

Iran's Minister of Economy Said On Thursday That the Trade of the Country Has Not Changed Much Over Past Two Years Despite the U.S. Most Complex and Most Oppressive Sanctions

IRAN NEWS

Deputy Interior Minister for Security Affairs in a Phone Conversation With His Turkish Counterpart Late On Thursday Reviewed Latest Developments on Combating Coronavirus in Both Countries

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1,556 New Cases Infected With COVID-19 in Iran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN- Health Ministry has confirmed 1,556 new cases of infection with the novel coronavirus, increasing the total number of cases to 104,691.

Speaking on Friday, the Ministry's spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said 55 people have died of the virus in the past 24 hours, bringing the total number of fatalities to 6,541.

Jahanpour said 83,837 patients have so far recovered from the disease, and been discharged from hospital.

2,711 patients are also in severe conditions of the disease, he added.

Jahanpour noted that 558,899 COVID-19 tests have been taken across the country.

Meanwhile Head of Food and Medicine Administration (FDA) said Iran which is grappling with sanctions has not only met its own needs but also is exporting the medical equipment to other countries.

In response to question, Mohamad-Reza Shanesaz in a live presser on Friday stated that Iran which has been grappling with crippling sanctions even to supply masks under the world's silence has not only met its own needs but also now in a position to export. It's all due to people's cooperation in the mask production and some companies changed their production lines for mass production of masks, gowns, and other items necessary in combating corona.

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Iran Reportedly Hunts for Grains

DUBAI (Reuters) - Iran is scrambling to buy millions of tons of wheat, corn and soybeans to shore up its reserves, Iranian officials and traders said, despite President Hassan Rouhani's assertions that the coronavirus would not endanger food supplies to the Middle Eastern country worst hit by the pandemic.

Iran's bumper grain crops will guarantee citizens ample staple foods to the end of the Iranian year in March 2021 as the impact of the pandemic has not spread to farming, Rouhani told parliament in a televised address on the state of the coronavirus crisis on April 15.

But the previously unreported buying spree highlights concern in Tehran of a possible future supply crunch should the pandemic further exacerbate an already challenging environment for Iran to import from international sellers.

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U.S. Not in a Position to Comment on Iran Nuclear Deal



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN- Iran says the United States must stop seeking to secure its short-term interests at the cost of other nations' long-term prosperity.

"JCPOA is neither the first nor the last of the multilateral achievements Trump withdrew from," said Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi in a tweet on Friday, referring by acronym to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers, from which U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew in 2018.

"The U.S. regime has sought to secure its short-term interests at the cost of nations' long-term prosperity," Mousavi added.

"The regime must END its abject unilateralism," he said, adding that the "irresponsible" U.S. can never be trusted.

As part of the JCPOA, the UN arms embargo on Iran — in place since 2006/2007- are to be lifted in October 2020 — five years after the JCPOA took effect.

With the date looming, the U.S. has shared with some members of the Security Council a draft resolution to prolong the arms embargo indefinitely.

To circumvent China and Russia's veto of the resolution, which are both parties to the JCPOA, the US will argue that it legally remains a "participant state" in the deal only to invoke a "snapback" that would restore the UN sanctions, which had been in place against Iran prior to the JCPOA's inking.

Meanwhile, a former Iranian diplomat believes the U.S. bid to "return" to the JCPOA is part of a wider plot to extend its pressure on the Islamic Republic after the failure of its "maximum pressure" policy.

Abolfazl Zohrehvand, a former Iranian ambassador to Italy and Afghanistan, says the US' withdrawal from the nuclear deal caused troubles for them despite their earlier assumption.

"Now the Americans seek to re-enter the JCPOA to create a fresh round of pressure, and are in fact seeking to use the JCPOA capacities to further arms sanctions on the Islamic Republic," he said in a Friday radio interview.

Meanwhile the U.S. Senate failed Thursday to override President Trump's veto of a war powers resolution limiting his authority to use military force in Iran. The vote was 49 to 45.

Mr. Trump vetoed the bill Wednesday night, calling it a "very insulting resolution" that Democrats had introduced "as part of a strategy to win an election on November 3 by dividing the Republican Party."

The bill, sponsored by Democratic Senator Tim Kaine, passed on a bipartisan basis in the Senate in February, and later passed in the House in March.

However, the Senate needed a two-thirds majority to override the president's veto. When it voted on the resolution in February, it passed 55 to 45, with eight Republicans joining all Democrats to approve it.

The resolution came after the U.S. assassinated Iranian general Qassem Soleimani, leading to escalating tensions between the U.S. and Iran. It demanded the removal of U.S. Armed Forces from hostilities against Iran within 30 days unless their engagement was approved by Congress.

Democrats and Republicans expressed concerns after Mr. Trump ordered the strike on Martyr Soleimani without congressional approval, leading Iran to retaliate by targeting American bases in Iraq, where dozens of American soldiers were injured. Iran also mistakenly hit a Ukrainian passenger plane, leading to the deaths of nearly 200 people.

U.S. Pulling Patriot Missiles From Saudi Oil Facilities

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The United States is pulling its Patriot missile systems from Saudi soil as part of broader curbs on its military support for the Arab kingdom, a report says.

Citing unnamed U.S. officials, The Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday that four Patriot surface-to-air missile batteries and dozens of military personnel will be removed from Saudi oil facilities.

The officials said the U.S. will also reduce its Navy presence in the Persian Gulf soon, adding that two jet fighter squadrons have already left the region.

The U.S. intensified its military presence in the region last year amid growing tensions with Iran. Part of the military hardware was deployed in September last year after a series of attacks on Saudi oil facilities.

The developments come over two week after President Donald Trump said his administration will review a proposal to block Saudi crude oil shipments to the US to try to save its struggling shale industry suffering from an unprecedented slump in demand and prices due to the novel coronavirus, and as fuel storage runs short.

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ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

New York, the Capital City of Coronavirus

The media disputes among state governors of the U.S. in facing with the management of the U.S. President Donald Trump in the White House in his ways of dealing with the Coronavirus crisis in New York and Washington are totally different.

In the past five decades, the U.S. economy has been deeply rooted in New York and today, that very economy has inflicted the most damages on the West's economy after the outbreak of the Coronavirus. Just some two weeks ago, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its report forecasted that the U.S. economy would shrink by 6% in 2020. In other words, the U.S. inevitably would withdraw the dominance of its national currency dollar in the world. In the IMF report, it has also been noted that European Union economy would also shrink by 7.5 percent and actually the West, in a deep and serious challenge with the Coronavirus, will be in economic decline, and New York is the capital of this challenge and decline.

The IMF report also forecasted that China's economic growth will be one percent in 2020. It means the gap between economic growths of China and both Europe and the U.S. will be some 8 percent in just one year. It actually means that the hub of bourses and banking sector of the Wall Street have turned into the capital city of the Coronavirus in the world and this stunning pandemic can push all the West into an economic abyss.

This concern has also forced French President Emmanuel Macron to outspokenly say that in upcoming months it would be determined whether EU as a big economic and political project would collapse or it would challenge with the crisis to overcome it.

The concern about the collapse in New York is several times more than Europe but it has not become media headlines. Of course this concern can be seen apparently in the faces of American people and the U.S. media anchors.

Last week acclaimed American actor Robert De Niro in one of the most popular programs, The Late Show, launched a scathing attack on the performance of Trump's Administration and mostly the White House regarding the management of the Coronavirus crisis. In his video interview and during his chat with the program's anchor Stephen Colbert, he shared his COVID-19 experience and what he did in the lockdown phase and his dissatisfaction with the government's services regarding the virus. De Niro reports that he doesn't watch a whole lot of movies anymore, but he's glued to the news. And these days, who isn't? It feels like it's been up-to-the-minute news updates for four non-stop years — and even more so now. He added it's a lot of reading scripts, a bit of working out and "trying to stay alive." The Irishman' actor also explained that he has been lifting weights "to keep bone mass strong" and doing a lot of cardio and other routine exercises such as using a treadmill to be ready for his next which will be a Coronavirus-themed movie where he is to play the role current New York governor Andrew Cuomo.

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U.S. Extends Iran Sanctions Waiver for New Iraqi Gov't

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq has succeeded forming a government after months of instability, and the United States welcomed the move by extending a waiver on Iran sanctions to ease pressure on the new leader.

In a phone call with the new Prime Minister Mustafa Kadhemi, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo congratulated him on taking office and discussed "working together to provide the Iraqi people the prosperity and security they deserve," the State Department said.

The appointment of a new government in Iraq was a complicated affair as the United States and Iran both have close relations with the country. Pompeo said that United States would not enforce sanctions on Iraq buying electricity and natural gas from Iran for 120 days "as a display of our desire to help provide the right conditions for success," a statement said.

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Iran Dismisses Fake News On Afghan Illegal Immigrants

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi categorically dismissed some untrue reports that a number of Afghan nationals had been forced by Iranian border guards to return to Afghanistan via Harirood River and suffered an accident.

Asked about continued media hypes created in the media run by petrodollars on the incident which occurred for some Afghan citizens in the border region with Iran, he said, "We strongly reject the reports that

a number of Afghan nationals have been forced by Iranian border guards to return home crossing the Harirood River."

Despite the irrelevance of the issue to Iran and given the request of the Afghan authorities, the ministry, due to fraternal relations based on the principles of goodwill and good neighborliness between the two countries, in an official note to the Embassy of Afghanistan in Tehran voiced readiness to cooperate with the Afghan side to investigate the allegations, Mousavi said.

