hydrocarbon sector.

Chevron Doesn't Plan to Exit Venezuela

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Chevron is complying with the U.S. Administration's requirements, but it is not winding down all activities in Venezuela preparing to leave the country, the U.S. supermajor's chief executive officer Michael Wirth told CNBC.

"We intend to comply, obviously, with the requirements of the government, but we're not actually winding down or leaving the country," Wirth said in an interview with CNBC today. "We're winding down certain activities," he added.

Last month, U.S. President Donald Trump ordered Chevron to start "winding down" activities in Venezuela in the latest increase in pressure against the Nicolas Maduro government in Caracas.

The U.S. government has granted Chevron a series of three-month sanction waivers to continue operating in Venezuela since it started to increase pressure on Maduro's regime at the beginning of 2019. Chevron's last extension for its Venezuela operations expired on April 22. On that date, the Trump Administration told Chevron it had to start winding down operations in Venezuela by the beginning of December 2020.

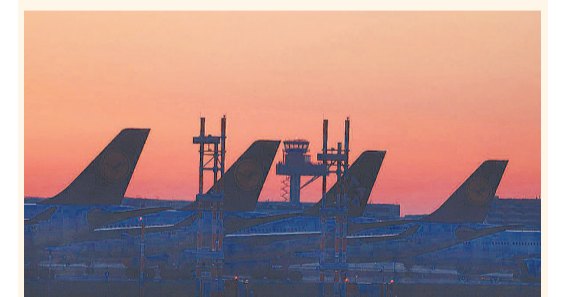
Commenting on the license to operate in Venezuela, Chevron's Wirth told CNBC: "We don't actually operate any assets in Venezuela, we are partner in two operations that are operated by another company."

The 90-day licenses to operate in Venezuela have gradually limited what Chevron can do in Venezuela, the company's top executive said.

The current license until December doesn't require Chevron to leave Venezuela—it just restricts activity to a smaller set of allowed operations, Wirth said.

Chevron operates a joint venture with Venezuela's PDVSA in the country that is home to the world's most abundant oil resources. Petrobras, the joint venture, produced around 200,000 bpd as of October, with Chevron's share of this at 34,000 bpd. The U.S. supermajor holds a 30-percent stake in the venture. In March, the output of Petrobras fell by more than 50 percent to 50,000 bpd from as much as 120,000 bpd just three months later.

Majority of EU States Back Suspension of Air Travel Refunds



PARIS (Reuters) - Germany, Italy and Spain have joined a call by 12 European Union governments for the EU's executive body to suspend rules forcing crisis-hit airlines to offer full cash refunds for cancelled flights, France said in a statement on Saturday.

The dozen EU governments, including Paris, urged the European Commission on Wednesday to suspend rules forcing the cash-drained airlines to offer refunds instead of vouchers for future travel because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I'm glad a very large majority of member states are supporting my request to authorise airlines and maritime groups to temporarily use vouchers when trips are cancelled, so as to relieve their cash reserves while protecting passengers' rights to a refund," French transport minister Jean-Baptiste Djebbari said in a statement.

Airlines across Europe, including Lufthansa (LHAG.DE) and Air France-KLM (AIRF.PA), have sought state rescues as coronavirus lockdowns have forced them to ground their fleets for more than a month, with no end in sight.

The European Commission, which is set to issue guidelines on how the broader transport industry could gradually restart, has said so far that airlines must follow EU rules and provide refunds for cancelled flights.

They should only issue vouchers if passengers accept them.

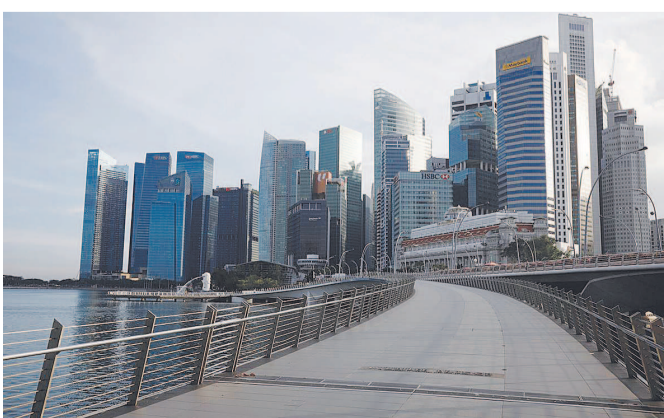
Governments in favour of a temporary waiver have said vouchers should be valid for a set period and include the right to reimbursement if they are not used before the expiry date. Protection should also be provided in the case of airline bankruptcies.

