

The Bazargan Customs on Iran's border with Turkey (called Gurbulak in Turkey) Has Started to Operate, and as of Yesterday 60 Iranian trucks Can Enter Turkey Every Day

Deputy Minister of Justice for Human Rights and International Affairs Mahmoud Abbasi Said Yesterday That 15 Indonesian and One Chinese Prisoners Were Extradited to Their Respective Countries

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Coronavirus May Have 2nd, 3rd Peaks in Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The head of Iran's Health Ministry's Public Relations Office said on Tuesday that coronavirus epidemic has no clear future and may come back for the second and third peaks.

Kianoush Jahanpour said that neither governments nor the research centers have provided clear image of the future of the deadly virus. Hoping that social distancing can prevent re-surge of the pandemic, Jahanpour said that COVID-19 may come back in summer.

He said that now there is limited information about the virus and everything is based on scientific guesses. More analyses should be done in the future.

He added most epidemiologists believe that there will be another outbreak of COVID-19 in mid-fall when it turns cold.

Jahanpour also said that some 63 more Iranians died of coronavirus over the past 24 hours and that 80,475 people out of a total of 99,970 infected with the coronavirus have survived and recovered while unfortunately total number of deaths reached 6,340.

He said that 1,323 new infected cases have been detected since yesterday.

Over the last 24 hours, 63 people died from the deadly virus, he added.

The Iranian official noted that 2,685 cases are in critical condition.

He added that 519,543 tests have so far been carried out in Iran. 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.

Over 114,000 Prisoners Furloughed During Corona Pandemic

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Judiciary Spokesman Gholam Hossein Esmaili noted yesterday that the pious help made by different walks of life has no parallel in the world and even in Islamic countries.

In his weekly video conference on Tuesday, the official stated: "We have witnessed the creation of unique scenes in pious help, especially by the revolutionary youth, students, scholars, and the voluntary forces, who showed helping the needy. This is unparalleled in the world and even in Islamic countries."

The spokesman for the judiciary, referring to a circular recently issued by the head of the judiciary to grant furlough to prisoners, said: "In the days of Corona, 114,193 went on furlough."

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U.S. Has Always Been Source of Tensions in Region



TEHRAN (IFP) - President Hassan Rouhani has called for easing of tensions in the world as all countries are struggling with the novel coronavirus pandemic.

In a phone conversation with Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Tuesday, Rouhani said in the current situation that the coronavirus has affected the whole world, tensions should be reduced and the relations between the countries should be based on humanitarian ties.

Expressing regret over Washington's creation of tension in the region, Rouhani said, "It is unfortunate that in recent weeks we have witnessed tensions created by the U.S. in Iraq and the Persian Gulf region."

"The United States has always been the source of tensions in the region," he noted.

Reacting to the claim by the United States that it is ready to help Iran fight against the coronavirus, the president said if they are honest and want to take action, the only way is to end imposing illegal sanctions.

Rouhani slammed the U.S. sanctions against Iran, saying unfortunately, under the harsh conditions of the fight against COVID-19, as well as its severe economic consequences, the U.S. illegal sanctions against the Iranian people have intensified.

The Iranian president also noted that there is no other way except inter-state cooperation to save the world from this virus, underlining that the Islamic Republic is facing many problems, even in supplying medical equipment and food as the cruel and inhumane U.S. sanctions are increasing.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Iranian president thanked the Japanese government for its friendly assistance to Iran in the fight against the coronavirus.

For his part, the Japanese Prime Minister stressed the need for cooperation of all countries to overcome the coronavirus and the global economic crisis caused by it.

"It is worrying that in this condition we are witnessing tensions in the Middle East. We believe that peace and stability must be established in the region," continued Abe.

He further mentioned that Iran is an important and influential country that plays a significant role in establishing peace in the region, adding that Tokyo will continue its cooperation with Tehran in this regard.

The Japanese prime minister described as "inappropriate" the intensification of US sanctions against the Islamic Republic amid the outbreak of the coronavirus, underscoring that in the current situation, humanitarian measures should be on the agenda of all countries.

-Rouhani and Abe also highlighted the need for cooperation between all countries to deal with the coronavirus, stressing that Tehran and Tokyo must boost ties and exchange experiences.

They further emphasized the development of bilateral relations and expressed hope that with the implementation of the previous agreements, Iran and Japan would witness the expansion of economic and trade ties.

Palestine to Nullify All Israel, U.S. Deals If Annexation Plot Goes Ahead

GAZA (PressTV) - President Mahmoud Abbas says Palestine will nullify all agreements with the United States and Israel if Tel Aviv annexes any part of the occupied West Bank, urging the international community to block attempts by the regime to exploit the coronavirus outbreak and steal more Palestinian land.

"We have informed all international parties that should Israel take this step, we will be absolved of all obligations, agreements and understandings with Israel and the US administration," he said on Monday in an address to a virtual meeting of the leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Contact Group.

The remarks came shortly after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud Party submitted a bill to the parliament (Knesset) that calls for the imposition of Tel Aviv's "sovereignty" over the Palestinian regions of the Jordan Valley, the northern Dead Sea area and the occupied West Bank.

Abbas urged the world community, including NAM and Security Council member states, to "uphold their responsibilities in ensuring the applicability of international law, and to prevent the Israeli government from taking advantage of the pandemic to move ahead with its plans to annex parts of the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, in violation of the Palestinian people's rights and in grave breach of international law, thus destroying any remaining chance for realizing the two-state solution and establishing a just and lasting peace and security."

He also stressed that the coronavirus outbreak in Palestine has been compounded by Israel's "oppressive measures and colonial policies" as well as the detention of thousands of Palestinian prisoners.

"We call upon you to press the Israeli government to release our Palestinian prisoners, and we hold Israel responsible for their safety and lives," he noted.

The Israeli regime has been sharply emboldened by US President Donald Trump's pro-Israel policies, the latest of which is a contentious plot unveiled in January with the aim of legitimizing Israel's occupation and re-drawing the Middle East map.

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ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



Iraq and End of a Five-Month Anticipation

These days and in the media and virtual space, some whispers are heard from Iraqi parties in support of Prime Minister-designate Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, and the vote of confidence will put an end to months of speculations, anticipations, and also weakness in political decision in the country.

After months of hard times in Iraq, ultimately Shiite groups designated Al-Kadhimi for the premiership seat. One of the features of the prime-minister designate and his cabinet is that there is no ambiguity and doubt about their honesty and also no foreign player has had a hand in his designation, and so far no doubt has been cast about his designation.

All Iraqi currents and parties like Shiites, Kurds and Sunnis have supported this designation and consider it the result of a national understanding which enjoys the support of all groups and ethnics in the country.

Although Shiite parties have enjoyed the majority in the Parliament, it is the first time that they overwhelmingly support any prime minister in the country. Of course, this will be politically important achievement if Al-Kadhimi and his cabinet win votes of confidence because it will provide a good opportunity for strengthening unity and creating convergence among all political parties from Shiites, Kurds to Sunnis.

Consensus among three important political and religious currents in Iraq on a designate from the majority group in the parliament can be a prelude to overcoming all challenges that Iraq has faced in recent years.

What is materialized today in Iraq is the result of instructive reaction which was seen during the parliament and national currents' stance against dictation of Americans' will. Americans wanted to impose Adnan Al-Zurfi as prime minister through illegal action of Iraqi President Barham Salih and through resorting to national reasons and winning the public opinion in Iraq but it faced with strong opposition from Shiite groups and their plot failed.

But Iraq's own mechanism and coalition of the majority could reach an agreement on Al-Kadhimi and asked him to form the cabinet.

Al-Kadhimi's background and records especially as the head of National Intelligence Service are good enough to be designated for the job. Some speculations over Al-Kadhimi's having a hand in assassination of Martyr Qassem Soleimani have not been confirmed yet and the probes have not confirmed the allegations.

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Russia Raps U.S. For Obstructing IMF's Loan to Iran

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - A senior Russian diplomat has slammed the US for obstructing a loan by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to Iran and Syria to help them in their fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

"The U.S. move, which is politically motivated to block the transfer of loans, including emergency financing in the face of a humanitarian crisis, to countries such as Iran and Syria, is unacceptable," Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Pankin told Rossiya Segodnya.

Pankin stressed that the IMF must take a transparent and non-discriminatory approach to granting loans to the needy and vulnerable amid the pandemic.

Kristalina Georgieva, the head of the International Monetary Fund, earlier announced that the IMF has allocated a \$50 billion emergency loan package for countries most affected by the coronavirus.

The Islamic Republic that has lost more than 6,000 people to the infection so far has put out a request for a \$5 billion loan, but Washington has -- in line with its changeless anti-Tehran policy and maximum pressure campaign -- opposed dispensation of the sum by the world body.

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Advertisement Department
021-44253335-39

www.irannewsdaily.com
info@irannewsdaily.com

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Extraordinary Flight Brings Home Iranians From Lebanon

TEHRAN (ILNA)- An extraordinary flight is to launch between Iran and Lebanon in a bid to bring home their nationals who have been stuck after the coronavirus lockdown,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said.

The spokesman said that so, a Mahan flight will leave for Beirut in the next few hours to return students, businessmen, and other compatriots living in Lebanon.

