

Friday Coincides With Martyrdom
Anniversary of Imam Ali (A),
The First Imam of Shiites.
IRAN NEWS Expresses Its
Condolences to Its Shiite Readers

IRAN NEWS

Head of Iranian Health Ministry's
Public Relations Office Said
Yesterday that Some 50 More
Iranians Died From Coronavirus
Over the Past 24 Hours and Total
Number of Deaths Reached 6,783

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Pompeo Knows Nothing About Basics of Politics

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani described the U.S. government as anti-human, cruel, and ruthless, saying the U.S. Secretary of State "knows nothing about basics of politics."

Speaking at a weekly cabinet meeting on Wednesday in Tehran, President Rouhani stressed that the cruelest and evil government is in power in the US.

Referring to the assassination of the late Commander of Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Lt. Gen. Qasem Soleimani Iran's President asked: "Which government do you know that assassinates our military commander on a mission?"

"This was the first time in the history of the America that US officials assassinated a high ranking military commander and they did that to our IRGC commander," he said.

"Also, Trump administration is impeding imports of medical equipment to Iran amid the pandemic, this is unprecedented in history," he added. **See Page 7**

Tehran, Kuala Lumpur Discuss Collaboration In Coronavirus Fight

TEHRAN (IFP) - President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Prime Minister of Malaysia have weighed plans for cooperation between the two Muslim nations in the battle with the novel coronavirus by sharing experiences and providing medical supplies.

In a telephone conversation on Wednesday, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Malaysia's Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin expressed readiness to share the experiences of Tehran and Kuala Lumpur in tackling COVID-19 and to cooperate in supplying the medical and health products.

They also described the coronavirus outbreak as a global challenge and agreed on the need for collective action by the Islamic countries in the battle with the disease.

The Iranian president and the Malaysia prime minister also highlighted the significance of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), stressed the need to save the nuclear deal, denounced the US' illegal sanctions against Iran -particularly in the current conditions- as a violation of human rights, and pledged that Iran and Malaysia will continue to support each other in the international organizations and in defiance of the sanctions. **See Page 7**

Stockpiling Gasoline Reaches Unprecedented Historic Level



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN- Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said that stockpiling gasoline in his country has reached an "unprecedented historic level" due to falling demand.

Speaking at a meeting of oil industry officials in Tehran, Zanganeh explained that both foreign and domestic demand has fallen as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

He also spoke of falling profits for refineries and the postponement of oil projects in the country. Apparently as a result of less oil production, petrochemical plants receive 40 percent less oil by-products needed for their own production.

Last year, the average daily consumption of gasoline in Iran was 97 million liters or around 25.5 million gallons. But after the start of the pandemic, consumption has fallen to 65 million liters a day in the last two months.

The pandemic has hit fossil fuel prices hard, with oil trading at half the price of three months ago. Iran was counting on reasonably high gasoline prices this year to make hard currency by exporting it to regional countries.

Zanganeh also said that Iran's oil rig count has risen by 20 units even as major producers across the world, especially the U.S. oil and gas industry, are stepping heavily on the brake pedal and reducing drilling at record speed because of the new coronavirus.

He further said the spread of the disease did not stop Iran's oil production, "thanks to persist efforts in the oil industry to protect the health of our employees".

Iran's oil-rich Khuzestan province has seen a spike in coronavirus cases, forcing authorities to close offices and impose travel restrictions in nine counties, including Abadan which is a major refinery town.

Elsewhere across Iran, the government has begun easing restrictions on normal life as new cases of infection have continued to decline.

The disease has hit the global oil industry hard, leading to a sharp decline in crude oil and products prices amid a slump in energy demand which has resulted in a rise in crude oil and products stocks, Zanganeh said.

"Gasoline storage in Iran has already reached an all-time high," he said during a meeting with his deputies and Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri in Tehran.

Despite being a major oil producer, Iran was a gasoline importer for almost four decades because local refiners could not meet growing demand. The imports had turned into a strategic vulnerability for Iran which has been facing round after round of Western sanctions for years.

That ended early last year when Iran brought a major refinery project in Bandar Abbas online, making the country self-sufficient in gasoline and producing some surplus for export. **See Page 7**

Turkey's Dithering on Iran Gas Imports and U.S. Link

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Turkey is dragging its feet on repairing a pipeline which was hit by an explosion in late March, stopping Iran's gas exports to the country, the Fars news agency says.

Iran sells about 10 billion cubic meters a year of gas to Turkey under a 25-year supply deal signed in 1996. The pipeline has been blown up several times by PKK terrorists, but it has been repaired and the gas flow has continued shortly.

However, after another blast occurred on the pipeline on March 31, an official at the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) said the Turkish side was not responding even as Iran had informed it of the incident.