Singapore Looks to Ramp up Factory Activities

SINGAPORE (Reuters) - Singapore will progressively ramp up its manufacturing activities, its minister of trade and industry said on Sunday, with the city-state looking to restart its economy as coronavirus curbs start to ease over the next few weeks.

Sectors that are intertwined with the global supply chain such as biopharmaceutical and petrochemicals as well precision manufacturing will be among priority sectors, Chan Chun Sing told reporters.

Only about 17% of Singapore's labor force is currently working onsite to maintain essential services and support for global production chains and connectivity.



Chan said workplaces will have put in place prescribed measures to minimize the risk of infection before they can reopen. He added that those who are able to work from home will have to continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

"So we will not be able to open some of the social entertainment outlets, but we will focus on our manufacturing capacities and production capabilities first," he said.

The city-state is facing the deepest recession in its 55-year history, compounded by so-called "circuit breaker" restrictions, which are aimed at stemming the spread of the novel coronavirus and are due to last until June 1.

Singapore will start allowing some businesses to reopen from May 12, authorities said on Saturday.

PMO Resumes Constructing Port Projects

TEHRAN (MNA) – Ports and Maritime Organization [PMO] resumed construction of port projects, which were ceased due to the outbreak of coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, in the country.

Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development and CEO of Ports and Maritime Organization [PMO]

Mohammad Rastad made the remarks on Mon. and added, “immediate compensation of port projects halted due to the outbreak of coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, has been put atop agenda of the organization.”

Rastad emphasized the need for serious action in the field of physical progress of these projects.



Oil-Hungry Asian Nations Pounce On Low Prices to Build Stockpiles

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Some oil-hungry Asian nations are taking advantage of the collapse in prices caused by the coronavirus pandemic to build up their crude stockpiles. Strategic reserves are stockpiles of oil and other fuels held by governments in secure storage facilities to cover unexpected disruptions to energy supplies.

Major economies such as the U.S., China and Russia began to build up reserves after oil shocks in the 1970s, according to Ravi Krishnaswamy, regional senior vice president for energy and environment at consultancy Frost & Sullivan.

The events that spurred them to take action were principally the 1973 Yom Kippur War between Israel and the Arab nations, and the 1979 Iranian revolution, which fuelled worries about supplies.

China is believed to have the biggest in the Asia-Pacific. Beijing does not give an official estimate but analysts say it is at around 550 million barrels. In comparison, the United States' strategic reserves currently hold around 630 million.

State-owned China National Petroleum Corporation said recently that the country's reserves were “obviously insufficient, and have not yet reached the international standard ‘90-day safety line’”.

The International Energy Agency requires its members to hold emergency oil stocks equivalent to at least 90 days of net oil imports. China is an associate member, but not a full member. Japan's oil reserves were around 500 million barrels at the end of February, equivalent to national consumption for more than seven months, according to the latest official data, while South Korea had around 96 million barrels in strategic reserves as of December 2019, enough for 89 days.

India, by contrast, has reserves with storage capacity of approximately 40 million barrels -- which would last just 10 days in the country of 1.3 billion people.

Strategic reserves are stored largely in secure underground depots like natural rock caverns. The US Strategic Petroleum Reserve, the world's largest supply of emergency crude, is stored in huge underground salt caverns along the Gulf Coast.

But building underground storage is challenging as it needs to have the right geological formation, and countries also need to build infrastructure to pump oil in and out.

The high cost of building reserves has stopped many countries developing them to sufficient levels. In Asia, India uses caverns to store its reserves but other countries, such as Japan, put theirs in above-ground tanks. Australia, which has long had one of the lowest levels of emergency stockpiles in the developed world, said it will take advantage of the fall in prices to develop a strategic reserve in the United States.

The country's own storage capacity is already full but it has an agreement with the US allowing it to lease space in its Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

In China, the Shanghai International Energy Exchange last month gave approval for state-owned Sinopec Petroleum Reserve to add more storage capacity.