Tehran Raps Washington Pursuing Political Objectives

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Hassan Rouhani has lashed out at the U.S. government for its excessive demands and for pursuing political objectives even amid the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic by following the policy of pressures and sanctions.

President Rouhani and his Uzbek counterpart Shavkat Mirziyoyev in a telephone conversation on Wednesday hailed the friendly and growing ties between Iran and Uzbekistan, and called for closer interaction between the two countries' officials to promote and strengthen relations in all fields.

The two presidents also congratulated each other on the start of the Muslim month of Ramadan, and expressed hope that all nations would join hands to overcome the existing challenges.

The Iranian and Uzbek presidents then pointed to the difficulties and problems that the coronavirus outbreak has created in the majority of countries in the world, calling for the promotion of cooperation and rapport between the nations and governments in the battle with the disease.

Discussing the status of bilateral relations and cooperation between Tehran and Tashkent in various arenas, President Rouhani and President Mirziyoyev agreed that the two countries would expand ties in various fields, broaden mutual banking cooperation, facilitate the visa application process for the business people, and restore the economic and trade ties to the previous level in conformity with the health protocols.



The Iranian president touched on Iran's success in the course of efforts to contain the coronavirus and the production of homegrown medical supplies, such as the diagnostic test kits and ventilators, noting, "The Islamic Republic of Iran is prepared to share its experiences and satisfy Uzbekistan's demands in the fight against the coronavirus."

President Rouhani also took a swipe at Washington for its hostile policies, adding, "Unfortunately, certain governments with excessive demands, above all the U.S., are pursuing their political objectives and imposing pressures and sanctions on the (other) countries and nations even under the current conditions, while we must stand against them."

President of Uzbekistan, for his part, admired Iran's success and measures in the fight against the novel coronavirus, stressing, "The Islamic Republic of Iran has a special position in the region, and we attach great significance to the promotion of relations with this country (Iran)."

Azerbaijan Urges U.S. To Lift Sanctions on Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - Azerbaijan Republic Ambassador to Tehran Bunyad Huseynov announced that the head of Azerbaijani Muslims, Jews, and Christian representatives had urged the United States to lift sanctions on Iran.

He added that Azerbaijan recorded 1,800 coronavirus cases since the epidemic began, of whom 22 have died. People over 65 are not allowed to leave home and the rest are required to have permissions," Azerbaijani ambassador stated.

Bunyad Huseynov referred to the cruel US sanctions, saying: "The head of Azerbaijani Muslims, Jews, and Christian representatives have sent a letter to the United States' President Donald Trump, urging him to lift sanctions on Iran."

He stated that the Republic of Azerbaijan has continued its economic ties with neighboring countries like Iran and Russia via transition amid coronavirus concerns, saying: "Lorries and their drivers are checked and escorted by the police from Iran border to Russia even Azerbaijan."

He also emphasized that the Azeri government has made efforts to contain coronavirus with banning flights and closure of educational departments.

Azerbaijani ambassador described the action of Iran's medical section as 'remarkable' and 'outstanding' to fight against the deadly coronavirus, adding: "All governments are obliged to extend their cooperation. Azerbaijan allocated \$5 million of humanitarian aid to Iran on March 14th to combat the coronavirus outbreak."

Pointing to the historical, cultural, and literature commonalities between the two countries, Bunyad Huseynov said: "Virtual libraries can provide services to meet people's needs during the COVID-19 shutdown."

Iran Congratulates Iraq on Formation of New Gov't

TEHRAN (IFP)- Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has congratulated the Iraqi prime minister and the people of the Arab country on the formation of a new government.

"Congratulations to Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, his Cabinet, the Parliament and most importantly the people of Iraq for success in forming a new Government," Zarif tweeted Thursday.

"Iran always stands with the Iraqi people and their choice of administration," he added.

On Wednesday, the Iraqi parliament approved the government of Prime Minister al-Kadhimi, ending six months of political deadlock in the Arab country.

In their session, the lawmakers gave votes of confidence to Kadhimi's picks for the ministries of interior, defense, finance, and electricity.

However, several ministerial candidates failed to get the lawmakers' approval, meaning Kadhimi will begin his term without a full government.

The parliamentarians rejected the incoming premier's picks for justice, agriculture and trade ministries.

Tehran, Vienna Slam U.S. Sanctions on Tehran

TEHRAN (IFP) - President Hassan Rouhani and his Austrian counterpart have slammed the sanction imposed on the Islamic Republic by the United States as the coronavirus still is taking toll on people.

President Rouhani said the U.S. keeps cruel sanctions on Iran's pharmaceutical and medical needs, despite the current difficult conditions to combat COVID-19.

In a phone call with Alexander Van der Bellen on Wednesday he reiterated that the U.S. government was even strongly against Iran's borrowing money from the International Monetary Fund to fight the virus.

"We believe the European Union should take more serious action in the current situation regrading its commitments to international issues and the JCPOA."

He further noted Europe's efforts to counter this pandemic and to help countries as well as ending unlawful sanctions are important, "and I hope we will see a new movement and initiative on the part of Europe."

Rouhani stressed that in the current context of the global outbreak of corona, all efforts should be focused on lifting sanctions and resolving disputes as well as ending wars and conflicts.

"The Islamic Republic seeks peace and stability in the region and expects Europe to put pressure on the Zionist regime not to allow to continue its attacks on Syria and Lebanon, and its siege of Gaza Strip without paying attention to the global pandemic," added Rouhani.

In turn, Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen touched upon his country's interest in developing cooperation with Iran as well as Vienna's readiness to transfer experiences in the fight against COVID-19.

He said Austria and the European Union oppose U.S. sanctions on Iran and will continue their cooperation with Tehran.

The Austrian president further stressed that the US move contradicts international treaties and is against international law. "We are trying to improve relations between Iran and Europe without being influenced by the United States," underscored Van der Bellen.

The two presidents also stressed the need to boost the INSTEX mechanism.

In the end, the Presidents of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Austria put stress on the need for comprehensive international cooperation to combat a pandemic, expressing readiness to share experiences in dealing with the disease and develop their joint cooperation in this regard.

Iran Takes Delivery of Medical Supplies From France

ORUMIYEH (IRNA) - Iran took delivery of about 10 tons medical supplies bought from France through Sarisu cross border market in northwestern country.

Director of Bazargan Customs office Sadeq Namdar said that it is the seventh medical cargo delivered to Iran through northwestern Iranian border market.

The medical cargo includes antiserum, lab tools and medical equipment, Namdar said.

He added that the latest medical cargo worth about 5.2 million euros.

Meanwhile, he said that the first medical cargo Iran bought was from Germany, the weight of the cargo was 26 tons delivered to the country 35 days ago via Sarisu border market.

Iran like other world countries has been fighting against the deadly coronavirus which has killed over 260,000 people across the world, more than 6,300 in Iran.

5.1-Magnitude Quake Jolts Tehran, Sparking Panic

TEHRAN (IFP) - A magnitude 5.1 earthquake hit northern Iran on Thursday night, the Tasnim news agency reported. The earthquake jolted the capital shortly, causing panicked residents to flee buildings for the safety of the streets, AFP journalists reported.

The quake struck the Iranian capital at around 00:45 am (2015 GMT) and lasted several seconds, the AFP journalists reported. The website of the Tehran University Seismological Centre was inaccessible.

However, according to the Twitter account of the EMSC earthquake monitoring service, it was 4.8 magnitude and its epicenter was 55 kilometers (34 miles) east of the capital.

Residents exited buildings and took to the streets in accordance with safety measures.

As of around 1:30 am, there was no immediate information on casualties or damage from the quake but Tasnim noted that the quake, which hit on the border of Tehran and Mazandaran province, was felt in the capital.

Iran Ready to Meet Tajikistan's Demand for Coronavirus-Related Products

TEHRAN (IFP) - President of Iran Hassan Rouhani has expressed the Islamic Republic's readiness to offer whatever help it can to the friendly and brotherly nation of Tajikistan in the fight against the novel coronavirus by providing testing kits and other medical equipment.

In a telephone conversation, President Rouhani and his Tajik counterpart Emomali Rahmon hailed the historical, religious and cultural commonalities as well as the friendly and brotherly relations between the two nations, and stressed the need to promote cooperation between Tehran and Dushanbe.

The two presidents also congratulated each other on the beginning of the holy Muslim month of Ramadan and discussed the latest status of the ties and cooperation between the two countries in various fields.

On the outbreak of the coronavirus infection and the difficulties caused by the pandemic in nearly all countries in the world, President Rouhani and his Tajik counterpart emphasized the necessity for close interaction between the

officials of the two states in order to promote cooperation and share the experiences in the battle with the virus.

The two presidents also stressed the need for the Iranian and Tajik authorities to step up efforts to restore the economic and trade ties between two sides to the previous level in full compliance with the health instructions, adding, "The nations and governments of Iran and Tajikistan have always stood by each other and will continue to do so."

In the conversation, President Rouhani highlighted Iran's success in producing the coronavirus diagnostic test kits and other medical supplies for the battle with the infectious disease, stressing, "We are prepared to fulfill the needs of Tajikistan, as a friend and brother, in this field to the extent we can."

For his part, President Rahmon lauded Iran's success in the fight against COVID-19 and the Iranian government's wise handling of the situation, noting, "Further enhancement of relations and cooperation with Iran is a key policy of Tajikistan in foreign interaction."

Zarif, His Uzbek Counterpart Review Developments in Afghanistan

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his Uzbek counterpart Abdulaziz Kamilov held talks over the phone Thursday on bilateral relations, issue of coronavirus and developments in Afghanistan.