“At the request of the Lebanese government, a number of Lebanese citizens who were unable to return to their country due to the cancellation of flights will travel to Lebanon on the same flight,” he added. Spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry stated that the Islamic Republic of Iran also will deliver the consignment of medical aid to Lebanon to help the country with fighting against the coronavirus outbreak.

Iran Discusses Resumption of Trade Ties With Turkey, Azerbaijan

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Chief of Staff of the Iranian president has held negotiations with Turkey and Azerbaijan Republic to remove obstacles in the way of resuming trade ties in the face of the spread of the coronavirus.

Mahmoud Vaezi on Monday called on Turkey to resolve the problems of trucks at the border.

In a telephone conversation with Turkey’s Trade Minister Ruhsar Pekcan, Vaezi spoke about the problems of Turkish trucks left behind Turkish border. The two sides also exchanged views on the movement of Iranian trucks at the Turkish-Bulgarian border to load perishable goods in the port of Mersin.

In this conversation, it was decided to resolve the problems of the trucks carrying perishable materials on Tuesday.

Vaezi and Pekcan also agreed that the process of transportation and transit between the two countries continues within the framework of the health and hygiene protocols.



In a separate telephone call, Vaezi held negotiations with Deputy Prime Minister of Azerbaijan Shahin Mostafayev about the ways to speed up resolution of problems caused by the COVID-19, especially the ones affecting the transit route of goods as well as rail, sea and land transport between the two countries.

The two sides also decided to resolve these problems within the next two days, based on the health protocols that have been developed.

They further stressed the process of joint trade and business cooperation be facilitated.

In this conversation, the Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan also announced the president of the country has ordered the allocation of five million dollars to provide the goods needed by Iran to fight the coronavirus.

Rouhani Stresses Encouraging Export Policy to Boost Production Needs

TEHRAN (IP)- President Rouhani noted the implementation of export incentive policy, stressed to use export revenues to meet import and production needs.

In the 134th session of the government’s economic headquarters on Tuesday, Hassan Rouhani said it is necessary to provide sufficient incentives for shareholders to use the assets of their stocks to exchange stocks and to encourage provincial investment companies to enter the stock market.

In the meeting which was chaired by Hassan Rouhani, the Governor of Iran’s Central Bank Abdolnaser Hemmati said the process of providing foreign exchange for basic goods essential for the country’s production continues according to the regulatory program.

The Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance Farhad Dejjansad also reported on the measures taken to release the Shares of Justice.

The meeting also addressed the status of the stock market and the supply of shares of state-owned companies to the public sector.

Tehran, Ankara Confer to Reopen Trade Borders

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Chairman of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran Hamid Zadbloom and Turkish Deputy Trade Minister Reza Tuna Turagay discuss the reopening of trade borders between the two countries.

Chairman of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran Hamid Zadbloom in a video call with Reza Tuna Turagay on Monday, referring to Iran’s efforts to ensure the health of commercial goods, called on Turkey to reopen trade borders between the two countries.

Zadbloom expressed hope that Iran’s transit route to Europe from Turkey would reopen as soon as possible.

Emphasizing the importance of relations between the two countries, the Turkish official said, “The Turkish Trade Ministry will try to resume the activities of trade borders between Iran and Turkey as soon as possible.”

Close Relations of Red Crescent, Red Cross

TEHRAN (IP)- The head of Iran’s Red Crescent Society said that there is a close connection between the Red Crescent and the International Red Cross, and this cooperation has expanded due to the Coronavirus global epidemic.

Speaking at a press conference on the occasion of World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day on Tuesday, Karim Hemmati responded the question of Iran Press correspondent about the level of collaborations between the International Committee of Red Cross and Red Crescent Society amid coronavirus pandemic, saying: “Iran has called on the Red Cross to take action to reduce sanctions. The Red Cross has so far sent cash and non-cash aid to Iran to deal with the corona.”

Hemmati said that the IRCS has managed to handle both the Coronavirus pandemic and floods at the same time using its experience and potentials.

With regards to managing a Coronavirus outbreak in the country, he divided the taken actions into three stages; before Coronavirus, which included screening; during Coronavirus, which included thermometry; and after Coronavirus, which included helping the vulnerable people whose lives have been affected by COVID-19.

“The Red Crescent Society has been able to use the training capacity in cyberspace to educate people about dealing with coronavirus,” Hemmati said, adding that 68 million people have used the content.

“During the outbreak of Coronavirus, Red Crescent volunteers, along with 3,400 medical staff across the country, screened 7.5 million vehicles for coronavirus and 14,000 suspected cases were identified that were introduced to the medical centers,” he added. Regarding the flood, Hemmati said that according to its experience last year, the Red Crescent along with other organizations, managed to control the floods in 25 provinces and there was no crisis in this regard.

Still, referring to the difficulties of sanctions amid the Coronavirus outbreak, the official said: “The sanctions have made it difficult for Iran to access cash aid, but with the help of the International Committee of the Red Cross, some of that cash has been delivered to Iran, but yet there is the problem of transactions. But despite sanctions, Iran has managed to contain the virus.”

The head of Iran’s Red Crescent Society went on to say that people donated 30 billion toman in cash to the Red Crescent, which has been distributed among the needy since the very beginning day. “Iran has so far received 112 international shipments from other countries, such as China, Qatar, Kuwait, Japan, and international organizations, and provided them to the public,” said the head of IRCS.

crops and pasture,” viewed the ambassador.

He said that Iran and Pakistan are dealing with COVID-19. Simultaneously they will soon start suffering from the consequences of the desert locust invasion, which will result in food insecurity and loss of livelihoods.

Hosseini added that the best way of preventing such horrible attack that can damage thousands of hectares of agricultural lands, is early warning, spreading pesticides and countering them before breeding. “Investing in this stage, would have a significant effect on saving people’s livelihoods from the Desert Locust infestations and reduce the rehabilitation costs,” said the ambassador.

He said that although this solution needs both budget allocation and regional cooperation, Iran and Pakistan are seriously concentrating on it. “In the fight against the Desert Locust, the Plant Protection Organization (PPO) of Iran has been reporting the situation to FAO on a regular basis,” added the envoy.

Call for Tehran-Islamabad Cooperation on Desert Locust

ISLAMABAD (IRNA)- Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan on Tuesday called for Tehran-Islamabad cooperation to stem desert locust attacks dangerous to the food security of millions of people in the two countries.

Mohammad Ali Hosseini said in an article published by local media on Tuesday said the new challenges like virus originated global pandemics, climate change, pollution and infest of locusts require timely and collective response. He added that food security is defined as state of having reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable nutrition food.

“It is worth mentioning that according to UN related reports, food security has declined dramatically in many developing countries,” noted the envoy.

The diplomat further said these days there are many reasons for deficiency of food security, inter alia, swarm of desert locusts, lack of water for agriculture and rapidly growing population.

“What has severely engaged countries like Iran and Pakistan in recent years is infest of locusts from different sides that threatens food supply for millions of people in the two countries,” noted Hosseini.

He said that this year, southern Iran was re-invaded in winter by infestations along the India-Pakistan border.

The envoy added that the unusually warm and wet winter allowed an extra generation of breeding, meaning that the Desert Locust infestations will be much larger than normal and poses a major risk for the region.

“Once conditions dry out, the remaining locust populations would move to the Indo-Pakistan border. It is predicted that the locust swarm Iran and Pakistan is the worst Desert Locust outbreak in the last 50 years, and can destroy all crops along their way; these swarms can wreak havoc in many provinces of both countries, especially in South Iran and South West Pakistan. This pest can reproduce rapidly, migrate long distances and devastate

Five Iranians Jailed Abroad on Bogus Charges of Military Activities

TEHRAN (IFP)- Five Iranian nationals have been thrown in jail in the foreign countries on spurious charges of involvement in military and defense activities, a lawmaker has quoted the Iranian deputy Defense Minister as saying.

Rapporteur of the Iranian Parliament’s National Security and Foreign policy Commission Hossein Naqavi Hosseini has provided details of the topics discussed in a Monday session of the parliamentary commission, which was attended by the deputy Defense Minister. According to the lawmaker, the deputy minister has said that at present, at least five Iranian citizens are being held in detention in the foreign countries on bogus charges of military and defense activities.

The deputy Defense Minister has said that more than 30 Iranian nationals had been taken into custody abroad because of the US’ hostile behavior, but the coordinated and effectual efforts from the Iranian organizations, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, yielded results in many cases, the MP noted.

On the case of Iranian scientist Sirous Asgari who is behind bars at a US immigration jail, Naqavi

Hosseini said the academic has been a victim of American hostility and rancor, noting that Asgari has been acquitted of all charges in connection with alleged illegal activities. The MP then noted that a representative of the Intelligence Ministry has also taken part in the Monday session of the parliamentary commission and has given a report about the US’ hostile policies against the Iranian citizens, particularly those who have played a role in the transfer of technologies into Iran.

“The Americans also make use of the intelligence services of the other countries in this regard,” the lawmaker quoted the Intelligence Ministry representative as saying.

Elsewhere in the Monday meeting, the Foreign Ministry representative has confirmed that the problems surrounding the case of Dr. Asgari have been resolved and the Iranian elite scientist will definitely return home as soon as he tests negative for the coronavirus, Naqavi Hosseini said.

The obstacles to repatriation of the Iranian scientist have been removed and he will be certainly taken back to Iran, but his travel should be given careful consideration since he suffers from heart disease, the MP noted.