According to Mehdi Jamshidi-Dana, Turkey's representative at Bazargan gas transmission station had left his post due to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

The official said it was not clear when the line would re-open, but he cited past experience which showed "repairing the lines takes three to seven days, depending on the amount of damage done".

Iran's natural gas exports to Turkey have stopped following an explosion on a pipeline near their joint border, an official at the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) said on Tuesday.

On Wednesday, Fars suggested that the pipeline is still out of service, citing Turkish state energy company Botas' dilly-dallying and unwillingness to repair it. The news agency speculated that the situation must be the result of aggressive US efforts to push its liquefied natural gas (LNG) into Turkey.

Heavily dependent on gas imports from Russia, Turkey has already reduced flows from Gazprom significantly, while increasing LNG purchases and gas imports from Azerbaijan.

"In recent months, Turkey has imported as much LNG from the United States as gas imports from Iran," Ali Nasr, an energy expert, told Fars.

Last November, Turkey marked the completion of the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) for carrying gas from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz II field to Europe. **See Page 7**

EU Urged to Take Decisive Action to Maintain JCPOA Balance

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's Ambassador to Brussels Ghoamhossein Dehghani said that the European Union [EU], as one of parties to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action [JCPOA] that benefits from all its aspects, must take decisive action to maintain balance of JCPOA.

Following an article which was published on the Euro News Website on the occasion of the 2nd anniversary of U.S. pullout from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Dehghani, in addition to describing economic, political and security dimensions of JCPOA, emphasized the need for maintaining balance outlined in this very important document by all its members.

"Normalizing relations of the Islamic Republic of Iran in political and economic dimensions with the world in return for fulfilling some of commitments by our country is the main objective of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action [JCPOA]," he emphasized.

He pointed to compliance of the Islamic Republic of Iran with JCPOA and violation of commitments by U.S. under JCPOA, sabotaging and breaching international law and added, "not only the United States withdrew itself from JCPOA and imposed illegal and unilateral sanctions against Iran, but also it [United States] pressurized other countries including European countries not to live up to their commitments under JCPOA." **See Page 7**

Iran-Germany Trade Volume to Hike By 15% Soon

TEHRAN (MNA) - It is predicted that trade volume exchange between Islamic Republic of Iran and Germany will rise by 15% in the coming months.

Iran-Germany Chamber of Commerce predicted that bilateral trade volume exchange will register a 15 percent hike in 2020 due to the suitable infrastructures of Iranian financial institutions. According to the Federal Government of Germany, Iran-Germany economic ties have been ameliorated despite the cruel and unjust U.S. sanctions.

Statistics showed that trade volume exchanged between Iran and Germany in the 1st three months of the current year in 2020 hit €394 million.

A member of Board of Directors of Iran-Germany Chamber of Commerce Michael Tockuss said, "the two countries of Iran and Germany mainly exchanged pharmaceutical products over the past months and it is hoped that other products will be added to the volume of bilateral exchanges by facilitating terms and conditions of financing."

He went on to say that Iranian banks have acted efficiently than their German counterparts in setting up infrastructures ad financing exports.

According to estimates, trade volume exchanged between the two countries of Iran and Germany will record about 15 percent growth in current year in 2020, he emphasized.

Russia Slams U.S. Assertion at U.N. That It Remains Party to JCPOA

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Russia's U.N. ambassador slammed the United States on Tuesday as "ridiculous" for arguing it was still a member of the Iran nuclear deal two years after it quit, so Washington could trigger a return of all United Nations sanctions on Tehran.

The United States, Russia, China, Germany, Britain and France in 2015 agreed to the deal with Iran that prevents Tehran from developing nuclear weapons in return for sanctions relief.

The U.N. Security Council enshrined the deal in a resolution that still names the United States as a participant, even though it left. U.S. President Donald Trump quit the agreement in 2018 and described the accord from Barack Obama's presidency as "the worst deal ever."

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, however, said last month the language in the resolution was "unambiguous" and "the rights that accrue to participants in the U.N. Security Council resolution are fully available to all those participants." **See Page 7**

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France 24 Hails Tehran for Adequate Measures Against Pandemic

TEHRAN (IRNA) - France 24 TV channel said that many citizens of Tehran are thankful to Mayor Pirouz Hanachi for adequate measures he adopted to contain spread of coronavirus epidemic making Tehran shine in the world.

English France24 gave a report of what Tehran's municipality has done to counter the coronavirus crisis and said the measures taken by the city to contain the pandemic have been positive.

The TV said that Hanachi is one of the respective officials that are trying to reopen schools, businesses, and mosques. It said that Hanachi is optimistic about the falling rate of the infection in Iran. He disinfected the streets of Tehran, provided shelter for the homeless and even provided entertainment for people that had to stay home.