During his telephone conversation, Zarif also expressed sympathy with the Uzbek flood-stricken people. The two foreign ministers also reviewed cooperation on the area of transportation as well as ways to contain coronavirus pandemic.

The deadly coronavirus radiating from Wuhan, China, in December 2019 has affected over 3,820,000 people across the world and killed over 265,000 people; while in Iran the number of the dead is over 6,300.

Two Terrorist Groups Dismantled

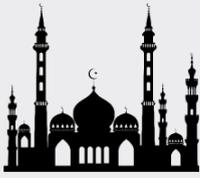
TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Intelligence Ministry says it has dismantled two terrorist groups in the west and northwest of the country and confiscated a cache of arms from them.

The public relations and information department of the ministry said that it managed to monitor and destroy two terrorist outfits affiliated with separatist groups, who had crossed into the country from neighboring areas to carry out acts of terrorism. According to the ministry, 16 members of the terrorist groups were arrested while two Kalashnikov assault rifles, a pistol, two grenades, seven magazines and 240 cartridges along with explosive devices were confiscated from them.

The ringleader is supported by one of the regional Arab reactionary countries, and is based in Europe, the report added, noting that some of the arrested terrorists were also involved in the assassination of defenseless people and extortion from manufacturers and traders in the west of the country.

A number of terrorists were also killed as forces with Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) carried out a security operation in the western province of Kordestan, which borders Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region.

Iran's IRGC forces kill a number of 'counter-revolutionary' terrorists in Divandareh County of the western province of Kordestan.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:00
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:17
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:26
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:02

18. They will say: "Glory to Thee! not meet was it for us that we should take for protectors others besides Thee: But Thou didst bestow, on them and their fathers, good things (in life), until they forgot the Message: for they were a people (worthless and) lost." Surah 25. The Criterion, The Standard (18)

Mineral Extraction to Reach 500m Tons

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade said the knowledge required in mining industry has been localized, adding that the extraction of minerals will reach to 500 million tons from 470 million tons in the past years.

Reza Rahmani said good investment has been done in mine industries such as aluminum, iron, and copper which are produced three times more than the country's consumption.

Iranian Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade who attended the inauguration ceremony of copper production projects in Kerman, southeast Iran, on Thursday stressed the domestic production in the field noting that copper reserves discovery has been tripled.

Rahmani said currently 64 types of minerals has been identified in Iran, noting that Iran is among the top 10 countries in mining industry.

"Our country has taken the mining industry program seriously with the emphasis of the Leader of Islamic Revolution and the government, and last year's explorations have been as large as the country's total explorations so far, which shows the country's mining position will flourish," he noted.

He referred to the decrease in selling mineral raw material and attributed it to the adoption of appropriate regulation, which has led to the production of products with high added value.

Announcing that exploration is a priority in the mining sector for the current year, the minister said the large projects this year will lead to employment for more than 10,000 people.

He added that last year over 470m tons of minerals were extracted in the country and this year the ministry is determined to increase the figure to over 500m tons, adding that 35 percent of extractions account for metals.



Rahmani noted that some big actions have been taken and this year the country will see a revolution in privatizing the mines.

On Thursday, President Hassan Rouhani inaugurated four big projects of copper industry in Kerman province.

The inauguration ceremony was held through a video conference from Tehran. Some 252 million euros investments have been made on the project of Khatoon Abad copper smelting complex and three other projects in Kerman province.

The president noted that reducing fossil fuel consumption, making use of modern technologies and boosting production are the advantages of the project.

During the ceremony President Rouhani stated that inauguration of landmark national projects in the country is a strong response to the global arrogance by Iranian workers, entrepreneurs and officials.

Iran completes national projects despite the sanctions, President Rouhani said at an inauguration ceremony on four major projects on copper industry in southern Iranian province of Kerman.

Despite the U.S. sanctions, Iran creates job opportunities and exports its products, the president added. There is no way but production to meet the country's needs in the sanctions era, and also in the critical situation that the country is fighting against the deadly coronavirus since late February, Rouhani said.

Iran to Produce 400,000 Tons Copper Annually

KERMAN (RNA) - Iran will produce 400,000 tons copper a year with four big national projects on copper industries inaugurated by President Hassan Rouhani in Kerman province on Thursday.

Managing Director of National Iranian Copper Industries Co (NICICO) Ardeshir Saad-Mohammadi made the remarks in his statement to the opening ceremony of industrial projects in Kerman province.

During his speech, the official hoped the national capacity to produce copper will reach 550,000 tons a year within next four years.

NICICO has planned to move in line with global economy in order to have a share in world market as the Iranian copper has fine quality and is well known worldwide, the official underlined.

NICICO, founded in July 1972, introduces itself as a company which encompasses all operations of copper mines in the country. The functions of this company include among others: To extract and operate mines of copper; to produce high grade products of ore and copper products such as cathode, slab, billet, and 8-mm wires.



Iranian Oil Rich Province Has \$11b Non-Oil Exports

AHVAZ (IRNA) - A provincial official of Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade of Iran in Khuzestan Province said on Wednesday that the province had \$11 billion of non-oil exports in the last Iranian year (ended on March 19, 2020).

Abdollah Naserian said that amount shows a 36% increase in value and 4% rise in weight compared to the previous year.

Naserian said that the target amount has been \$9.3 billion dollars, which the actual export shows \$1.7 billion more than that.

He added that \$9 billion dollars of goods have been exported to Iraq.

NIDC Builds Acidification Batch Mixer

TEHRAN (Shana) - The National Iranian Drilling Company has manufactured an acidification batch mixer by relying on local experts.

The mixer is developed with a shell resistant to acid and chemicals, said Ali Asghar Shokouhi Toroghi, head of the evaluation and monitoring of well experiments, stimulation and completion at the Exploration Department of the National Iranian Oil Company.

He said the item was needed for acidification, lifting and coiled tubing operations of the Exploration Department in the Persian Gulf which needed to be manufactured domestically.

Due to the obligation to supply this device according to the contract, the supply or manufacturing strategies of the device were discussed in numerous meetings of this department with the executives of the National Drilling Company and finally, due to limited resources and urgency of the matter, the National Iranian Drilling Company decided to build this device by relying on domestic capabilities, he said.

Shokouhi Toroghi added that the device was prepared by the experts of the National Iranian Drilling Company with the support, supervision, and periodic visits of the NIOC Exploration Department within 50 days. It has also been successfully tested in well operations at Forouzan field.



Kurdistan Accommodates Over 40% of Iran Exports to Iraq

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran says a significant portion of its exports to the neighboring Iraq is handled via the borders to the Arab country's semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan.

A spokesman of Iran's customs office said that borders to the Iraqi Kurdistan were responsible for some 42 percent of the value and 31 percent of the volume of Iran's exports to Iraq over the last calendar year.

Seyyed Rouhollah Latifi said that the total Iranian exports of goods to the Kurdistan Region amounted to 8.103 million metric tons worth \$3.768 billion over the 12-month period ending March 19.

Iraq was only second to China in Iran's list of top export destinations in the last calendar year as the country imported a total 25.688 million ton of Iranian goods and products worth \$8.99 billion, according to recent figures published by Iran's customs office.

Exports to Iraq have become a major source of earning hard currency for Iran at a time the country is grappling with a series of American sanctions that have affected its normal oil revenues.

The main gateway for exports to the Iraqi Kurdistan region is the Parvizkhan crossing, located to the north of the city of Qasr Shirin in the Iranian province of Kermanshah, through which some \$1.4 billion worth of Iranian export shipments passed over the last calendar year.

Bashmaq and Tamarchin are other major trade gateways between Iran and the Kurdish region while local border markets set up is several locations have helped boost exchanges across the Iran-Iraqi border.

Latifi said border crossings to the Iraqi Kurdistan region had remained open for the past weeks despite a coronavirus pandemic that forced closures in other areas across the borders.

Iranian exports through the crossings from March 19 to April 20, 2020 reached 870,000 tons worth \$259 million, he said.

EDBI Calls for Revision in Roadmap on Developing Exports

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of Export Development Bank of Iran has called for more attention to financing exports and facilitating the key role of EXIM Bank of the country in the country's roadmap for developing exports.

Reacting to the publication of the first copy of roadmap for developing exports in the country, Dr. Ali Akbar Salehabadi, in a letter to the head of Institute for Trade Studies and Research Dr. Marjan Faqih Nansiri, hailed the efforts of those who have compiled the roadmap for exports to ease woes in way of exports. In his letter, he also added that transparency for the current situation of the exports, presenting an analysis from the current situation, attitude towards opportunities and threats, and above all, defining the general policy and creating a general view for all related bodies are of the strong points of the roadmap.

Dr. Salehabadi in the letter said that EDBI, as one of the main arms of supporting exports in the country, has had positive attitude towards the roadmap but he reiterated that some topics in the roadmap need revision and more attention.



He also called for transparency in the role of EDBI as the EXIM Bank of Iran in the roadmap. Salehabadi also called for transparency in some executive mechanisms for real function of regional and international agreements.

He also called for revision and attention to the role of some effective bodies in exports affairs like the role of EDBI for facilitating exports and playing its important role for surge in the exports.

Salehabadi also pointed to the role of EDBI in developing national exports, adding that the bank for over 25 years as the EXIM Bank of the country and the arm of the government in exports affairs has played an important role in financing exports and resolving issues related with banking and financial problems during the sanctions era while today in the global economy, EXIM banks have been turned into an important tool for governments to materialize their exports developmental goals.