Diplomats Discuss Boosting Iran-Oman Ties

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran’s ambassador to Oman and the sultanate’s foreign minister held a meeting to weigh plans for the expansion of the relations between Tehran and Muscat.

In the meeting in Muscat, Iranian envoy Mohammad Reza Noori Shahroodi and the Sultanate of Oman’s Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah discussed the latest regional and international developments and issues of mutual interest.

According to the Iranian Embassy in Oman, the two diplomats weighed plans to promote the bilateral relations and facilitate maritime transportation between the two neighbors.

They also talked about the challenges posed by the outbreak of the novel coronavirus as well as the status of the Iranian nationals residing in Oman.

In a telephone conversation with Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tariq Al Said in April, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani stressed the need for collective action by all countries in the fight against COVID-19.

The president also voiced Iran’s readiness to provide the friendly and neighboring state, Oman, with the experiences and achievements in the battle with COVID-19 and to offer whatever assistance necessary.

Religious Sites Reopen In 132 Iranian Cities

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Religious sites reopened in 132 Iranian cities as the officials are easing the restrictions aimed to contain spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), according to Hojjatolislam Mohammad Norouzpour, an official with the Endowments and Charity Affairs Organization of Iran.

Norouzpour said that easing of restrictions follows improvements of health conditions in these cities.

Religious sites had been closed since two months ago following the outbreak of the pandemic in Iran.

Norouzpour, however, noted that although the religious sites are open, the visitors need to observe health protocols.

He said that people can visit religious sites while practicing social distancing protocols.

People who go to religious sites should take with them everything they may need such as their own prayer books and Qurans to read, the official said.

All the visitors’ health conditions will be tested and anyone diagnosed to be contracted COVID-19, will undergo medical treatments, he added.

Zarif Advises Pompeo To Read UNSCR 2231

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in a message said Iran nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is part of UNSCR 2231 and advised U.S. Secretary of state to read the resolution.

“@SecPompeo pretends UNSCR 2231 is independent from #JCPOA,” Zarif wrote in his Twitter account on Tuesday.

“He should READ 2231. JCPOA is PART of 2231. That’s why it’s 104 pages—& why he’s not read it,” he added.

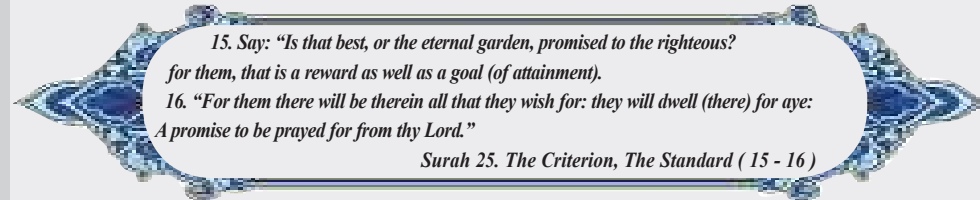
“2231 for Dummies: -It would NOT EXIST w/o JCPOA - US violated it & prevented others from complying -US has NO standing,” he noted.

Earlier, Iran’s Ambassador to the United Nations headquarters at Geneva Esmail Baqaei Hamaneh said on Monday that the United States’ invocation of UNSC Resolution 2231 against Iran is a travesty and it should be held accountable for abusing the UN Security Council.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:00
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:14
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:30
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:05



15. Say: "Is that best, or the eternal garden, promised to the righteous?

for them, that is a reward as well as a goal (of attainment).

16. "For them there will be therein all that they wish for: they will dwell (there) for aye: A promise to be prayed for from thy Lord."

Surah 25, The Criterion, The Standard (15 - 16)

Five New Free Trade Zones to Be Launched

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Majlis has approved plans for launching five new free trade zones (FTZ) in north and east of the country.

The parliament allowed the government to prepare the required conditions for developing two major FTZs in Sarakhs and Dogharoun, areas on the border with Afghanistan.

Dogharoun, the gateway for official trade between Iran and Afghanistan for more than a century, will be developed as Iran's largest FTZ in an area of around 8,700 hectares, said reports in the local media.

Establishing the zones in the eastern province of Razavi Khorasan is expected to help local economy in the normally underdeveloped regions across the border between Iran and Afghanistan as more investment will be attracted to the FTZs due to eased restrictions governing such areas.

According to the parliament bill passed on Monday, the Iranian government will also launch three FTZs in the northern province of Mazandaran, a hub for agriculture where exports of farming products to countries to north of Iran have increased over the past years.



The three new FTZs will be developed in port cities on the Caspian Sea, namely Amirabad, Fereydunkenar and Noshahr, said the media reports.

Some of the five Iranian locations approved to become FTZs had already served as special economic zones (SEZ).

Iran's Guardian Council, which vets legislation by the parliament, should endorse the bill passed on new FTZs before its come into force.

Announcing new economic and trade zones in Iran come as the country seeks to boost trade with neighboring countries in a bid to access new sources of foreign currency and offset the impacts of a series of American sanctions that have hampered its sale of oil.

Meanwhile on Sunday ISNA reported that foreign direct investment (FDI) to Iran declined over the past calendar year to stand at \$854 million, says a new report.

Figures published by 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.

Iran, Turkmenistan Seeking to Resolve Transit Problems

MASHHAD (IRNA) - Iran's Ambassador to Turkmenistan Gholam Abbas Arbab Khaled hailed efforts to solve problems facing transit between the two countries, saying that the issue was discussed during telephone talks between Iran's minister of roads and urban development with his Turkmen counterpart and the two countries' presidents.

Addressing a meeting of Trade Commission of Mashhad Chamber of Commerce, he added that based on the recent conversation between President Hassan Rouhani and President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, the two countries were scheduled to hold talks at the ministerial level.

While strict laws in Turkmenistan have made trade exchanges very difficult, the country has taken restrictive measures to deal with the outbreak of coronavirus since February, he said, noting that the air, land and rail borders of Turkmenistan with the surrounding countries are tightly controlled and even closed in some cases.

Commenting on the results of Iran's follow-ups to remove obstacles and problems facing transit between the two countries, Arbab Khaled said that during the recent meetings, the two countries' officials made suggestions and further measures were taken at Inche-Borun border to create disinfection tunnels as part of measures to fight coronavirus.

It was also agreed during talks that nine Turkmen border crossings would be opened, of which three belongs to Iran, he said.

Referring to Turkmenistan approach based on collaboration with Iran, the ambassador said that Iran's northern neighbor has always favored development of bilateral relations and cooperation in the field of transit and energy.

"Turkmen officials are trying to gain access to the Persian Gulf through Iran, so we hope that Turkmenistan's approach in future will help create good reforms in the field of transit with that country and other countries in the Central Asian region," Arbab Khaled said.

Iranian Trade With Arab States Stands at \$22b

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Director General of Trade Promotion Organization for Arabic-African Affairs Farzad Piltan said that Iranian trade with Arab states stood at \$22 billion in the past Iranian year 1398 (ended on 20 March, 2020).

Farzad Piltan said that \$12.5 billion of the \$22b trade was export to the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, i.e. Iraq, the UAE, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, as well as Jordan, Lebanon and Syria; and \$9 billion was the import from these countries.

Piltan said that in export, Iraq (\$9b) and the UAE (\$2.5b) and in import the UAE (\$8.7b) and Qatar (\$200m) are on the top of the list.

He added that in both export and import Bahrain was on the bottom of the list.

From among the regional countries, there are some that are on top of the foreign trade of Iran: Iraq (4th), Oman (18th), Qatar (34th), Kuwait (39th), Syria (41st), Lebanon (62nd), Jordan (63rd), Bahrain (88th).

Iran Exports 40,000 Coronavirus Test Kits to Germany

TEHRAN (IFP) - A consignment of 40,000 Iranian-made diagnostic test kits for the novel coronavirus disease has been shipped to Germany on Tuesday.

The shipment, involving 40,000 test kits manufactured by an Iranian knowledge-based company, was exported from Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport on Tuesday morning.

The coronavirus test kits have been made by Pishtaz Teb Zaman Co., a knowledge-based enterprise with 21 years of experience in producing various cancer tumor markers and testing kits for the diagnosis of infectious and endocrine diseases.

The Iranian company has already developed five types of biochemistry kits and has exported its products to Italy,

Belgium, Brazil, Germany, South Korea and Turkey.

The Iranian Vice Presidency for Science and Technology has categorized the company as a leading firm contributing to the knowledge-based economy in Iran.

Following a call from the vice presidency a couple of weeks ago, Pishtaz Teb Zaman focused its efforts on the production of COVID-19 diagnostic test kits.

CEO of the company Behrouz Hajian Tehrani says the homegrown product meets all European standards of accuracy, performance and diagnosis time.

The new test kits have undergone a long process to obtain certification inside Iran and have also received Europe's CE marking, he added.

Non-Oil Exports, Driving Force of Iran Economy in Current Year

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Reza Rahmani said that export of non-oil commodities is the driving force of economy of the country in the current year [started March 21, 2020].

In this line, activation of all export capacities and export markets with a focus on the private sector has been put atop agenda.

Speaking in a meeting with members of Special Taskforce to Support National Production on Monday, he said, "Despite all problems facing ahead, the Ministry of Industry managed to export more than 135 million tons of non-oil goods last year [ended March 20, 2020]."