One storage depot in southern Guangdong province can hold up to 600,000 cubic metres (3.8 million barrels), while another in northern Hebei province can hold up to one million cubic metres. India's Ministry of Petroleum tweeted on April 15 it was buying crude to fill its reserves, stored in rock caverns, “to their full capacity”.



Madhu Nainan, editor of industry publication PetroWatch, however, questioned whether the country had enough available storage space to build up capacity quickly.

“In India, storage tanks and pipelines are full and dealers' tanks are full,” he told AFP. Japan and South Korea, with ample stockpiles, have not announced plans to build up their reserves substantially. A Japanese trade ministry official said current levels were sufficient, while Seoul plans to increase stockpiles by less than one percent this year.

It looks unlikely, in the short term at least. Many observers believe economic activity won't bounce back quickly with the gradual lifting of lockdowns but only when a vaccine for the virus is discovered -- which could be some time away.

“Low oil prices won't turbocharge Asian economic recovery,” Jeffrey Halley, OANDA senior market analyst, told AFP. Major oil-importers in Asia -- such as China, Japan and South Korea -- would in usual times benefit from low prices but this is unlikely to be the case immediately given the economic devastation caused by the pandemic. In Japan, for example, “the price crash has hit financial markets hard, which is negatively affecting the Japanese economy”, said Toshihiro Nagahama, an economist at Dai-ichi Life Research Institute.

“We can't apply our usual framework to this unprecedented period.” Some economists, however, expect oil prices to stay low for a long period, meaning major importers could eventually emerge winners.

“Oil prices are expected to remain low to some extent when the post-corona era comes, and given the current situation, it will have a positive effect on (South Korea's) economy in terms of recovery,” said Jung Jun-hwan, a researcher at the Korea Energy Economics Institute. There are also “obvious losers” in Asia, such as oil exporters Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei, said OANDA's Halley.

Indian Officials Capture Rare Snow Leopard



SHIMLA (Dispatches) - A rare snow leopard captured as it savaged livestock in a remote village in the Indian Himalaya will be sent to a zoo instead of being released, officials said Sunday, triggering outrage from activists.

The endangered creature was found on Saturday after it became trapped inside a pen containing sheep and goats in Giu village near the Tibetan border in India's Himachal Pradesh state.

“The big cat was unable to escape from the enclosure after killing a few livestock,” wildlife official Hardev Negi, who led the team that caught the snow leopard, told AFP.

“The shepherd contacted us and we captured the animal in a cage.” The state's chief wildlife official Savita Sharma told AFP the snow leopard was not being released since the incident involved “wild animal-human conflict,” adding it would be transferred to a zoo in the foothills outside the state capital Shimla. Officials estimated that the juvenile animal killed 43 sheep and goats in the pen over four days.

There are only 44 snow leopards living in the high passes and rugged valleys of Himachal Pradesh, according to Sharma. Rajeshwar Negi, the National Convener of Nature Watch India said the decision was condemning the creature to a life without freedom. “Don't they know how stressful it will be for the animal to be transported on a bumpy 350-kilometre long road,” he told AFP.

“Does it mean the snow leopard will spend the rest of its life in a zoo instead of the Himalayan wilds?”

He added that the animal would also suffer in the higher temperatures at the zoo in Shimla, which is significantly warmer than its natural habitat.

As few as 4,000 of the mysterious animals could be left in the high mountains of central Asia -- their sole habitat -- according to the World Wildlife Fund. Negi said snow leopards were being forced to move to lower altitudes and prey on domestic animals as the populations of their natural prey -- the ibex and blue sheep -- have been decimated by hunting.

Global warming is also threatening the survival of the big cat, with warmer temperatures pushing the tree line higher and prompting farmers to move further up the mountains to plant crops and graze livestock, encroaching on the snow leopards' territory.

Roche Wins U.S. Nod for COVID-19 Antibody Test

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Roche has won emergency approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for an antibody test to determine whether people have ever been infected with the coronavirus, the Swiss drugmaker said here on Sunday.

Thomas Schinecker, Roche's head of diagnostics, said the company aims to more than double production of tests from about 50 million a month to significantly more than 100 million a month by the end of the year.

Governments, businesses and individuals are seeking such blood tests to learn who may have had the disease, who may have some immunity and to potentially craft strategies to help end national lockdowns.