He also called for increasing the capital of EDBI in accordance with goals and missions of the bank in the current situation dominating the exports. He also called for inclusion of new items in the roadmap like a supervisory and executive body and changing some regulations of the bank in order ease supporting the exports.

Health Sector Gets Another \$260m in Rescue Over Pandemic

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The government has earmarked some \$260 million to the country's health sector in a fresh attempt to help hospitals and care homes cope with the new coronavirus pandemic.

Iranian deputy president for budgeting said that the new lifeline had been made possible by drawing from Iran's sovereign wealth fund. Mohammad Bagher Nobakht said that the money will be spent by Iran's health ministry on purchase of drugs, diagnostic tools and medical equipment needed in hospitals to treat patients suffering from COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus.

Nobakht said around a third of the rescue package, some 15 trillion rials, will be earmarked to hospitals that are exclusively treating the COVID-19 patients.

The official said another 3 trillion rials will go to bonuses for health care staff confronting the pandemic in Iran. Nobakht said the government had also used a first installment of the \$1-billion rescue package provided by National Development Fund of Iran to pay for benefits to workers who had lost their jobs because of the pandemic.

He said government's aid to benefit funds to help them cope with the impacts of the pandemic would amount to 15 trillion rials with another payment that is planned for next week. Iran has been able to fund various schemes to fight the COVID-19 pandemic despite a series of American sanctions that have strained government finances.

India Sends First Wheat Shipment to Afghanistan Through Chabahar Port

CHBAHAR (IRNA) - India has sent its first wheat consignment weighing 5,000 tons to Afghanistan through Chabahar Port, managing director of Sistan and Baluchestan Ports and Maritime Department said on Thursday.

Behrouz Aqaei said that efforts have been made for sending the consignment continuously and in short time to Afghanistan. He added that the shipment is supposed to be sent through Chabahar Port.

The first part of humanitarian aid consignment of India to people of Afghanistan was also sent through Chabahar Port on April 15. He noted that the consignment including 203 containers entered Chabahar Port and was immediately loaded by modern equipment.

Earlier, Managing Director of Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment Zaman Hashemi in a meeting with Iranian commercial attaché in Kabul Mohammad Mehdi Javanmard Ghassab said that a dried fruit consignment will be sent from Afghanistan to India through Chabahar Port soon and called for Iran's cooperation for transiting the shipment.

Exports to Iraq Resume Via Parviz Khan Border Post

QASR-E SHIRIN (Dispatches) - Exports to Iraq via Parviz Khan border post on northwestern Iran resumed after one day industrial action by the Iraqi drivers, Governor of Qasr-e Shirin, Morad Ali Tatar, said on Thursday.

Morad Ali Tatar said that border trade and movement of cargo trucks are underway via Parviz Khan border post with Iraq.

Iraqi drivers went on strike to protest an Iraqi law that make them pay insurance fee for possible compensatory damages may occur on cargoes in the process of shipment by the trucks, the governor said.

The strike was due to internal problems in Iraq and had nothing to do with the Islamic Republic of Iran, Tatar noted.

About 54 percent of Iran's non-oil products are being exported to Iraq via Parviz Khan border post, a major land route for trade.

Syria Postpones Election For Second Time Over Virus

DAMASCUS (AFP) - Syria postponed a parliamentary election for a second time Thursday as part of measures to protect the war-battered country from the coronavirus pandemic.

The Syrian government has recorded 44 cases, including three deaths in areas under its control, while the Kurdish administration in northeastern Syria has reported three cases, including one death.

The president's office said on its official social media accounts that the vote will be pushed back to July 19, from the scheduled date of May 20 as "part of preventive measures" to combat the virus. The polls, to be held across government-run areas, are the third since the start nine years ago of a conflict that has killed at least 384,000 people.



Turkey, Russia Hold 9th Joint Patrol in Idlib, Syria

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish and Russian troops have carried out the ninth joint patrol along a key highway in Idlib, northwestern Syria, Turkey's National Defense Ministry said Thursday.

"Within the framework of TUR-RF Agreement/Protocol, the 9th TUR-RF Combined Land Patrol on M-4 Highway in Idlib was conducted with the participation of land and air elements," the ministry said on Twitter. The M4 highway, also known as the Aleppo-Al Hasakah road, is about 30 kilometers (19 miles) from Turkey's southern border.

The eighth joint patrol was conducted on Tuesday.



Iraq Gets New Gov't Amid Crises



BAGHDAD (AFP) - Mustafa Kadhim al-Jafari took office as Iraq's premier early Thursday after breaking months of political deadlock, taking the reins amid a staggering economic crisis, a health pandemic and the spectre of renewed protests.

Observing social distancing to curb the spread of the coronavirus, lawmakers gathered at parliament in masks and gloves around 9:00 pm local time, but the vote was delayed for hours to make last-minute edits to ministerial posts.

Kadhemi soon received a congratulatory call from U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who announced a 120-day waiver extension on U.S. sanctions to let Iraq buy gas from neighboring Iran.

Kadhemi's nomination came after weeks of lobbying deeply divided political parties, including those close to neighbouring Iran who had been wary of his ties to the United States.

One hardline faction had accused Kadhemi of conspiring with Washington over the January drone strike that killed Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and Iraqi commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis outside Baghdad airport.

MPs approved 15 ministers out of a prospective 22-seat cabinet, with seven ministries -- including the key oil and foreign affairs positions -- still empty as political parties squabble over shares.

Kadhemi, the 53-year-old former head of the respected National Intelligence Service (INIS), was nominated by President Barham Saleh on April 9 -- the third attempt to replace outgoing premier Adel Abdel Mahdi.

Abdel Mahdi, 77, resigned late last year following months of protests decrying rampant corruption, unemployment and a political class seen as beholden to neighbouring Iran.

He became the first premier to step down since the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein, but stayed on as caretaker PM in the absence of a successor.

The new PM appeared to have brought Iran-aligned factions on board, with endorsements from both Martyr Soleimani's successor as Quds Force chief Ismail Qaani, and from Mohammed Kawtharani, the pointman on Iraqi affairs for powerful Iran-backed Lebanese movement Hezbollah.

The ministers who were approved included those for the sensitive portfolios of finance, interior, defence, health and electricity -- securing the majority that Kadhemi needed for his cabinet to be considered viable.

The new body is meant to hold early elections seen as an opportunity for a political reset for the country, but it will also face urgent policy priorities.

Iraq's GDP is set to shrink by 9.7 percent this year and poverty rates may double, making it the country's worst annual performance since 2003, the World Bank has warned.

The enormous deficit brought on by collapsing crude prices may force the cabinet to trim salaries for state workers, potentially sparking new anti-government rallies.

Meanwhile the coronavirus pandemic has killed more than 100 Iraqis, and the country's dilapidated health system is at risk of being overwhelmed by a spike in cases.

Kadhemi will also have to resolve budget and oil disputes with the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq, and lead a strategic dialogue with the United States in June over economic and military ties.

In the phone call, Pompeo mentioned talks with Kadhemi and agreed on "working together to provide the Iraqi people the prosperity and security they deserve," the State Department said.

Russia Overtakes Germany, France After Record Rise in Coronavirus Cases

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia's coronavirus cases overtook France and Germany on Thursday to become the fifth highest number in the world after a record daily rise, and Moscow's mayor said the real figure, not captured by official statistics, was much higher.

The official tally surged to 177,160, meaning Russia now has more registered cases than Germany or France, as the number of new cases of the novel coronavirus jumped by 11,231 in the past 24 hours.

More than half of all cases and deaths are in Moscow, the epicentre of Russia's outbreak, which on Thursday reported a record overnight increase of 6,703 new cases, bringing its official total to 92,676.

But Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said research showed the real number of cases in the Russian capital was around 300,000, or more than triple the official figure.

Moscow's health department said that late-stage testing for the coronavirus often produced false negative results and that more and more Muscovites displayed no symptoms or suffered only mild cases.



China Accuses Pompeo of Telling Lies Over COVID-19 Pandemic

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China on Thursday accused U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo of telling one lie to cover up another in his continued attacks against Beijing over the COVID-19 pandemic.

The remarks were made by Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying, who reiterated that Beijing has been transparent about the COVID-19 outbreak that emerged in China late last year and that U.S. politicians are making baseless accusations against China.

Hua also said Beijing opposes US interference in its domestic affairs, in response to a question about the State Department's decision to delay a report to Congress assessing whether Hong Kong enjoys sufficient autonomy from China to continue receiving special treatment from the US.

Pompeo told a news conference on Wednesday the report will be delayed "to account for any additional actions" leading up to the annual meeting of Chinese parliament in late May.

Washington and Beijing have clashed repeatedly over the virus, which emerged in China late last year but has since spiralled into a global pandemic.

Conspiracy theories that the virus came from a maximum-security virology lab in Wuhan have swirled since earlier this year, but were brought into the mainstream last month by US government officials. The World Health Organization has said U.S. claims about the origin of the virus were "speculative".

The top U.S. epidemiologist Anthony Fauci has echoed the WHO's statement, telling National Geographic that all evidence so far "strongly indicates" a natural origin.

But countries including the United States and Australia have called for an investigation into how the disease transformed into a global pandemic.

Officially, China's toll for the virus is 4,633 - but several countries have cast doubt on whether the numbers are accurate.

China and the U.S. had only recently soothed economic tensions, with the signing of a "phase one" trade deal in January.

Turkey Still Delivering Parts for U.S. F-35 Jets

ANKARA (Reuters) - Turkey is still producing and delivering parts for U.S. F-35 jets despite being suspended from the program nearly a year ago over its purchase of a Russian anti-aircraft defence system, Defense Industry Director Ismail Demir said on Thursday.