He pointed to the outbreak of coronavirus, COVID-19, in the country and added, "the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade has taken drastic measures to support businesses incurred severe damage as a result of spread of coronavirus."

The outbreak of coronavirus has affected trade and business activities of other countries severely, he said, adding, "in the current situation, we are witnessing that special decisions have been taken by other countries in the field of banning and restricting imports and exports."

Sungun Copper Complex Chosen as Exemplary Unit of Year

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN- The assessment committee and jury of the 31st national honoring labors festival named Sungun Copper Complex, the affiliated company to National Iranian Copper Industries Company (NICICO), as the exemplary unit of the last Iranian calendar year which ended on March 20.

After evaluations by the cooperatives and labor and social welfare ministries in last Iranian calendar year, Sungun Copper Complex was chosen as the exemplary unit in the festival due to its activities which were outstanding. The company was named as one of the top four exemplary units of last year.



Meanwhile in the festival, Eng. Ahmadpour from Sungun Copper Complex was also named exemplary worker of the province.

The festival is held every year jointly by cooperatives and labor and social welfare ministries in order to boost spirit among the workforce and companies.

Sungun Copper Complex last year, after some infrastructural plannings which were drawn up by the CEO of NICICO Dr. Ardeshtir Saad Mohammadi, witnessed considerable surge in production and it also had good achievement in indigenizing production of some equipment and parts and cut dependency on imports.

PGSOC Tops Passive Defense Rankings

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Persian Gulf Star Oil Company ranked first in the country last year in terms of observing all principles of the passive defense.



According to reports, the company was awarded as the top Passive Defense Prize due to observing all safety and passive defense principles.

Protection of all sensitive infrastructures and main economic veins of the country is very vital and this issue has underscored the importance of attention to the necessary bases of passive defense more than ever, the public relations of the company said.

Persian Gulf Star Refinery which provides major part of fuel for the country has to double its attention regarding the passive defense principles as the head of national passive defense organization has said, the refinery is one of the vital and strategic infrastructures of the company and needs more care and safety measures.

Holding regular maneuvers for assessing the condition, monitoring probable challenges and hours of exchange of views with experts are of the major measures of the company which helped it to win this award.

The plaque of appreciation has been recently presented by the director of passive defense organization of Hormuzgan Province to the secretary of passive defense department of PGSOC Mr. Farhad Salehi.

Sangan Co. Sets New Record For Monthly Pellet Production

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Hardworking and determined staff of Sangan Steel Company by producing 381,093 tons of pellets in last Iranian calendar month and transporting 16,200 tons per day by rail fleet set two unique units.



The CEO of Sangan Steel Company announced these achievements, adding that this proud achievement in the year of surge in sanctions has happened after drawing up comprehensive planning and operationalizing the strategic plans of production and round-the-clock efforts of personnel of the company, and another golden leaf has been added to the book of honors of the company.

Mr. Ali Amraee added that tireless staff of Sangan Steel Company by putting the Supreme Leader's remarks as their yardstick for surge in production could materialize these two new records amid all problems in providing the raw material.

He said the company produced 381,093 tons of pellets and sent 16,200 tons of pellets per day by the rail fleet registered two new records for monthly production and rail shipment since the start of the company.

Amraee pointed to the significance of rail transport, adding that using rail capacity will boost the safety of delivery of products and their final costs.

He noted that definitely the strategic and unique role of Sangan Steel Complex in feeding steel plants with raw material will speed up the production cycle in Mobarakeh Steel Company and a huge leap in the steel chain, and above all, it will boost progress and job creation in the country.

He concluded his remarks by expressing his gratitude to the hardworking staff of the company.

NIDC Announces Priorities in Year of Surge in Production

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) revealed the priorities of the company for the current year which has been named Year of Surge in Production and rejected allegations that the company is laying off its workers.

Speaking in an interview, Mr. Seyed Abdollah Mousavi highlighted the priorities of the company for the current year which is year of surge in production, adding that the company has approved plans for employing fully its technical and specialized capabilities this year. He further said he could mention planning for using 15 drilling rigs as well as offering technical and submersible services in the mega project of developing 28 oil reservoirs.

He also pointed to the agreement signed with Pezhvak Energy Engineering Services Company on Sunday, adding that according to the agreement worth of \$60m, NIDC will start drilling of six wells by using two drilling rigs in Sepehr and Jufair oil fields.

Mousavi noted that NIDC has announced its readiness for drilling of 120 wells which have been defined in the upcoming projects of Pasargad Energy Development Company.

He then pointed to the company's strategic plans in the year of surge in production, adding that curbing the costs and colorful presence in developmental project of 28 oil reservoirs are of the major programs of the company this year.

Mousavi reiterated that the company will continue its policy of self-sufficiency and independence this year.

He also announced readiness of the company for colorful presence in the offshore drilling, adding that the company with three offshore drilling rigs is busy with offering services.

Mousavi also refuted allegations that the company is to lay off some of its workers, adding that the company has no problem in its payments and it is not to lay off any one.



Iraqi Parliament to Vote On New Gov't Today

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq's parliament will sit today to vote for the cabinet of Prime Minister-designate Mustafa al-Kadhimi, who is tasked with forming a new government.

The vote of confidence session for the new cabinet will be held at 9 p.m. local time (1800GMT), according to a statement from the parliamentary press office.

Parliament Speaker Mohamed Al-Halbousi said in the statement that the al-Kadhimi cabinet will consist of 12 ministers from the Shiites, six from the Sunnis and three from the Kurds.

It is claimed that Turkmen and Christians were kept out of the cabinet.



U.S. Milestone of 100,000 Virus Deaths Likely by June

WASHINGTON (AFP) – U.S. President Donald Trump now says his worst-case coronavirus scenario would be 100,000 deaths, but the country will probably reach that grim milestone by next month, according to several scientific models -- none of which predict a summertime halt to the virus's spread.

"We're going to lose anywhere from 75,000, 80,000 to 100,000 people. That's a horrible thing," Trump said Sunday evening at a virtual town hall meeting on Fox News.

The Republican incumbent, who is vying for re-election in November, argued that without lockdown measures that have crippled the world's biggest economy, the toll would have been far greater -- more than 1.2 million "at a minimum."



No Proof From U.S. on Speculative Wuhan Lab Claims



GENEVA (Dispatches) - The World Health Organization said Monday that Washington had provided no evidence to support "speculative" claims by the U.S. president that the new coronavirus originated in a Chinese lab.

"We have not received any data or specific evidence from the United States government relating to the purported origin of the virus -- so from our perspective, this remains speculative," WHO emergencies director Michael Ryan told a virtual briefing.

Scientists believe the killer virus jumped from animals to humans, emerging in China late last year, possibly from a market in Wuhan selling exotic animals for meat.

Top U.S. epidemiologist Anthony Fauci echoed the WHO's statement in an interview published Monday evening by National Geographic.

"If you look at the evolution of the virus in bats and what's out there now, (the scientific evidence) is very, very strongly leaning toward this could not have been artificially or deliberately manipulated," Fauci told the magazine. "Everything about the stepwise evolution over time strongly indicates that (this virus) evolved in nature and then jumped species," he said.

U.S. President Donald Trump, increasingly critical of China's management of the outbreak, claims to have proof it started in a Wuhan laboratory.

And U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Sunday said "enormous evidence" backed up that claim, although the U.S. intelligence community last week said it would continue to study whether the outbreak stemmed from infected animal contact, or a lab accident.

China has vehemently denied suggestions the lab was the source.

"Like any evidence-based organisation, we would be very willing to receive any information that purports to the origin of the virus," Ryan said, stressing that this was "a very important piece of public health information for future control."

"If that data and evidence is available, then it will be for the United States government to decide whether and when it can be shared, but it is difficult for the WHO to operate in an information vacuum in that regard," he added. The UN health agency -- which has also faced scathing criticism from Trump over accusations it initially downplayed the seriousness of the outbreak to shield China -- has repeatedly said the virus clearly appears to have originated naturally from an animal source.

WHO expert Maria Van Kerkhove stressed during Monday's briefing that there were some 15,000 full genome sequences of the novel coronavirus available, and "from all of the evidence that we have seen... this virus is of natural origin."

While coronaviruses generally originate in bats, both Van Kerkhove and Ryan stressed the importance of discovering how the virus that causes COVID-19 crossed over to humans, and what animal served as an "intermediary host" along the way.

Turkey Will No Longer Tolerate Harassment in Syria Safe Zone

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey will no longer tolerate terrorist harassment in the Idlib safe zone in northwestern Syria or ramped-up attacks which flout agreements, Turkey's president said.

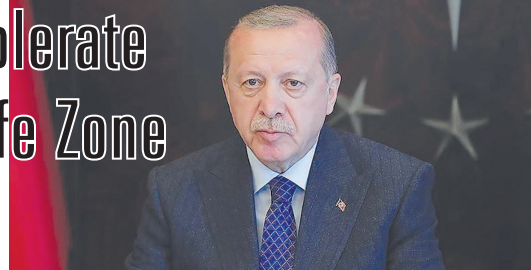
Terrorist groups are trying to exploit Turkey's preoccupation with the coronavirus pandemic to step up attacks both within Turkey's borders and beyond, Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in a televised address following a Cabinet meeting in Istanbul.