Basel-based Roche, which also makes molecular tests to identify active COVID-19 infections, said its antibody test has a specificity rate exceeding 99.8% and sensitivity of 100%, meaning tests would show very few false positives and no false negatives.

A false-positive result could lead to the mistaken conclusion that someone has immunity. Roche said its test relies on intravenous blood draws, with

higher accuracy than finger-prick tests.

“If you take blood from a finger prick, you will never be able to achieve the same level of specificity that you will achieve ... when you take blood from the vein,” Schinecker said. “You have to have very, very high specificity. Even 0.1% or 0.2% makes a difference.”

Similar antibody tests have also been developed by companies including U.S.-based Abbott Laboratories, Becton Dickinson and Italy's DiaSorin.

Abbott has said the specificity and sensitivity of its test are 99.5% and 100% respectively. Diasorin has said its Liason XL test has 97.4% sensitivity and 98.5% specificity.

As demand escalates for antibody tests, an array of distributors with no background or established testing competency have also joined the experienced companies in an all-but-unregulated marketplace in the United States, according to a Reuters investigation.

Roche did not disclose a price for its test but said that it would be identical worldwide.

PMU Repels...

FROM PAGE 1

Four terrorists were killed after PMU artillery units targeted Daesh elements east of the city of Tikrit in Salahuddin.

Another four terrorists were captured in the northern Kirkuk province.

Separate Iraqi security operations also led to the arrests of two prominent Daesh figures in the northern Nineveh province, known as “Abu Talha al-Ansari” and “Humam al-A'li”.

The spike in terror and anti-terror operations comes after at least 10 PMU fighters were killed in a coordinated attack in the cities of Mekeeshfa and Balad in the Salahuddin Province in a Daesh raid on Saturday.

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. The engagements mark the latest of an increasing string of Daesh sleeper cell attacks in the past few weeks, usually concentrated between the provinces of Salahuddin, Kirkuk and Diyala.

The uptick in Daesh operations has happened nearly simultaneously with Washington's latest string of airstrikes openly targeting PMU forces, which are formally part of the Iraqi security forces. Washington most notably assassinated the PMU's deputy commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, alongside Iran's top anti-terror Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, in the capital city Baghdad in January. Iraqi resistance groups have responded by vowing to take up arms against U.S. military presence if Washington fails to comply with a parliamentary order calling for the expulsion of U.S. troops following the assassination.

Afghanistan Urges...

FROM PAGE 1

Yesterday, Afghan media alleged that about 57 Afghan refugees attempting to enter Iran illegally had been forced to go through Harirod River by Iranian border guards, killing 23 people.

Iran's Foreign Ministry on Sunday rejected loss of life on Iranian border with Afghanistan.

Iran and Afghanistan share more than 800 kilometers of borders, which is used by drug traffickers to enter Iran to transport drugs, and Afghan migrants sometimes enter it illegally.

U.S. Dangerous...

FROM PAGE 1

“The United States has a long-standing record of non-compliance with its international obligations. It is a regime that has no commitment to the rule of law in international relations and is the most important violator of international law.”

In response to a question, the foreign ministry spokesman noted the JCPOA has had various achievements including the lifting of arms embargo.

“By illegally withdrawing from the nuclear deal, the United States is after undermining all of the accord's achievements, and they imagine they can do so,” reiterated Mousavi.

He said the Islamic Republic is in touch with the other parties to the deal and is certain that Washington will not succeed in extending Iran's arms embargo.

He added that Iranian scientist imprisoned in the U.S. Immigration Service's detention center will be released and expatriated soon.

Mousavi also said Dr Sirus Asgari, who has reportedly contracted COVID-19 will return to his home country as soon as possible.

He said the ministry has taken steps to follow up on his situation, while the Interests Section of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Washington is closely monitoring his situation through U.S. judicial officials.

“He is going to go through a corona test today and tomorrow, and God willing, if his test is negative, all the necessary measures will be taken to return him to the country,” added Mousavi.

He stated that the will of the neighbors is to keep borders open for more trade exchanges.

Some borders are closed due to cautiousness about dealing with the coronavirus pandemic; however, Iran's three joint borders with the Iraqi Kurdistan region are open and trade exchanges are underway there, Mousavi said.