Washington announced last July, when the first Russian S-400 units arrived in Turkey, that it was suspending Ankara from the F-35 program and expected to "wind down" Turkey's involvement by March 2020.

The United States also said the purchase meant Turkey could be subjected to sanctions under U.S. legislation aimed at discouraging defense purchases from Moscow.

Turkey was both a parts manufacturer and major buyer of the Lockheed Martin F-35 stealth jets. Washington says the S-400s jeopardize the jets - which Ankara denies - and are incompatible with NATO defense systems.

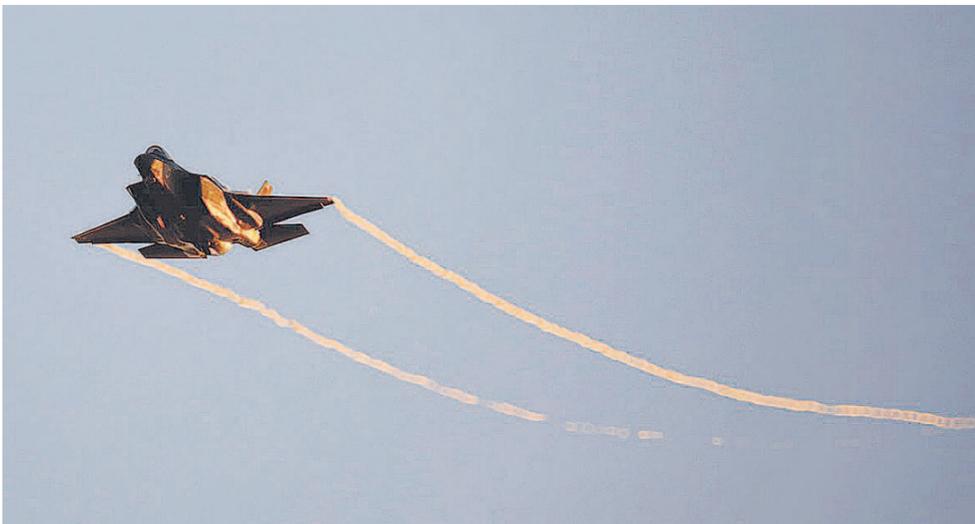
"There was an understanding in the United States that nothing would be bought from Turkey for the F-35s after March 2020, but that approach is no longer there," Demir said. He suggested the global coronavirus pandemic meant the March deadline no longer applied, without elaborating.

"Our companies continue their production and delivery," Demir said in an online interview, adding that Turkey remained a "loyal partner" of the F-35 program.

Taking Turkey out of the project would cost other members of the programme up to \$600 million, he said.

Turkish officials have said the deployment of the S-400s has been put back from April because of the coronavirus outbreak, but will ultimately go ahead.

Demir said a new timetable for activating the S-400s would be drawn up once operations were back to full capacity after the outbreak.



Captured American Mercenaries To Be Tried in Venezuela

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuela will try two Americans allegedly captured during a failed raid by mercenaries, President Nicolas Maduro said on Wednesday as the U.S. vowed to "use every tool available" to bring them home.

Venezuela announced on Monday that it had arrested the pair on suspicion of trying to topple Maduro in an operation supported by the US-backed opposition. "They are convicts, confessed, caught red-handed and are being judged by the republic's attorney general, by Venezuela's civil courts, and the process will be full of guarantees and fair," said Maduro. The leader of the crisis-wracked South American country insisted the Americans, identified as Luke Denman and Airan Berry, were being "well treated, with respect."

Maduro showed the passports of Denman, 34, and Berry, 41, on state television. The U.S. military has confirmed they were former members of the U.S. security forces, U.S. media reported. In Washington, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the government would "use every tool that we have available to try to get them back."

U.S. President Donald Trump had denied any involvement by his administration with the mission, and Washington accused Maduro of launching a "disinformation campaign."

Russia, a close ally of Maduro's, hit out at Trump on Wednesday and described his denials as "unconvincing."

Venezuela's Attorney General Tarek William Saab said Monday that opposition leader Juan Guaido, who is backed by the U.S. and more than 50 countries, had signed a \$212 million contract with "hired mercenaries" using funds seized by the United States from the state oil company PDVSA.

Denman and Berry are amongst 17 people arrested for allegedly being part of an invasion force that planned to assassinate Maduro but was intercepted early Sunday just off the coast, about 40 minutes from the capital Caracas.

Another eight alleged attackers were killed.

"They have confessed their guilt, they broke international law, they broke Venezuelan law," Maduro said.



Shanon
(adviser)

Parsian

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J, balcony
yard, & pkg
Fully Furn

Niavaran Villa (\$4000)
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S, J, & yard
green yard
Fully Furn

(\$2200)
Darrous Villa
300sq.m, 3bdrs
S/pool, Sauna
Jacuzzi, pkg
Fully Furn

Farmanieh (\$2400)
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(\$10000)
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Lufthansa Unit Austrian Airlines Plans 1,100 Job Cuts

VIENNA (Reuters) - Lufthansa unit Austrian Airlines, which has applied for 767 million euros (669.7 million pounds) in emergency aid from the Austrian government, plans to cut 1,100 of its 7,000 staff by 2023, national news agency APA reported. The airline also plans to cut salaries by 13% in that period, APA reported from an unidentified source after a meeting of Austria's supervisory board.



Russian Oil Output Falls Near to OPEC+ Target

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia's oil output in the first five days of May fell to 8.75 million barrels per day (bpd), close to its production target of 8.5 million bpd for May and June under a global deal to cut crude supplies, two sources familiar with the data told Reuters.

Together with gas condensate, or light oil, which is not part of Russia's target, the country's output was 9.5 million bpd for May 1-5, the first time it has fallen below 10 million bpd since August 2009.

While the latest data, which showed production of 1.296 million tons per day including gas condensate, was only for the first few days since the deal kicked in on May 1, it shows Russia is following through on its pledges so far.

Russia's Deputy Energy Minister Pavel Sorokin said in an online interview that domestic oil producers are striving to reach the target as soon as possible.

He also said that the global oil demand declined by around 30% last month and the fall has eased since then. However recovery to pre-crisis levels would not be achieved quickly.

Sorokin added that some countries, where international majors work, may have difficulties with sticking to targets under a global oil output cuts deal.

He didn't name those countries. Traders and industry sources said that Iraq has yet to inform its regular oil buyers of cuts to its exports, suggesting it is struggling to fully implement the cuts deal.

Reuters uses a ratio of 7.33 barrels per tonne to calculate the daily output in barrels. Russia's gas condensate output is typically about 700,000-800,000 barrels a day.

A group of leading oil producers known as OPEC+ including Russia and Saudi Arabia agreed last month to cut crude supplies to combat the fallout from the coronavirus, which has hit economic activity and demand for fuel around the world.

Under the global pact, Russia has pledged to reduce its crude oil output in May and June by 2.5 million bpd from a baseline of 11 million bpd. In April, the month before the deal came into force, Russia produced an average 11.35 million bpd.

Last month, oil prices fell to their lowest in more than two decades due to the slide in demand during the pandemic combined with overproduction and a lack of crude storage capacity.

Prices have since recovered slightly as some countries end coronavirus lockdowns and producers curb their supply.

Russia's average monthly oil and gas condensate output fell to 9.97 million bpd in August 2009 but then remained above 10 million bpd until this month, thanks to new fields coming online such as Vankor, operated by energy giant Rosneft.

Euro Zone Set for Record Recession, Inflation to Vanish

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - The euro zone economy will contract by a record 7.7% this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation will almost disappear and public debt and budget deficits will balloon, the European Commission forecast.

As the economy contracts this year, consumer prices will almost stagnate, the Commission forecast. The inflation rate will slow to 0.2% in 2020, before accelerating to 1.1% next year, when the euro zone is to return to growth of 6.3%. Investment will plunge 13.3% this year, it said.

"Europe is experiencing an economic shock without precedent since the Great Depression," European Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs Paolo Gentiloni said.

"Both the depth of the recession and the strength of recovery will be uneven, conditioned by the speed at which lockdowns can be lifted, the importance of ... tourism in each economy and by each country's financial resources," he said.

With government spending the main fuel for the economy, the effort to keep economies alive will widen budget gaps in the euro zone to an aggregate 8.5% of GDP this year from 0.6% last year, before the deficit shrinks again to 3.5% in 2021.

A surge in public debt will take longer to undo. The Commission forecast euro zone debt will jump to 102.7% of GDP this year from 86% last year, and recede only to 98.8% in 2021.

"We see governments running fiscal deficits ... as essential for a robust and broad recovery, and see European support as particularly important for the periphery to be able to participate in this recovery," Morgan Stanley bank said in a research note on the Commission forecasts.

"Proposals for the next EU budget - which will encompass a recovery fund - are still being drafted. The details, particularly on size and breakdown of loans/grants, will be key," the bank said.

Gentiloni said the Commission's plan for financing the recovery would be ready "in weeks" and that it would be approved by EU leaders in June. It would be a mix of grants and long-term loans, he said, but declined to give more details.

Bank of England Sees Worst Slump in 300 Years

LONDON (Reuters) - The Bank of England held off further stimulus measures but said it was ready to take fresh action to counter the coronavirus hammering which could cause the country's biggest economic slump in over 300 years in 2020 before a bounceback in 2021.

The BoE said its Monetary Policy Committee kept Bank Rate at its all-time low of 0.1% and left its target for bond-buying, most of it British government debt, at 645 billion pounds.