"This attitude alone is enough to show how far the terrorist group is from humanity," he said. Erdogan said the Turkish Armed Forces are pursuing and neutralizing terrorists non-stop, adding that its operations across the border also continue without interruption.

"We closely monitor every step of members of the terrorist group operating in a wide area in northern Iraq and Syria."

He stressed that Turkey immediately neutralizes members of the terrorist group trying to infiltrate secured areas in Syria.

Since 2016, Turkey has led a trio of successful operations across its border into northern Syria to prevent the formation of a terror corridor, enable peaceful settlement by locals, and protect civilians from attacks: Euphrates Shield (2016), Olive Branch (2018), and Peace Spring (2019).



Global Coronavirus Deaths Exceed Quarter of a Million

LONDON (Reuters) - Global coronavirus deaths reached 250,000 on Monday after recorded infections topped 3.5 million, a Reuters tally of official government data showed, although the rate of fatalities has slowed.

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

Globally, there were 3,062 new deaths and 61,923 new cases over the past 24 hours, taking total cases to 3.58 million. That easily exceeds the estimated 140,000 deaths worldwide in 2018 caused by measles, and compares with around 3 million to 5 million cases of severe illness caused annually by seasonal influenza, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

While the current trajectory of COVID-19 falls far short of the 1918 Spanish flu, which infected an estimated 500 million people, killing at least 10% of patients, experts worry the available data is underplaying the true impact of the pandemic.

The concerns come as several countries begin to ease strict lockdowns that have been credited with helping contain the spread of the virus.

"We could easily have a second or a third wave because a lot of places aren't immune," Peter Collignon, an infectious diseases physician and microbiologist at Canberra Hospital, told Reuters. He noted the world was well short of herd immunity, which requires around 60% of the population to have recovered from the disease.

The first death linked to COVID-19 was reported on Jan. 10 in Wuhan, China, after the coronavirus first emerged there in December. Global fatalities grew at a rate of 1-2% in recent days, down from 14% on March 21, according to the Reuters data.

Mortality rates from recorded infections vary greatly from country to country. Collignon said any country with a mortality rate of more than 2% almost certainly had underreported case numbers. Health experts fear those ratios could

worsen in regions and countries less prepared to deal with the health crisis.

"If your mortality rate is higher than 2%, you've missed a lot of cases," he said, noting that countries overwhelmed by the outbreak were less likely to conduct testing in the community and record deaths outside of hospitals.

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.

Int'l Crisis Group Calls For Pressure on Haftar

ANKARA (Dispatches) -The International Crisis Group said this week that Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar's regional backers should press him to reconsider his decision to replace UN-backed mediation in Libya with a new political roadmap and government.

The Brussels-based think tank evaluated the effects of Haftar's political statement dated April 27 with an analysis titled 'Interpreting Haftar's Gambit in Libya.'

"For Haftar's Libyan critics, his 27 April political declaration has only reinforced the notion that he cannot be a partner in negotiations. By giving them yet another reason to continue to fight him, Haftar's latest gambit risks further perpetuating this tragic war," said the statement.

"His allies should quickly and forcefully press him to both reconsider and commit himself to the UN-led process."

Following the ouster of late ruler Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya's government was founded in 2015 under a UN-led political deal. Since April 2019, the government has been under attack by Haftar's forces, based in eastern Libya, and more than 1,000 people have been killed in the violence.

Haftar unilaterally declared himself the ruler of Libya on April 27, claiming he had "accepted the mandate of the Libyan people" and termed the 2015 UN-brokered Skhirat agreement for a unified government in the country "a thing of the past."

But the coup attempt by Haftar was condemned by international actors and regional allies.

Notably, although Haftar's spokesman said a unilateral ceasefire had been announced, forces affiliated with the renegade commander attacked southern Tripoli with rockets only a couple of hours before the announcement.



Syria Says Israeli Jets Struck Military Outposts Near Aleppo



DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Syrian air defences thwarted an Israeli missile attack on a research centre and a military base in the northern province of Aleppo state media said on Monday in the fifth such strikes in two weeks on suspected targets.

The Syrian army said in a statement that Israel hit military barracks in al Safirah in the eastern Aleppo countryside. Earlier, state television had said a research centre was targeted. The army said it was now assessing the damage caused by the strikes.

A regional intelligence source said Israel was stepping up raids in Syria at a time when world attention and the region, including Syria, were distracted by the coronavirus pandemic.

An Israeli army spokeswoman declined to comment on the report.

Western intelligence sources say militias have long been entrenched in Aleppo province where they have bases and a command centre and installed advanced weapons, part of a growing presence across government-controlled Syria.

The Scientific Studies and Research Center is one of several facilities where Western intelligence and opposition sources suspect Syria with the help of Iranian researchers work on developing chemical weapons they accuse Syria of having used against civilians in rebel-held areas.

Damascus and its ally Moscow deny they have used chemical weapons that have killed hundreds of civilians in the course of the nine-year conflict and blame jihadist rebels for such attacks.

Israel has previously struck several military research facilities believed to have been a centre for chemical and biological weapons.



Zaferanieh Apt (\$2000)
250sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

(\$2600)
Darrous Apt
300sq.m, 4bdrs
S/pool, Sauna
balcony, & F.F

Jordan Apt (\$1500)
160sq.m, 3bdrs, & F.F

Shanon (adviser)
Parsian

Farmanieh Apt (\$2400)
220sq.m, 3bdrs, S/pool
Sauna, J, Large balcony
pkg, & Fully Furn

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Fax : 88506474

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4bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
yard, & pkg
Fully Furn

(\$10000)
Velenjak bldg
5storey, 20bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg lots
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Turkey Borrows Over \$1.25b From Domestic Markets

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - The Turkish Treasury borrowed 8.8 billion Turkish liras (\$1.25 billion) from domestic markets through an auction on Monday.

Zero-coupon bonds (semiannually, re-opened, third issue) with a 13-month term rate were sold in the auction, which will be settled today and mature on June 9, 2021.

The total tender for the bonds was 19.58 billion Turkish liras (\$2.77 billion) with a 45.1% accepted/tendered rate.

The interest rate of the 399-day government bonds was accepted at a 9.12% term rate, while annual simple and compound interest rates were 8.32% and 8.29%, respectively.



EU Approves 7b Euros in French State Aid to Air France

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Commission on Monday gave the green light to 7.0 billion euros (\$7.7 billion) in French state aid to national carrier Air France to cushion the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

"The European Commission has approved, under EU State aid rules, a €7 billion French aid measure consisting of a state guarantee on loans and a shareholder loan to Air France to provide urgent liquidity to the company in the context of the coronavirus outbreak," EU competition commissioner Margrethe Vestager said in a statement. The EU's executive body, the bloc's competition watchdog, loosened its rules on state subsidies in mid-March to make it easier for member countries to come to the aid of companies in financial difficulty as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the case of Air France, the aid consists of 4.0 billion euros in bank loans, 90-percent guaranteed by the state, and 3.0 billion euros in direct state loans in return for which the airline has committed to improving its profitability and reducing its greenhouse gas emissions.

"France has demonstrated that all other potential means to obtain liquidity on the markets have already been explored and exhausted," the Commission said.

"In the absence of the public support, Air France would likely face the risk of bankruptcy due to the sudden erosion of its business. This would likely cause severe harm to the French economy," it said.

As a result of the imposition of travel restrictions introduced by France and by many destination countries to limit the spread of the coronavirus, Air France has suffered a significant reduction of its services, which resulted in high operating losses.

France and the Netherlands each hold about 14 percent of the Air France-KLM group.

The Dutch government, for its part, plans to give 2.0-4.0 billion euros state aid to KLM in the form of loans and guarantees.

EU Carbon Market Emissions Fell 8.7% in 2019

LONDON (Reuters) - Greenhouse gas emissions regulated under Europe's carbon market fell by 8.7% last year, with a large fall from the power industry helping to offset a small increase from aviation, the European Commission said on Monday.

Around 45% of the European Union's output of greenhouse gases is regulated by the Emissions Trading System, the bloc's flagship policy to tackle global warming by charging for the right to emit carbon dioxide (CO₂).

An increase in renewable power generation such as wind and solar led to a 15% fall in power industry emissions covered by the scheme, the Commission said, while industrial emissions were down 2% compared with 2018.

Aviation industry emissions covered by the scheme rose by 1%.

Total verified greenhouse gas emissions from stationary installations, such as power plants and factories, were 1.527 billion tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) in 2019.

Emissions from the aviation industry were 68.14 million tons CO₂e, the Commission said.

The figures were in line with analyst expectations published last month, based on raw data.

Globally greenhouse gas emissions are expected to fall further in 2020 as measures designed to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus have led to the closure of business and factories and reduced power demand.

The International Energy Agency said last week global energy demand could slump by 6% leading to an 8% drop in carbon dioxide emissions.

Argentina Faces Off With Bondholders as \$65b Debt Deadline Approaches

LONDON (Reuters) - Argentina's government and its biggest bondholders are at loggerheads over plans to restructure \$65 billion (\$2.33 billion pounds) in foreign debt the South American country says it cannot pay,

with no sign either side wants to budge in last-ditch talks to strike a deal.

Three major creditor groups on Monday reiterated their stance that they would reject a tough offer the government made last month that currently closes on May 8. The government has also hardened its position that it cannot afford to pay more.