Trade exchanges are going on while the health protocols are met, the official added.

He further said Iran follows measures on which it has reached an agreement with neighboring countries to continue economic exchanges along borders.

Based on mutual agreements, borders are open at the times set before, Mousavi underlined.

Iran Manages COVID-19...

FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile yesterday, Head of Iran's Health Ministry's Public Relations Office Kianoush Jahanpour said that 79,397 people out of a total of 98,647 infected with the coronavirus (COVID-19) have recovered whereas 6,277 have lost their lives.

Jahanpour went on to say that 1,223 new infected cases have been detected and 74 others have lost their lives since yesterday (Sunday).

Iran has taken numerous steps to stop the spread of the disease, ranging from closing schools and universities to canceling cultural and religious gatherings. It is also constantly disinfecting and sanitizing public places.

Iran Has Most...

FROM PAGE 1

We have classified the ways to use these weapons; that is, the weapons and tactics we may use against a terrorist group are different from the weapons we may use in an equal or unequal battle.”

He added that today, the power of Iran's missile systems in the Aviation Force is tremendous.

“We have a variety of guided missiles, and from very long distances we can fire our missiles to hit the enemy. On the other hand, we are combining weapons with night vision systems so that we can strengthen our combat capability at night,” he continued.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Qorbani said the Army Aviation has put the issue of self-protection on the agenda and is working on it to protect helicopters and pilots.

“We had successful tests. This is one of the necessities of our work, and thank God, we are focusing on self-protection to equip our helicopters with self-protection system.”

He underscored that at the time of natural disasters like floods, earthquakes, etc., it is the Army Aviation that creates air communication when the roads are closed.

“During the Kermanshah earthquake, we carried out 500 sorties till midday, which was unprecedented in the world. In the floods of Golestan and Lorestan, where all roads were closed, it was the Army Aviation that helped the people. That's why we say the Army Aviation is really useful. Today, we are covering 18 provinces of the country in the form of air emergencies. In various elections, it is the Army Aviation that transfers ballot boxes to hard-to-reach areas,” concluded General Qorbani.

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Cowboys, QB Dalton Agree to Terms on One-Year NFL Deal

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Andy Dalton, released by the Cincinnati Bengals after nine years as a starting quarterback, has agreed to terms on a one-year NFL contract with the Dallas Cowboys.

The Cowboys, who announced the deal in a Saturday night website posting, have a starter in Dak Prescott, who will make \$31.4 million in the 2020 season after being named the team's "franchise" player in March.

Germany's Interior Minister Backs Bundesliga Restart

BERLIN (Reuters) - German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer on Sunday backed a possible restart for the Bundesliga season this month without spectators as the government prepares for a key meeting next week.

Although Bundesliga clubs have returned to training in small groups, the league has been suspended since mid-March due to the coronavirus pandemic and the government is to decide next week on a potential resumption of sports activities.

Fritz, Rae Win Glitchy Mario Tennis Charity Tournament

TOKYO (Reuters) - American tennis player Taylor Fritz and his doubles partner, Tik Tok personality Addison Rae, won the virtual Stay At Home Slam on Sunday as real-life tennis remains on hold because of the coronavirus crisis.

The likes of the Williams sisters, Japanese stars Naomi Osaka and Kei Nishikori and the recently retired Maria Sharapova competed as their favourite characters from the world of Nintendo to raise money for charity.

The professional tennis tours are closed down until mid-July at the earliest because of the coronavirus pandemic, meaning fans and players alike were eager to turn their attention to the tournament played within the Mario Tennis Aces game.

The final, which pitched Fritz and Rae against Nishikori and his partner, DJ Steve Aoki, was watched live by over 35,000 people on Facebook Gaming but did run into technical difficulties as the match froze midway through the set.

After a delay, which was filled by awkward banter between co-commentators seven-time Grand Slam winner John McEnroe and YouTube personality iJustine, the match restarted.

Mirroring his real-life playing style, Fritz's dominant serve was the deciding factor as he and Rae ran out 6-4 winners to claim the championship and a \$1 million donation to the No Kids Hungry charity.

All the players received a \$25,000 donation to their charity of choice.

"I was more nervous there than any of my real tennis matches," Fritz said.