However, two of its nine policymakers - Michael Saunders and Jonathan Haskel - voted

for 100 billion pounds' worth of more bond-buying firepower.

In what it called an illustrative scenario, the BoE said it saw a plunge of 14% in Britain's economy in 2020 followed by 15% bounce-back in 2021.

Such a scenario would require very significant monetary and fiscal stimulus, it said.

Many economists expect the BoE to increase its asset purchase program next month, before the extra 200 billion pounds it gave itself in March is exhausted by the furious pace of its buying of British government debt.

"However the economic outlook evolves, the Bank will act as necessary to deliver the monetary and financial stability that are essential for long-term prosperity and meet the needs of the people of this country," Governor Andrew Bailey said.

"This is our total and unwavering commitment." Both decisions announced on Thursday were in line the forecasts of most economists in a Reuters poll.

Britain's government has already rushed out spending and tax measures worth about 100 billion pounds to try to counter the effect of its coronavirus lockdown.

The BoE said it expected a 25% plunge in British gross domestic product in the April-June period with the unemployment rate more than doubling to 9%.

Sterling rose after the central bank's announcement, initially gaining half a cent against the U.S. dollar before falling back a bit.

Last week, the U.S. Federal Reserve restated a pledge to keep interest rates low and continue offering trillions of dollars in credit as long as the economy needs it, and the European Central Bank kept the door open to further stimulus.

China's Exports Unexpectedly Rise

BEIJING (Reuters) - China's exports unexpectedly rose in April for the first time this year, taking some pressure off manufacturers in the world's second-largest economy after the coronavirus pandemic battered demand and disrupted manufacturing supply chains.

April's better-than-expected outcome followed an improvement in March, but the outlook for China's exports remains bleak as the health crisis around the world is sparking fears of a global recession. Slowing global growth and mounting job losses will likely dampen demand for Chinese goods for months to come. Overseas shipments in April rose 3.5% from a year earlier, marking the first positive growth since December last year, customs data showed on Thursday.

That compared with a 15.7% drop tipped by a Reuters poll of economists and a 6.6% plunge in March. The sharp fall in China's exports and imports earlier in the year eased in March as factories resumed production, but analysts expect pressures to persist as the coronavirus crisis shuts down economies around the world. "April shipments may have been boosted by exporters making up for shortfalls in the first quarter due to supply constraints then," Louis Kuijs of Oxford Economics said in a note.

"(But) in any case, as heralded by the weakness of new export orders in the PMIs, exports should weaken significantly in the near term as China's key trading partners fall into deep recession, although our baseline forecast sees global demand recovering in the second half."

Imports sank 14.2% from a year earlier, the biggest contraction since January 2016 and below market expectations of an 11.2% drop. They had fallen 0.9% the previous month.

The soft imports reading was due to weak domestic demand and declines in commodity prices. The shutdowns outside China also dealt a heavy supply shock to the country's importers.

China's trade surplus for the period stood at \$45.34 billion (36.79 billion pounds), compared with an expected \$6.35 billion surplus in the poll and a surplus of \$19.93 billion in March.

Both official and private factory surveys for April showed sub-indexes for export orders scaled back sharply, suggesting stronger external headwinds even as some countries have eased lockdowns. With the coronavirus under control domestically, China's economy has begun to open up again as authorities loosen draconian restrictions including stay-at-home orders.

But many factories are grappling with slashed or cancelled overseas orders after reopening as global demand remains tepid. Many are faced with rising inventory and falling profits, and some have let workers go as part of cost-cutting efforts. Shaking off optimism of an immediate recovery, many economists have slashed their trade outlook for the near future.

"We expect export growth to slump further to -30.0% in Q2 from -13.3% y-o-y in Q1 and real GDP growth to remain negative at -0.5% y-o-y in Q2," said analysts with Nomura in a research note prior to the data release.

Ukraine Faces Deepening Recession Due To Coronavirus Lockdown



KIEV (Reuters) - Lockdown measures to battle the coronavirus pandemic will cause Ukraine's economy to shrink by 1% in the first quarter of this year and contract 10.9% in the second quarter, a Reuters monthly poll of analysts said.

The government has forecast that the country's gross domestic product will shrink by about 5% overall in 2020 and the State Statistics Service will publish GDP data for the first quarter in mid-May.

If the Reuters poll forecast is confirmed, this would mark the first quarterly decline in economic growth for Ukraine since 2015. Last year, the first two quarters had growth of 2.9% and 4.7% respectively.

In the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea and a military conflict with Russia-backed separatists in industrial eastern Ukraine, GDP fell 16.0% in the first quarter and 14.0% in the second quarter of 2015.

With recession looming again, the government is trying to secure an \$8 billion package from the International Monetary Fund, conditional on reforms.

Artem Shcherbyna from investment company Capital Times said: "Due to the implementation of quarantine measures throughout Ukraine in April-May 2020, we are recording a partial or full halt to the activity of most sectors of the national economy."

The government has extended to May 22 a nationwide lockdown that was initially imposed in mid-March.

It bans or limits many business activities except critically important services such as food production and pharmacies.

"A deep drop is seen in the passenger transport sector (due to the quarantine), in industries (due to a fall in external demand, primarily due to the quarantine in the EU)," wrote Hanna Cherednychenko from the think tank International Centre for Policy Studies.

She also said wholesale and retail trades suffered due to low demand from households, with people staying at home and curbing their spending as incomes were hit.

U.S. Announces \$49m Settlement in Malaysia 1MDB Scandal

WASHINGTON (AFP) - U.S. authorities have reached a deal to recover another \$49 million in assets bought with money looted from Malaysia's 1MDB state investment fund and laundered through the global financial system.

Billions of dollars were plundered from the sovereign wealth fund and spent on everything from a luxury yacht to artwork in a fraud allegedly involving former Malaysian premier Najib Razak and his inner circle.

Najib was ejected in 2018 elections largely due to public anger over the scandal and is now facing trial over his involvement in the theft.

The U.S. Justice Department says it has now returned or helped Malaysia recover nearly \$1.1 billion in funds and assets. The latest tranche comes from the settlement of a civil case against Khadem al-Qubaisi, an Emirati businessman accused of helping siphon 1MDB funds out of Malaysia.

"Instead of benefiting the people of Malaysia, as intended, these funds were used by the co-conspirators to finance lavish acquisitions of personal property, luxury real estate and business investments in the United States and elsewhere," said Assistant Attorney General Brian Benzckowski in a Monday statement.

More than \$4.5 billion originally meant to fund state investments was looted from 1MDB between 2009 and 2015 by high-level officials of the fund and a high-flying young businessman named Low Taek Jho, according to U.S. investigators. Low used much the money to buy luxurious homes and top-level art and invest in Hollywood movies, including the Martin Scorsese hit "Wolf of Wall Street".

The Justice Department seized most of Low's assets and has been slowly liquidating them for return to Malaysia.



Russia Offers Solidarity With Iran Against U.S. Sanctions

MOSCOW (IRNA) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in a letter to his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif expressed solidarity with Iran against U.S. inhumane and unilateral sanctions.

In his letter, Lavrov congratulated Iranians on the arrival of the Holy Month of Ramadan, saying we express solidarity with

Iran with regard to opposition against U.S.' anti-human approach to develop illegal and unilateral sanctions against Iran which has been seriously damaged by the spread of coronavirus.

Such a principled approach has been stressed by President Hassan Rouhani and Russian President Vladimir Putin in their phone call on April 21, he added.



Hungary, Serbia, Montenegro "No Longer Democracies"

BUDAPEST (AFP) - Hungary, Serbia and Montenegro can no longer be called democracies after unprecedented democratic backsliding, a rights watchdog said Wednesday, noting the especially "precipitous" fall down the rankings of Prime Minister Viktor Orban's "regime".

The U.S.-based Freedom House declared in its annual "Nations in Transit" report that Hungary is instead a "hybrid regime...in a 'grey zone' between democracies and pure autocracies".

Balkan states Serbia and Montenegro have also lost their democratic status for the first time since 2003 due to "years of increasing state capture, abuse of power, and strongman tactics employed" by their respective Presidents Aleksandar Vucic and Milo Djukanovic, the report said.

The decline of EU member Hungary, once a "democratic frontrunner" in 2005, was "the most precipitous ever tracked" by the human rights group.

In 2020 Hungary became the first country to fall by two of the group's ranking categories and "leave the group of democracies entirely," the report said.

"Hungary today can no longer be regarded as a democracy," Freedom House said. Orban's government has "dropped any pretence of respecting democratic institutions," it said.

"After centralising power, tilting the electoral playing field, taking over much of the media, and harassing critical civil society organisations since 2010, Orban moved during 2019 to consolidate control over new areas of public life, including education and the arts."

The adoption in March of a COVID-19 emergency law that lets the government rule by decree indefinitely "has further exposed the undemocratic character of Orban's regime".

A Hungarian government spokesperson dismissed the ranking and described the



group as the "fist" of the "Soros network", referring to the US billionaire George Soros long accused by Orban of meddling in Hungary.

"Freedom House was once known as the bipartisan human rights organisation. With their Soros funding they've declined," said Zoltan Kovacs in a Twitter post.

"Anyone who doesn't conform to their liberal view, gets downgraded," he said.

Freedom House also reported a "stunning democratic breakdown" across the 29 countries it surveyed from central Europe to central Asia, noting there are now "fewer democracies in the region today than at any point since the annual report was launched in 1995".

Virus-Hit German Industry Output Falls at Record Pace in March



BERLIN (Reuters) - German industry output plunged 9.2% in March, its fastest decline since current records began in 1991, data showed on Thursday, as the coronavirus pandemic slashed demand for goods from Europe's biggest economy.