The debt negotiations will determine whether Argentina is able to avoid slipping into what would be its ninth default, damaging the country's access to global markets as it struggles to escape from a painful recession.

Argentina's offer included a three-year halt on payments on the bonds, a 62% reduction in coupon payments and maturities pushed back to 2030 and beyond.

The bondholders, who have previously rebuffed the proposal, said they would not tender their bonds in the current offer, though were willing to work with Argentina's government when it was ready to do so.

"(Creditors) consider the terms to require Argentine bondholders to bear disproportionate losses that are neither justified or necessary," the committees said in a statement.

The groups include names like BlackRock, Fidelity, Ashmore and hedge funds Greylock Capital, HBK and Pharo Management.

The standoff is raising the risk Argentina will fall into a record ninth sovereign debt default on May 22, when the grace period on a missed interest payment runs out.

Santiago Cafiero, Argentina's cabinet chief, told local radio station La Red on Monday that the country's offer to creditors would not be modified because it was "the commitment that we can fulfil and that will be sustainable over time."

S. Korea Braces for Prolonged COVID-19 Economic Fallout

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's government on Monday vowed to announce key economic measures including extensive job creation actions within the upcoming weeks, upon judgment that the economic risks stemming from the novel coronavirus pandemic will persist.

"This month will be the time to outline (the directions) for the second-half of the year against the economic crisis," Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Hong Nam-ki said at a meeting of officials.

The chief fiscal policymaker thereby underlined that the half-year economic policy, the government's third supplementary budget bill and the Korean version of the "New Deal" should be announced by early June as planned.

The Korean-style proposal — recalling a series of programs, public work projects and financial reforms in the US for recovery from the Great Depression in the 1930s — will consist of large-scale digital information technology projects, online educational services and online medical services, according to the ministry.

Hong also called for special measures to accelerate the domestic market and consumption, while highlighting the need for ideas that could temporarily lift hurdles for corporate investment.

While Asia's fourth-largest economy has seen visible improvements in its epidemic graphs over recent weeks, taking a step closer to alleviating its quarantine rules, fiscal officials warned that the real impacts "have only just begun," stressing the need for mid- and long-term protective actions.

"Most experts are projecting the second quarter (to be a low point for the economy), so the signs of real shocks including contraction of the real economy or unemployment are (just starting to surface)," Vice Finance Minister Kim Yong-beom said at a macroeconomic meeting with ministry officials held earlier in the day.

"The government will make its best efforts to protect jobs since it is key to overcoming a national crisis, and create new jobs in line with our plans to launch the Korean version of a 'New Deal Project,'" he added.

The latest oil price volatility, risks surrounding emerging markets and the possibility of reigniting the US-China trade war due to global reshoring were cited as major factors that could bring about a "real shock" and prolonged economic instability.

Oil producers have been struggling to cope with the volatility after the historic oil price crash last month, when US West Texas Intermediate futures plunged below zero for the first time in history. "Growth forecasts for oil-producing nations are being cut drastically," Kim said.

"With the current account and fiscal balances of such nations to worsen alongside their economic uncertainties, and possibility of them retrieving the oil money, it could throw the global economy off balance."

The U.S.-China trade war could be reignited with both nations attacking each other over handling of the coronavirus and immediate recovery of the economy is unlikely at the moment, Kim said.

Russia Boosts Oil, Gas Production In April Ahead of Reductions



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia boosted 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 reductions this month under a global supply pact.

The report, which cited Energy Ministry data, confirmed April's figure was the highest month-to-month average production C-RU-OUT since January 2019, when it was 11.38 million BPD.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Russia, and other allied producers (OPEC+) agreed in April to chop their combined oil production by about nearly 10 million BPD, or 10% of worldwide supply in May and June to tackle the economic downturn from the novel coronavirus.

The U.S., Norway, Canada, and Brazil may add reductions that would bring the total reduction to 20 million BPD, or 20% of global provide, though the coronavirus crisis has driven down demand by up to 30%, driving down prices.

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

This number excludes the production of gas condensate or light oil. Russian energy ministry doesn't disclose gas condensate production separately.

Russia's mid-sized oil producer Tatneft stated Saturday it pumped 1.994 million tons of oil in April, down from 2.442 million tons year-earlier.

Egypt Expects Economic Growth Rate to Drop in FY 2020/21

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Egypt's economic growth rate would decrease to 2 percent during the next fiscal year 2020/2021 if the COVID-19 crisis continued until December 2020, warned Minister of Planning Hala el-Saeed.

Earlier in April, Saeed said Egypt is targeting 4.5 percent growth in FY 2020/2021, but it may drop to 3.5 percent if the coronavirus crisis continues until the middle of the fiscal year.

The Minister was discussing the basic features of the sustainable development plan for FY 2020/2021 before the plan and budget parliamentary committee, during the discussion of the state's draft general budget.

She reviewed Egypt's economic performance before the coronavirus pandemic, noting that the economic growth reached 5.6 percent and the unemployment rate dropped to less than 8 percent. In addition, inflation slowed to 5 percent and non-oil deficiency fell 24 percent. Saeed added, in a press statement, that data for FY 2019/2020 showed the government implemented investments amounting to EGP113 billion during the July - March period, with a growth rate of 23 percent compared to the same period in the previous fiscal year.

The Minister indicated that private investments are expected to drop, which will in turn affect total investments, estimated at EGP740 billion during 2020/2021, as a result of the coronavirus crisis.

However, she noted that if the crisis continues until mid-FY 2020/2021, investments are expected to drop by about 30 percent.

During the committee's session, Finance Minister Mohamed Maait confirmed that the state seeks to develop its resources, amid the economic conditions imposed by COVID-19 pandemic around the world.



He indicated that this is a new situation and revenues are negatively affected by its implications, noting that the government follows the logic of calm crisis management.

Maait explained that the cabinet wants to expand the state's resources to avoid inflation and high prices in the future, asserting that the state took decisions at difficult times to ensure the best is done in the interest of the citizens.

The Minister pointed out that the draft law has been under discussion since June 2018 and has been reviewed many times to achieve the interests of the state.

The committee approved the draft law that includes increasing fees imposed on some items, as well as imposing new fees on contracts of sports players and management, sports company licenses, as well as mobile devices and accessories.

“Eaten” Goes on Screen at Stuttgart Int’l Film Festival

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian animated piece, ‘Eaten’ by Mohsen Rezapour is set to go on screen at the 27th Stuttgart International Festival of Animated Film in Germany.

The film is about life in a mysterious and unknown planet, a rabbit-like creature is eaten, but that’s not the end of the story.

Founded in 1982, the Stuttgart International Festival of Animated Film is one of the biggest and most important international festivals for animation. The festival attracts 80,000 cinephiles and 2,500 accredited professionals. Among the varied film program, the focus is on short films for adults and children, with numerous competitive categories awarding cash prizes.



France Refuses Amazon’s Covid-19 Emergency Fund Request

PARIS (Dispatches) - France’s labor ministry on Monday refused a request by Amazon for emergency funds to pay its employees during the coronavirus crisis, after the retail giant shut its warehouses over a French court ruling ordering the company to deliver only essential goods until its health protocols were revised.

The ministry said Amazon France had asked to benefit from coronavirus crisis funds that cover about 84 percent of net pay for workers facing temporary layoffs because of a drop in business.

Amazon France confirmed it sought the funds to cover salaries for some 10,000 employees at its six main distribution sites in the country.

The online retailer has been locked in a battle with labor unions which say not enough was done to mitigate contagion risk for staff working in close proximity to process a flood of orders amid the nationwide lockdown, which saw traditional shops shuttered.

Last month, an appeals court upheld a ruling that sharply curtailed Amazon’s operations and ordered management to review safety measures. The court said only digital products, office equipment, groceries, medical and personal care products could be delivered in the meantime.

But Amazon said it was impossible to comply with the order, and completely shut down the six sites from mid-April until May 5, though it maintained full pay for employees.

“The recent decision by the Court of Versailles has obviously had an impact on our French operations... As a result, we filed for the help that other companies in France have benefited from,” the company said in a statement.

“Our logistics operations are technically complex and the court’s fine of 100,000 euros (\$109,000) for any infraction means that even accidental shipping of non-authorized products, on the order of 0.1 percent of the total, could lead to over one billion euros of fines per week,” it said.

The world’s largest online retailer is facing mounting scrutiny as it juggles a surge in online orders during government lockdowns to curb the pandemic and employees’ safety, and France has become a major battleground.



France is the only country where Amazon has shut all of its so-called fulfillment centres after unions complained that they were still too crowded and filed a legal challenge.

Unions called Amazon’s request for employment aid “absolutely scandalous” and accused the firm of getting around the court order by fulfilling French orders from its other warehouses in Europe.

Dozens of employees had staged walkouts at several sites before the ruling to demand better workplace protection during the Covid-19 outbreak.

Amazon reported last week that despite a surge in orders worldwide because of virus lockdowns, its profit dropped 29 percent in the first quarter of this year, to \$2.5 billion, because of Covid-19 expenses, including measures for “keeping employees safe”.

The company is in the process of recruiting some 175,000 more employees to cope with surging demand.