The Williams sisters couldn't translate their real-life prowess into the virtual world as both lost their opening round matches.

Sharapova and partner, model Karlie Kloss, also went out in the first round whilst Osaka's match against Nishikori and Aoki had to be forfeited after her partner Hailey Bieber struggled to maintain a strong internet connection.

Despite the technical issues - brushed off by McEnroe as being "like a rain delay" - tennis fans will have to be content with virtual tournaments for now.

Last week, Rafael Nadal and Andy Murray headlined the Virtual Madrid Open, which was also plagued by some technical snafus.

"It has been a crazy time but we all need to have some fun and it is for a great cause," said McEnroe.

The coronavirus pandemic, which has infected over 3.4 million globally, killing



at least 240,000 people, has also played havoc with the world's sporting calendar.

The Wimbledon championships were cancelled for the first time since World War Two whilst the French Open, originally scheduled to begin in May, has been pushed back until September.

All ATP and WTA tour tournaments have been cancelled until at least mid-July.

Meanwhile Australian tennis maverick Nick Kyrgios invited Rafael Nadal to take part in a cosy video chat on Sunday despite their stormy on-court relationship.

As the coronavirus has sent the tennis season into hibernation until July 13 at the earliest, a host of players have recently taken to social media for face-to-face exchanges.

So, on Sunday, after the BBC had asked for suggestions as to the most sought-after facetimes, Kyrgios was quick to respond.

"Rafa lets do Instagram live together. I am down with it. Rafael Nadal let's do it," wrote the Australian on Instagram.

Kyrgios and Nadal have endured a bitter relationship on court.

Netherlands Coach Koeman Hospitalized With Heart Problem

THE HAGUE (AFP) - Dutch national coach Ronald Koeman required hospital treatment after suffering a heart problem, his wife told De Telegraaf newspaper on Sunday.

The 57-year-old underwent a "cardiac catheterisation" procedure at a hospital in Amsterdam after complaining of feeling unwell at his home.

"The speed with which he was taken to the hospital and the quick intervention of the doctors allowed his condition to be stabilised," said Bartina Koeman.

Koeman, who has coached the Dutch side since 2018, is expected to be discharged from hospital today.

"It was a shock," tweeted the Dutch football federation.

"Happily, things are already a little better. Strength and a good recovery, coach."

Koeman, a standout defender at Ajax, PSV, Feyenoord and Barcelona as well as the Dutch team in his playing career, had already qualified the Netherlands for Euro 2020.

However, the tournament has been pushed back to 2021 due to the coronavirus.

Serie A Teams Can Start Individual Training

MILAN (Reuters) - Serie A teams will be able to start individual training sessions as of Monday amid the COVID-19 crisis, according to a letter sent by the Italian interior ministry to local authorities.

Prime minister Giuseppe Conte said last Sunday that individual training could start on May 4 and team training on May 18, only for sports minister Vincenzo Spadafora to say that athletes in individual sports could start training from May 4 and those in team sports must wait until May 18.

Spadafora's statement drew criticism and Serie A club Sassuolo on Saturday said they would allow their players to use their facilities from Monday, Bologna, also based in the Emilia Romagna region where special permission was given for athletes in team sports to take part in training sessions on an individual basis from May 4, said players could resume training on Tuesday.

The region of Campania, which includes Naples, has also said that players can begin training. Napoli have yet to comment. "Athletes and non athletes, of non individual disciplines, just like any citizen, are allowed to practise individual sporting activities, in private and public areas, in respect of the interpersonal safety distance of at least two metres and in respect of the ban to gather in any form," the interior ministry said in a letter to local authorities.

Serie A has been suspended since March 9 and the league and the Italian football federation (FIGC) both want to complete the season, although the Italian government says it has not yet decided whether it will give its permission to do so.

Pogba Using Lockdown To Prepare for Return

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United midfielder Paul Pogba is using the coronavirus lockdown to step up his return to fitness after an injury-plagued season.

Pogba had made just eight appearances for United this season before the health crisis forced the suspension of the Premier League in March. The French World Cup winner hasn't played a single match in 2020 due to his persistent ankle problems.

Liverpool Should Be Awarded Premier League Title

LONDON (Reuters) - Former Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier believes his old club should be awarded the Premier League title even if the season is not completed because of the COVID-19 crisis.