The auto industry, which was Germany's biggest exporter and employed more than 800,000 people before the outbreak, contracted by 31.1% on the month.

Analysts said worse was in store. Andreas Scheuerle of DekaBank calling the headline reading "a curtain raiser for the horror show".

Expectations in a Reuters poll were for a 7.5% drop.

A breakdown of the data showed that export-dependent manufacturing was most affected by the slump in demand, contracting by 11.6%, including a 16.5% drop in capital goods.

Figures published on Wednesday showed that orders for German industrial goods dived 15.6% in March to their lowest level since records began in 1991.

Construction offered the only glimmer of hope. Activity rose by almost 2%, the data showed.

The data reflected the impact of a shutdown and restrictions that Germany imposed in mid-March to slow the spread of the coronavirus. So far, it has withstood the pandemic better than the United States and most of its European neighbors.

The government expects the economy to shrink by a record 6.3% this year despite measures to mitigate the impact of the crisis with a 750 billion-euro (\$809.33 billion) stimulus package and a short-time work subsidy scheme that lets employers move staff to shorter hours rather than laying them off.

The Ifo institute said on Thursday that its industrial production index had hit its lowest level since German reunification, signalling that the sector expects an unprecedented collapse in activity.

Helge Braun, Merkel's chief of staff, said on Thursday the pandemic will last for at least the rest of this year and economists have cast doubt on a quick economic recovery even as Germany starts to reopen its economy and lift restrictions.

"There is sure to be another large fall in April given that severe restrictions were in effect throughout last month," said Andrew Kenningham of Capital Economics. "We expect demand to recover only slowly because many households have suffered a loss of income and savings, and will be less confident about the future."

Merkel announced steps on Wednesday to ease the coronavirus lockdown in Germany. At the same time, she installed an "emergency brake" mechanism to restore restrictions if infections pick up again.

Under measures agreed with Germany's 16 federal state leaders, people from two households will be allowed to meet, and more shops will open, provided hygiene measures are in place.

Scientists Hunt for Genetic Key to Virus Vulnerability

PARIS (AFP) - Why are some people barely affected by coronavirus, while others become gravely ill even though they are young and healthy?

Scientists are searching for answers in patients' genes, looking for mutations that affect their immune response in the hope of finding new treatments.

As more people become infected with the virus, a rough profile of a severely-affected patient has emerged: older, with underlying illnesses and more likely to be male.

But that is far from the full picture.

Intensive care units around the world have also treated a minority of people who are under 50 with no underlying medical problems.

These roughly five percent of patients are the ones

that interest geneticist Jean-Laurent Casanova.

"Someone who could have run the marathon in October 2019 and yet in April 2020 is in intensive care, intubated and ventilated," he told AFP.

Casanova, director of the human genetics of infectious diseases laboratory jointly based at the Imagine Institute in Paris and Rockefeller University in New York, wants to find out if they have rare genetic mutations.

"The assumption is that these patients have genetic variations that are silent until the virus is encountered," he said.

Casanova co-founded the COVID Human Genetics Effort, which is seeking to study the genome of these severely-ill younger patients in places like China, Iran, Europe, North America and Japan.

Iran Reportedly...

FROM PAGE 1

The urgency has prompted Iran to alter its approach to buying commodities, seeking out direct contracts — rather than announcing international purchasing tenders — with smaller-sized trading houses.

Rouhani's office and the government spokesman's office declined to comment on the issue when contacted by Reuters. Iran needs to import 4 million tons of wheat, 1.5 million tons of barley, 700,000 tons of raw sugar and 4 to 5 million tons of corn, in the Iranian year ended March 2021, a senior agriculture ministry official, who asked not to be named due to the sensitivity of the matter, told Reuters.

"These figures could change because of the outbreak," the source said, explaining that import targets could move downwards if exporters curbed supplies on the back of the virus, making Iran's search for grains even more challenging.

Competition for international commodities is heating up as governments move to buy more to shore up their reserves, spurred into action by lockdowns which have slowed supply chains and prompted export curbs.

Food, medicine and other humanitarian supplies including animal feed are exempt from U.S. sanctions, re-imposed in 2018 after the United States pulled out of Iran's nuclear deal with six world powers, but authorities say the step has nevertheless deterred some foreign banks from doing any Iranian business, including food shipments.

The effect of sanctions-related financial hurdles on Iran's food buying capability was clearly demonstrated in late 2019, when at least 20 vessels carrying more than a million tons of grains piled outside Iranian ports as payments lingered.

Iran's economy is set to fall deeper into recession this fiscal year and foreign reserves could drop to \$73 billion by March, a loss of almost \$40 billion in two years, the Institute of International Finance said in January.

"They are taking a new approach to buying because the big boys don't want to touch Iran anymore," one Middle-East based trading source said.

The Middle East trading source, who does business with Iran, said the government was now focused on doing the bulk of its wheat and corn purchases through private contracts rather than formal government purchasing tenders and seeking out smaller trading outfits to sign deals.

Traders are being promised 90% of their payment balance before the vessels pass the Suez Canal, he said, adding that banks in South Korea, Russia and China were mostly involved in financing the deals versus more Turkish bank involvement in the past.

"It's not my issue how they get the money there, but they do," he said, when asked if he was worried that payments for contracts could get delayed as in 2019.

"It is easier for them to get things going that way and to get payments through," he said, adding that Iran was currently attempting to sign contracts for 250,000 tons of wheat and 200,000 tons of corn for delivery in April and May in that manner.

Nigel Kushner, chief executive of British law firm W Legal with clients involved in Iranian grain trading, said payment routes for humanitarian goods including food were emerging from Switzerland, the European Union and countries which had frozen Iranian funds - such as South Korea - which could potentially be used.

"All those options are viable - there is greater scope now for using these payment routes than there has been for quite some time," Kushner said. "The problem is the Iranians have got to find the money." European grain traders said they had been told by officials in Tehran that Iranian funds from oil sales in Asian banks, mainly euros, were being transferred to Switzerland where a new payment mechanism for grain imports is being prepared.

If payment is possible via Swiss banks, traders at multi-national trading houses said they would resume high-volume sales to Iran.

Iran, one of the world's largest consumers of bread, needs around 16 million tons of wheat annually.

Its production of the grain is forecast at 14 million tons this Iranian year ending March 2021, with the government looking to buy 10.5 million tons of that.

But despite Iran's sizeable production figure, its state purchases have been declining over the years, largely as a result of years of what critics say is mismanagement by the cash-strapped government.

"When they offer such a low price to Iranian farmers, of course they will face such shortage. The price has increased this year but it is still low," a former agriculture ministry official said, accusing the government of mismanagement.

"Instead of paying a huge amount of money to dealers and small traders, the government could easily increase the offered price for domestic crops," the official, who still is part of the establishment, said.

New York...

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In his interview he strongly defended the performance of Cuomo and slammed Trump Administration's in dealing with the Coronavirus crisis. On Cuomo's performance, De Niro said, "Cuomo... he's doing what a president should do." Calling the pandemic "a national tragedy," the actor expressed his disappointment in the current administration's attempts to control the coronavirus outbreak.



De Niro who has acted in acclaimed movies like Raging Bull and Taxi Driver is popular among the American people as the cultural statue. On the central government, he labelled the U.S. President "an idiot" who largely ignored many of the warning signs. It's all about him getting re-elected. I have no words for it anymore. I'm nonplussed. Dumbfounded ...," he added.

These remarks are like what French President Macron have made implicitly and they reveal the decayed root of American economy in facing of New York as the center of country's economy and Washington as the center of political management of the country.

Today Coronavirus pandemic in the world has turned into dominance of economic misery influence in different levels and with what I elaborated, New York City is considered as the capital of this crisis.

1,556 New Cases...

FROM PAGE 1

"Mask production now reaches 2 million per day and enough stockpile will be exported", he said.

Shanesaz elsewhere highlighted that given the alcohol and sanitizers, their usage and applying are a must during the epidemic. In the first few weeks, people complained over the shortages because of the high demands but now there are no shortages in the pharmacies or shopping centers.

With the cooperation of the Ministry of Industry, Mines, and Trade, Iran has increased the production of its medical products, which is undoubtedly much better and of higher quality compared to its imported products, and is approved by AEOI (Atomic Energy Organization of Iran), he added.

U.S. Extends Iran...

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Later, Pompeo also congratulated the new prime minister in a tweet, saying, "now comes the urgent, hard work of implementing the reforms demanded by the Iraqi people", a reference to months of protests in many cities demanding government efficiency, accountability and reduction of Iran's influence.

Kadhemi took over Thursday Baghdad time after winning parliamentary approval for his cabinet line-up -- the third attempt to replace Adel Abdel Mahdi, who resigned last year in the face of nationwide demonstrations against corruption.

Iraqi politicians have the delicate task of balancing relations with Washington and neighboring Iran, which has deep economic and religious ties with Iraq but is under sweeping sanctions imposed by President Donald Trump.

Recognizing Iraq's fragility, the Trump administration has given Iraq a series of waivers on U.S. sanctions to let it keep buying gas from Iran.

The latest had been announced last week and was to run for only 30 days.

U.S. Pulling Patriot...

FROM PAGE 1

U.S. President Donald Trump had warned Saudi Arabia earlier in April that he would end American military support for the kingdom if Riyadh did not cut oil production.

In a phone call on April 2, the U.S. president told Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman that unless his country started cutting oil production, he would be unable to stop lawmakers from passing legislation to withdraw U.S. troops from the kingdom.