Gazprom Neft Sees Oil Prices Topping \$30 This Summer



LONDON (Dispatches) - Oil prices will top \$30 a barrel this summer as demand will start to recover slowly, Alexander Dyukov, chief executive at Russian oil producer Gazprom Neft, told a Russian television channel in an interview.

Dyukov, head of Gazprom’s oil arm, said that he hoped oil prices would exceed \$30 a barrel in the summer and approach \$40 per barrel by the end of this year.

The manager, however, noted that demand recovery would not be V-shaped, and there would not be a jump in prices in May, although this is the month in which the new OPEC+ cuts enter into force.

Last month, Dyukov told Russian business daily Kommersant that if U.S. states ease lockdowns and oil demand improves, oil prices could recover to \$40-\$45 a barrel by the end of this year.

As part of the OPEC+ deal, Russia pledged to cut its production to 8.5 million bpd in May and June from a February 2020 baseline, or by around 2 million bpd, or by 19 percent, from February 2020, Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak told Interfax in an interview earlier this week. Assuming full compliance, Russia could see its oil production decline by 15 percent annually in 2020, according to Novak. As per Reuters estimates, a drop in 2020 production would be the first decline in Russia’s oil output since 2008.

According to Gazprom Neft’s Dyukov, Russian companies cutting so much production as per the OPEC+ deal would not be an easy task, but it is achievable.

Russia has rarely complied 100 percent with the previous OPEC+ pacts over the past three and a half years.

Even though the OPEC+ deal begins on May 1, oil prices will not rise much in the near future because of very high global inventories, minister Novak said in an article published in the ministry’s publication Energy Policy this week.

China is already showing signs of recovering economic activity, and we hope that other economies could see positive developments in a few months, too, Novak said, but warned: “Nevertheless, you should not expect a jump in oil prices in the near term, due to the current oversupply on the market.”

FDA Tightens Scrutiny of Coronavirus Antibody Tests

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on Monday tightened its oversight of coronavirus antibody tests after the market was flooded with dubious tests.

Companies selling antibody tests, which determine whether someone has been infected with COVID-19, must submit data to prove their accuracy, the FDA said.

The agency had previously allowed companies to validate their own data from antibody tests, also known as serology tests.

“We unfortunately see unscrupulous actors marketing fraudulent test kits and using the pandemic as an opportunity to take advantage of Americans’ anxiety,” the FDA said in a statement.

“Some test developers have falsely claimed their serological tests are FDA approved or authorized.”

The FDA said test manufacturers will have 10 days to submit performance data and request an emergency use authorization (EUA).

“To date, 12 antibody tests have been authorized under an individual EUA, most within just the past few days, and over 200 antibody tests are currently the subject of a pre-EUA or EUA review,” the FDA said.

A serology test detects the presence of antibodies to the new coronavirus in the blood of someone who has recovered from COVID-19, the disease it causes.

“These tests may be important for guiding our next steps in the fight against this pandemic, such as by providing information on disease prevalence and the frequency of asymptomatic infection,” the FDA said.

It said the tests could also help identify potential donors of “convalescent plasma,” which involves using blood plasma from a recovered individual as therapy for an infected patient.

Alitalia Suspends Its Last Long-Haul Flight

MILAN (Reuters) - Alitalia said it will suspend its daily direct flight between Rome and New York from Tuesday until the end of May, cancelling its last long-haul connection still operating during the coronavirus crisis.

Alitalia, which is being nationalized following financial problems, said in a statement on Monday that the move was due to a marked slowdown in demand in the last 10 days of April and a worrying level of Covid-19 cases in New York.

FNTA - a federation of three Italian flight crew trade unions - said it opposed the suspension of the New York flight, arguing it would push passengers to fly with rival Air France (AIRF.PA) instead.

FNTA wrote on Monday to Alitalia’s top executives and Italy’s transport and industry ministers, outlining its opposition.

“We consider this decision to be absolutely inexplicable and unacceptable, both for commercial reasons and in general, because it deprives Italian



citizens of the only direct connection still existing between Italy and the United States and diverts passengers to Air France-KLM,” FNTA said in the letter seen by Reuters.

Alitalia’s state-appointed administrator Giuseppe Leogrande said last week that the carrier was operating around one tenth

of the 500 flights it ran every day before the coronavirus crisis.

He said the carrier had suffered a 95% fall in passenger revenue in the first three weeks of April, adding management was putting in place several measures to cut costs as the company prepared itself to be nationalized.

The Italian government has earmarked 500 million euros (\$546 million) for the carrier and plans to take full control of it in June.

Alitalia has endured 11 years of difficult private management and three failed restructuring attempts, problems exacerbated by the coronavirus crisis that has devastated the global airline industry.

Russia Raps...

FROM PAGE 1

The U.S. move has been widely condemned by both Iranian and world officials.

A few weeks ago, the European Union censured the United States for refusing to ease sanctions on the Islamic Republic and blocking the IMF loan to Iran to help it fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

The EU’s top diplomat says the U.S. rejected the bloc’s call to allow economic aid to reach Iran amid the coronavirus outbreak. Iran’s top security official said on April 25 that the U.S. blocking of Iran’s request for a loan from the IMF violates the rule governing right to health.

Iraq and End of...

FROM PAGE 1

His good relation with domestic political parties and neighboring states of Iraq and key regional players is of his positive point, showing his political maturity, which can settle some undecided issues in Iraq and the region.

Implementing the parliament’s approval of expulsion of the U.S. forces from Iraq is one of the conditions which has been set by the Shiite groups for his support which is strategically important and this demand undoubtedly is a national one from the new prime minister which is still a condition.

Some believe that former Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi was the best one for the resistance front and in the regional level but the current critical condition and deadly protests in Iraq and ultimately Shiite Jurisprudence’s demand led to his resignation which changed the situation.

However the coalition between majorities of resistance Shiite groups in Iraq reached a consensus on Al-Kadhimi and this decision in the current critical condition of the country and Iraqi people is considered as a positive and forward-moving action.

Since a couple of days ago, Americans have resorted to some wicked actions to weaken the position of Iraqi parliament which is considered as an open interference in administration of an independent country like Iraq.

They have begun a psych-war in the virtual space by frightening the people of the Daesh forces attacks. And on the eve of Iraqi parliament’s courageous action, American planes started air drills over Iraq space and it has been reported that they have disembarked some mercenary Daesh forces in some areas in Iraq or have armed them.

Iraq Interior Minister and Iraqi military commanders in their interviews assured the people about possible Daesh threats and claimed those attacks were just for weakening the parliament decision for pullout of the U.S. troops.

It seems aligned maturity of political parties in Iraq has been carefully planned to overcome the U.S. policies, and after five months of speculation and anticipation Iraq would achieve an admirable result.

Over 114,000 Prisoners...

FROM PAGE 1

Speaking at the 25th press conference, Gholam Hossein Esmaili said that more than 500 committees had been sent to investigate the situation of prisoners after the recent circular issued by the head of the judiciary.

He stated that in the last 15 days, these committees have examined all the cases of prisoners on leave in an accurate manner, and for each of them, the type of crime, the type of punishment, and the manner of their behavior have been assigned.

“Also, in order to eliminate imprisonment and implement a policy of reducing the population of criminals, more than 106,000 alternative sentences to imprisonment have been issued throughout the country last year,” the official highlighted.

Elsewhere, the spokesman of the Judiciary emphasized that the fight against economic corruption is our main priority and as long as there is corruption, the decisive and relentless fight against the corrupt will continue without any consideration, adding: “I announce the news about the fight against economic corruption in May this year.”

He stated: “Today, in the Special Court for addressing the causes of economic disruptors, 21 defendants accused of disrupting the country’s foreign exchange system, were put on trial.”

Esmaili said the defendants each operated in four groups, with a total of more than \$ 48 million in foreign currency bought and sold by the defendants.

Palestine to...

FROM PAGE 1

The Palestine Liberation Organization says it reserves the right “to withdraw from the interim agreement.”

Trump’s self-proclaimed “deal of the century,” crafted to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, also calls for the creation of a Palestinian state with limited control over its own security and borders.

The scheme — drawn up in close cooperation with the Netanyahu administration — bars Palestinian refugees from returning to their homeland while enshrines Jerusalem al-Quds as “Israel’s undivided capital” and allows the regime to annex settlements and the Jordan Valley.

A recent Israeli coalition government agreement reached between Netanyahu and his main rival, Benny Gantz, includes a framework for implementing the illegal annexations.

Apple, Google Ban Use of Location Tracking in Contact Tracing Apps

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Apple Inc and Alphabet Inc’s Google on Monday said they would ban the use of location tracking in apps that use a new contact tracing system the two are building to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Apple and Google, whose operating systems power 99% of smart phones, said last month they would work together to create a system for notifying people who have been near others who have tested positive for Covid-19, the disease sometimes caused by the coronavirus.

Both companies said that privacy and preventing governments from using the system to compile data on citizens was a primary goal. The system uses bluetooth signals from phones to detect encounters and does not use or store GPS location data.

But the developers of coronavirus-related apps in several U.S. states told Reuters last month that it was vital that they be allowed to use GPS location data in conjunction with the new contact tracing system in order to track how outbreaks move and identify hotspots. Apple and Google on Monday said they will not allow use of GPS data along with the contact tracing systems. That decision will require public health authorities who want to use GPS location data to rely on unstable workarounds to detect encounters using Bluetooth sensors.