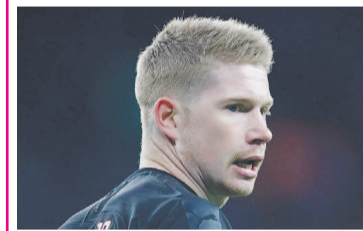
Liverpool are 25 points clear at the top with nine games left to play in the Premier League, which has been on hold since March 9 as the novel coronavirus spread across the globe.

According to Houllier, who led Liverpool to FA Cup and UEFA Cup glory in 2001 during his six-year spell at Anfield, Jurgen Klopp's team would be deserved champions.

Asked if they should be awarded their first top-flight title since 1990, the former France coach told TalkSport: "Yeah. That's what they did in France. They gave it to Paris St Germain. They had a 12-point lead and I think Liverpool needed just two games to win the title.

"If there was a difference of maybe two or three points then you could argue it takes some chances away from teams behind but 25 points there is no way they wouldn't be champions. They deserve it." Houllier, now an adviser to Olympique Lyonnais president Jean-Michel Aulas, added that the Premier League should follow the government's lead on whether to resume.

"I think they should follow the government's rules. If the government decides we stop then we have to abide by that," he explained.



De Bruyne Eyes Swift Return to Action

LONDON (Reuters) - Kevin De Bruyne believes Manchester City could resume training in a fortnight, that the Premier League will finish the season despite the coronavirus crisis and that his club's European ban will be overturned.

The midfielder is also pleased Belgium coach Roberto Martinez has extended his contract and says he is not interested in a move.

The 28-year-old, speaking to Belgian newspaper Het Laatste Nieuws, predicted the Premier League season will be concluded unlike the campaigns in France, the Netherlands and his native Belgium.

"My feeling is that we may be able to train again within two weeks," he said.

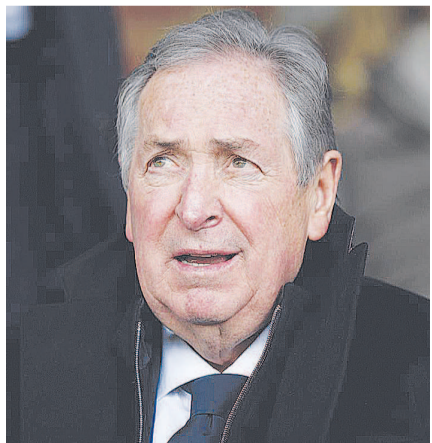
"The government wants to restart football as soon as possible to give the people something, but it will be played without spectators I think. The financial aspect is far too important for the Premier League and if the season is not complete, it will cause serious problems."

De Bruyne's Manchester City team mate Sergio Aguero said last week he was scared about returning.

"Gosh, I don't think they are really afraid for themselves, but for their families," De Bruyne said. "That is the problem for many people. Everyone will be tested once we start playing again."

De Bruyne had been in excellent form before the suspension.

"When the league resumes, I don't really see it as an extension of the season. It feels more like the start of a new season," the Belgian international said. "I have never stood still for so long in my career but I'm not making a big deal out of it. Greater powers are at work and whatever is said and decided, I will agree with."



Froome Unsure If Tour de France Organizers Can Prevent Mass Gatherings

PARIS (Reuters) - Britain's four-time Tour de France champion Chris Froome is unsure if the organisers can fully prevent large crowds from gathering at the race that was rescheduled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Tour, scheduled to start on June 27, was pushed back to Aug. 29 due to the outbreak. Mass gatherings have been banned in France until September, with the country recording more than 168,000 coronavirus cases and over 24,000 deaths.

"Would the organizers be able to keep people from coming and gathering in large crowds? In theory we can put on the race and it can be broadcast on television," Froome said in an Instagram chat with former England cricketer Kevin Pietersen.

"You're not going to get the same scenes as you would get going through these tunnels of just people everywhere and all the rest of it.

"Maybe that's the version of the race we need to see this year. I don't know."

Froome, who won the Tour in 2013, 2015, 2016 and 2017 and is one victory away from equalling the record held by Jacques Anquetil, Eddy Merckx, Bernard Hinault and Miguel Indurain, is using the delay to make up the training time he lost after a crash last year.