In mid-April, Frank Fannon, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for energy resources, said the country could also impose tariffs on Saudi oil.

Trump had also warned Saudi Arabia earlier that month that he would end American military support for the kingdom if Riyadh did not end its oil price war with Russia and cut production.

Tennis Players Face off on Munich's Empty Squares

MUNICH (Reuters) - With sports clubs closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, tennis enthusiasts in Munich have taken to the Bavarian capital's deserted landmarks to play. Christoph Hanke, who in 2015 founded World Club Tennis to enthruse people for the sport, wanted to find a way to keep members interested and give them something to look forward to. So he and fellow World Club Tennis member Susanne Wildgruber set off to play on as many of Munich's famous sites as possible.

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Ewing Reveals "Dream Team" Gold Stolen

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Hall of Famer Patrick Ewing has revealed two Olympic gold medals and a college basketball championship ring were stolen during a burglary at his home several years ago. In an interview with the syndicated "Dan Patrick Show" radio and television program, Ewing said the gold he won as part of the 1992 "Dream Team" was among the items stolen. "My house got broken into in New York at one point and they stole my medals," Ewing said.

Italy Decides Fate of Suspended Football Season

ROME (AFP) - The fate of the Serie A championship hung in the balance Thursday as state scientists huddled with football bosses in a desperate effort to save the pandemic-interrupted season.

The high stakes talks come with pressure mounting from sports-deprived fans and cash-starved sponsors for Italy to follow the German Bundesliga's lead and return to action.

Serie A began to descend into chaos at the end of February as the new coronavirus swept across Italy's north -- home to big teams such as Inter Milan and Juventus.

Several important matches were rescheduled. Some teams in the south played regularly and others in the north were not even able to train.

The league eventually threw up its hands and suspended the championship on March 9. Fewer than 500 people had then died of the virus and the league was hoping to kick off again by early April.

Italy's official toll now stands at almost 30,000 and the time to pin the Scudetto badge on the shirts of the undisputed Serie A champion is running out.

Italy's Sport Mediaset channel called Thursday "the most important day for the future of our championship".

Some eager clubs have already opened up their grounds to players ahead of the official resumption of organised training on May 18.

Cristiano Ronaldo will have to observe a 14-day quarantine after returning to Italy from nearly two months of confinement in Portugal.

His Juventus teammate Paulo Dybala said Wednesday he has been given the all-clear



after first testing positive for the virus together with his girlfriend.

But rivals Torino confirmed that one of their players had tested positive and the issue of how to keep the disease from spreading on the pitch remains unresolved.

"I hope to restart football," Italy's Sports Minister Vincenzo Spadafora said ahead of the meeting.

"But if the safety issues are not settled, the government will decide to shut things down."

Media reports said the discussion could run on into the weekend as the sides try to figure out proper virus testing procedures and the logistics of travel through contagion zones.

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte -- the first Western leader to impose a national lockdown to ward off the pandemic in March -- was expected to have the final say.

But Conte has erred on the side of caution throughout the crisis. He upset many at the end of April by delaying an expected announcement on when matches can resume.

Former Football Federation president Carlo Tavecchio warned that Italy's top three leagues faced the threat of lawsuits if their seasons were called off.

"If the championship is not finished, the rules of FIFA and UEFA will not be respected and there will be a lot of litigation, with losses not only for Serie A but also Series B and Serie C," Tavecchio said.

The former football executive said the "Italian system will default" unless the number of teams is immediately reduced.

"Football must be rescued through desperate measures," Tavecchio said.

FIFA Investigating Fernandes Man Utd Move



LONDON (Reuters) - FIFA is investigating the transfer of midfielder Bruno Fernandes from Portugal's Sporting Lisbon to Manchester United following a complaint from his former team Sampdoria, soccer's world governing body has said.

The 25-year-old joined United from Sporting in January for an initial fee of 55 million euros (48 million pounds) and has registered three goals and four assists in nine games.

Sky Sports reported that Italy's Sampdoria inserted a 10% sell-on clause on any profit Sporting made on Fernandes when they sold him in 2017.

However, the Portuguese club say that clause is null and void as the playmaker signed a fresh deal in June 2018 after terminating the original one.

"We can confirm that on April 3 the Italian club Sampdoria lodged a claim with FIFA against the Portuguese club Sporting Clube de Portugal related to financial obligations set out in the contract corresponding to the transfer of... Fernandes," FIFA said in a statement released to British media.

Merkel Gives Go-Ahead For Bundesliga to Resume in Mid-May

BERLIN (Dispatches) - German Chancellor Angela Merkel and state leaders gave the Bundesliga the green light to restart behind closed doors from mid-May after weeks of shutdown imposed to control the spread of the coronavirus.

The political blessing makes the German top-flight the first of Europe's five major leagues to return to the field.

"Matches will be allowed under the approved rules," said Merkel at a press conference in Berlin. The leaders approved a plan by the German Football League (DFL) for the Bundesliga to resume in stadiums without spectators and with players regularly tested.

Permission was granted on condition that strict guidelines are followed -- with a hygiene officer appointed to each team -- to prevent contagion of the virus.

Bayern Munich and Germany captain Manuel Neuer said the players now had an "enormous responsibility" to be role models and follow the hygiene guidelines.

The DFL must now set a date for the restart with either May 16-17 or the following weekend earmarked.

Representatives from the clubs will finalise those details in a videoconference on Thursday.

"Today's decision is good news for the Bundesliga," said the league's CEO Christian Seifert.

"It's a great responsibility for the clubs to implement the medical and organisational guidelines in a disciplined manner."

Bayern Munich, seeking their eighth consecutive German title, were four points clear at the top of the table when play was halted in mid-March.

"It's a good feeling. We are now looking forward to being able to resume playing," said Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, adding the decision was "an important and wonderful signal for the Bundesliga".

His opposite number at Borussia Dortmund -- the club second in the table behind Bayern - also welcomed the news.

"We are very pleased that people in Germany have behaved so magnificently that the spread of the pandemic has at least been contained," said Dortmund CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke.



Doubts Linger Over Villas-Boas Future at Marseille

MARSEILLE (AFP) - The decision to end the French Ligue 1 season early brought celebrations in Marseille, who are looking forward to a return to the Champions League thanks to the fine work done by coach Andre Villas-Boas, but it remains to be seen if he will stay at a club with major financial problems.

Marseille were second when the season was suspended in mid-March with 10 games remaining. They were well behind leaders Paris Saint-Germain but well clear of the chasing pack, so nobody disputes they are worthy runners-up after the French government dashed hopes of the campaign restarting.

In an Instagram post, Villas-Boas called it an "extraordinary achievement". Marseille have not been in the Champions League since 2013, but they had finished fifth last season under Rudi Garcia and Villas-Boas knew he was arriving at a club with little money to spend.

He had to do without arguably Marseille's best player, the winger Florian Thauvin, for almost the whole campaign because of injury, but the Portuguese has breathed new life into the careers of Dimitri Payet and goalkeeper Steve Mandanda.

In addition, he has got the best out of those new faces who did come in, like Spanish defender Alvaro Gonzalez and ex-Boca Juniors striker Dario Benedetto.

The former Porto, Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur coach has rebuilt his own reputation by reviving a club that is wildly popular across France and remains the country's only winners of the Champions League having taken the inaugural edition in 1993.

Australian Open Organizers Admit Cancellation Possible

SYDNEY (AFP) - Tennis Australia conceded Thursday that January's Australian Open faces cancellation under a worst-case scenario, but said it was looking at a range of options in hope the COVID-19 crisis eases.

This year's tennis calendar has been suspended until at least July 13 and, with global borders closed, there is uncertainty about when the international circuit can resume.

The season-opening Grand Slam is scheduled to take place in Melbourne from January 18-31, more than eight months away, and Tennis Australia said it would abide by whatever restrictions were in place at that time. "We've certainly made no secret about the number of scenarios that we're looking at," a spokeswoman told AFP.

"We're hoping for the best but planning for everything."

Possibilities range from cancellation to imposing quarantine on overseas players and allowing only Australian fans into the event.

"We have to look at all the angles because a lot of the decisions will be beyond our control and related to government guidelines and restrictions," she said.

"We do need to have all the protocols in place to ensure everyone's safety."

This year's Wimbledon has been cancelled for the first time since World War II and the French Open postponed until the end of September.



Dybala Gets All-Clear After Coronavirus

TURIN (Dispatches) - Juventus star Paulo Dybala revealed y that he has been given the all-clear almost a month-and-a-half after contracting coronavirus.

"Many people talked in the past weeks ... but I can finally confirm that I am healed. Thank you once again for your support and my thoughts on all who are still suffering from it. Take care," tweeted the 26-year-old.

Dybala was one of three Juventus players to test positive along with Italy defender Daniele Rugani and France's Blaise Matuidi.

Rugani was the first Italian top-flight footballer diagnosed with the virus on March 11. Both he and World Cup winner Matuidi recovered mid-April.

Dybala was diagnosed on March 22, along with his girlfriend Oriana, who recovered sooner from the disease which has killed nearly 30,000 people in Italy.

Dybala also posted a picture of himself on Instagram with his arms outstretched looking at the sky: "My face says it all, I'm finally cured from Covid-19."

Italian champions Juventus also confirmed that their Argentine star had recovered.

"Dybala performed, as per protocol, a double check with diagnostic tests (swabs) for Coronavirus-Covid 19, which came back with negative results," Juventus said in a statement.

"The player has, therefore, recovered and will no longer be subjected to the home isolation regime."