Hossam Gets Life Ban For Match-Fixing

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Egyptian Youssef Hossam has been banned from tennis for life after being found guilty of multiple match-fixing and other corruption offences, the Tennis Integrity Unit (TIU) said on Monday.

A TIU investigation found that the 21-year-old had committed 21 breaches of anti-corruption rules between 2015 and 2019 and conspired with others to carry out a campaign of betting-related corruption at the lower levels of professional tennis.

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

Switchboard:
(+98) (21) 44253448
Public Relations Tel:
(+98)(21) 44253450
Editorial Board: 44253449
Public Relations Fax:
(+98)(21) 44253395
Advertising Department:
Tel/Fax: (+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234
Website:
http://www.irannewsdaily.com

E-Mail Address:
info@irannewsdaily.com
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Karius Ends Besiktas Contract

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Goalkeeper Loris Karius has terminated his contract with Turkish side Besiktas following a dispute over unpaid wages, the on-loan Liverpool goalkeeper said on Monday.

Liverpool loaned German Karius to Besiktas on a two-year deal in August 2018 after paying a world-record fee for a goalkeeper when they signed Brazilian Alisson. Karius, who was widely criticised for being at fault for two goals when Liverpool lost the 2018 Champions League final to Real Madrid, complained to world soccer's governing body FIFA last year that Besiktas had not paid him for several months.

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SPORTS

WEDNESDAY MAY 6, 2020

German League Hopes for Restart Go-Ahead

BERLIN (AFP) - Germany's football league insisted Monday the mass testing of players and backroom staff was "providing protection" after 10 cases of coronavirus across the top two divisions raised questions about whether it will get the green light to resume matches this month.

On Monday, the German Football League (DFL) reported that out of 1,724 tests, 10 had returned a positive result, three of which are already known to involve Bundesliga side Cologne.

"The tests carried out over the past few days have fulfilled their purpose of providing additional safety and thus protecting players as best as possible from infection during team training or matches," the DFL said in a statement.

The positive results, around 0.5 percent of the total, all came from the first batch of tests as the German league prepares to resume from the weekend of May 16 in empty stadiums and with strict hygiene measures. The league's plans to become the first major European football competition to restart since the season was halted in mid-March hinge on the regular testing of players.

The DFL did not specify which clubs the positive tests came from, but the individuals concerned have immediately been quarantined and the local health authorities informed.

The news of the positive tests comes as the league is hoping to get the green light to resume from Chancellor Angela Merkel's federal government on Wednesday.

According to the regulations in force in Germany, anyone who has been in contact with a positive case of coronavirus must observe a 14-day isolation period.

Horst Seehofer, Germany's interior minister who has responsibility for sport, has said he supports the plans for Bundesliga teams to finish its interrupted season.

However, on Monday Seehofer's ministry football would not be allowed to deviate from the rules for the wider population.

"Horst Seehofer stands by what he said -- anyone who has been in direct contact with a person who has tested positive must be quarantined for 14 days," interior ministry spokesman Steve Alter said.

"This is a principle that applies to the whole population and there is no reason why it should be any different for professional footballers."

The league's plans to resume state that clubs are able to continue training even if a squad member or coach tests positive for the coronavirus and is quarantined.

Germany's top clubs are desperate for the season to be completed by June 30 in order to claim a 300 million euros (\$325 million) instalment of money due from the league's television contract.

Thirteen of the 36 clubs in the top two leagues are reportedly under severe



financial pressure due to the pandemic.

Some politicians also want league games switched from pay-per-view broadcaster Sky to state channels to encourage fans to stay at home and not gather to watch matches in public places which have a subscription.

RB Leipzig, who were third in the table behind leaders Bayern Munich when the league halted, are planning to keep their squad in semi-quarantine on their training grounds should games resume.

They will "possibly spend the night here as well. This is still being discussed," Leipzig's German international defender Marcel Halstenberg told broadcaster MDR.

Not all players are following the strict hygiene measures.

In a video he posted to Facebook on Monday, former Chelsea striker Salomon Kalou greeted Hertha Berlin team-mates and staff with handshakes, breaking guidelines to avoid contact and earning the league's wrath.

"The pictures of Salomon Kalou from the Hertha dressing room are absolutely unacceptable," the DFL said.

The German league is aware that its plans are under scrutiny.

Anja Stahmann, chairwoman of German's state ministers for sport, called for "the greatest possible transparency" from the DFL.

She also added fuel to the debate about whether the league should resume.

"In public, people are rightly saying - 'why should football resume behind locked doors yet religious services are still banned?'," the Bremen-based politician told Deutschlandfunk radio.

"Why are the playgrounds closed, but millionaires are allowed to play football?"



Hertha Berlin Suspend Kalou Over Handshake Video

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bundesliga club Hertha Berlin have suspended forward Salomon Kalou after he posted video on Facebook which showed himself and team mates shaking hands and displaying a casual approach to COVID-19 guidelines.

The club also said in a statement that "this was the conduct of a single player" and denied that the squad do not take social distancing and hygiene rules seriously.

The Ivorian apologized for his behavior which the German Football League described on Twitter as "absolutely unacceptable" and which some media suggested could even hamper the Bundesliga's hopes of re-starting after the coronavirus outbreak.

The Bundesliga has been suspended since mid-March but is hoping to convince the government that it is safe to restart in the next few weeks. A decision is expected on Wednesday.

Hertha, which said that the film was made after the entire squad had tested negative for coronavirus, admitted that the video at one point showed players shaking hands while Kalou was also seen to interrupt a team mates' medical test.

"Salomon Kalou's video from the dressing-room violated basic team rules and showed behaviour that is neither appropriate to the situation nor in accordance with the club's rules of conduct," said the statement.

F1 Agrees \$145m Cap For Teams in 2021



LONDON (Reuters) - Formula One has agreed a \$145 million (116.73 million pounds) budget cap for teams next year and will continue to try and tighten that for future seasons, managing director Ross Brawn said on Monday.

The Briton also told Sky Sports television after a teleconference with teams and the governing FIA that a much fairer prize fund would feature in a new commercial agreement due by the end of this year.

"The budget cap initial objectives were a more competitive field and I think with the situation we have now the sustainability, the economic sustainability, of Formula One is a priority," said Brawn.

"That counts as much for the big teams as it does for the small teams."

Formula One's season has yet to start, with the first 10 races postponed or cancelled by the COVID-19 pandemic.

A major rewrite of the technical regulations has been delayed to 2022, with teams carrying over this year's cars to 2021.

The budget cap had been set initially at \$175 million but some teams had wanted a more drastic limit closer to \$100 million to ensure the sport survives the crisis.

Ferrari, the oldest and most successful constructor, had opposed any reduction below \$145 million.

The cap does not include drivers' salaries, with Britain's six times world champion Lewis Hamilton on an estimated \$35 million a year at Mercedes.

"The message is clear we've got to cut costs," said Brawn.

"We started at \$175 (million), that was a long battle to get it there, and with the current crisis we are now going to start at 145 and the discussion really is how much further down we can drive the next few years."

Brawn said the new-look cars would definitely be coming for 2022, despite some teams pushing for another year's delay.

India Bowler Shami Considered Suicide Before Comeback

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India fast bowler Mohammed Shami has revealed how he thought of committing suicide while struggling with personal problems before making a spectacular comeback to the national side.

Shami battled weight issues, injury and a legal quarrel with his estranged wife before a stellar performance at the World Cup last year re-established the 29-year-old as a key player.

With cricket and sports halted in the coronavirus lockdown, Shami opened up about his own and his family's fears to teammate Rohit Sharma during an exchange on Instagram.

"I think if my family had not supported me back then I would have lost my cricket. I thought of committing suicide three times during that period due to severe stress," said Shami.

"I was not thinking about cricket at all. We were living on the 24th floor. They were scared I might jump from the balcony." Shami's contract with the Board of Control for Cricket in India was withheld in 2018 because of allegations of domestic violence, only to be reinstated later.

The bowler also struggled with injury that saw him spend nearly a year on the sidelines, leading to weight gain. He said his family and friends helped him bounce back. "My two or three friends used to stay with me for 24 hours (during my days of depression). My parents asked me to focus on cricket to recover from that phase and not think about anything else," he said.



Lloris Wants Premier League Title Settled On the Pitch

LONDON (Dispatches) - Hugo Lloris believes that ending the English Premier League season without declaring Liverpool champions would be "cruel", but the Tottenham captain wants the final table decided on the field.

The goalkeeper is following the English social isolation rules at home with his family in London, helping his two oldest daughters with their homework while trying to stay fit in case the season restarts.

"We're in a situation where everyone wants to finish and get the verdict from the pitch," Lloris told French sports daily L'Equipe. "It would be terrible if it all ended like that with nine or 10 games to go in the Premier League."

"We're coming into the most exciting, beautiful time of the season. Nobody wants it to end like this." Liverpool lead the table by 25 points.

"It would be cruel for Liverpool with the lead they have. They're practically champions. There would be a taste of the unfinished business."

The France captain says that resuming the Premier League without fans will be strange. "It'll be weird wherever it happens. Football is not a closed-door sport," he said. "Without spectators, it's not the same sport. That's not how I see football. 'We're here to bond, to share our emotions. We all want full stadiums, with atmosphere, fans, colour and song.'"