Anti-Iran Bias Debunked After 'Successful' Handling of Corona Crisis

TEHRAN (IFP) - President Hassan Rouhani says the country's "success" in tackling the novel coronavirus epidemic and handling of the situation under the foreign sanctions have disproved what he called "wrong" and "biased" judgments about the Iranian government and nation.

In remarks at a meeting of officials and intellectuals from the Iranian academic institutions and seminaries, President Rouhani said Iran's "successful achievements" in the battle with COVID-19 invalidated the "biased" judgments against Iran, its establishment, government and management system.

The critics recognized that Iran is a powerful and mighty country following the Islamic Republic's performance amid the coronavirus outbreak, the president noted.

President Rouhani also said that Iran has outperformed many other countries in dealing with the coronavirus, adding, "Many countries laud such (Iranian) performance."

Highlighting the far-reaching impacts of the pandemic on the human societies in the world, the Iranian president said many governments that claimed to be leading scientific and financial powers have been thoroughly beset with coronavirus-related problems.

"The measures that we witnessed in Iran in the course of battle with coronavirus could disprove many judgments that were being made about the establishment, the government and people," President Rouhani underlined.



Among the biased judgments about Iran that have been debunked were the wrong notions that the Islamic Revolution has impeded Iran's scientific progress or that the Islamic Republic has lost its social capital, the president added.

"The Westerners imagined that the Iranian nation would not withstand the pressures and sanctions for more than a few months, and after the outbreak of the virus, they thought that a country under tough sanctions and with limited financial sources could not endure such problems," President Rouhani stated.

He further highlighted Iran's successful handling of the medical services after the outbreak of COVID-19, saying his administration has managed to double the number of hospital beds over the past six years.

"So far and amid the fight against the coronavirus, we have not faced any problem with the hospital beds at any region," he underscored.

"The Iranian health sector's performance has been very great in comparison with the other countries, while we have not encountered any crisis in the other sectors in this period such as the welfare or provision of services for the disabled, the old people's homes, and the big factories," President Rouhani noted.

Jahangiri Underlines Significance of FTZs in National Economy

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - First Vice-President Eshaq Jahangiri said business units based in Iran's free trade zones can use the 500 trillion rials (about \$11.9 billion) of facilities that the government is providing to compensate the economic damages of the coronavirus outbreak.

Jahangiri said that the government has provided these facilities under easy conditions and expressed hope that by the end of the Iranian month of Khordad (June 20), all units affected by the coronavirus crisis will be able to benefit from these facilities.

The official underlined the significance of the free zones in the country's economy, saying the free zones have been established with the aim of becoming important centers of investment, production and employment in the country, portal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) reported.

The first vice-president emphasized that the program prepared by the Secretariat of the Free Zones High Council for the implementation of 310 development and service projects in the country's free zones by the Iranian calendar year of 1400 (starts on March 2021) must be seriously pursued.

He further mentioned 620 trillion rials (\$14.7 billion) of investment made in the mentioned projects and said: "The implementation of these projects will increase production and employment and will have a [positive] impact on the country's economy."

Tehran, Moscow Urge Cooperation in Battle Against Pandemic

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Health Minister Saeed Namaki and his Russian counterpart Mikhail Murashko have stressed the importance of enhancing joint efforts in the fight against the deadly coronavirus outbreak.

The two health ministers held a videoconference on Tuesday about ways to strengthen Tehran-Moscow cooperation to contain the COVID-19 spread following a phone call between Iran's President Hassan Rouhani and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin last month.

During the videoconference, Namaki hailed Russia for providing Iran with aid amid the outbreak said, "It is necessary for Iran and Russia to further increase cooperation and exchange experience in the fight against the coronavirus."

He also called on regional states to double their efforts to boost the fight and keep up trade exchanges while observing health protocols. He added that Iran's precautionary measures such as social distancing and gradual re-opening of shops have played a key role in containing the disease and reducing the number of deaths.

Namaki praised the good level of healthcare



cooperation between Tehran and Moscow in recent years, calling on both sides to take more steps towards promoting their relations in other areas, particularly in research and medical sectors.

Iran, one of the Middle Eastern countries hardest hit by the pandemic, has managed to contain the rate of COVID-19 infection mainly relying on home-grown efforts for producing treatment and diagnostics as the country continues to suffer from a series of US sanctions that hampered its access to imports of medicine and vital medical equipment.

The Russian health minister, for his part, outlined his country's measures to fight against the coronavirus outbreak, particularly controlling border areas, equipping hospitals and announcing health protocols.

Murashko said Tehran and Moscow should boost cooperation in various health and research fields given their flourishing strategic ties.

Russia has so far recorded 232,243 coronavirus cases, the third-highest total worldwide.

Leader Urges Investigation Into Deadly Naval Accident



TEHRAN (PressTV) – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei calls for an investigation into a recent deadly incident involving the Iranian Navy's Konarak logistical and support vessel in the country's southern waters.

In a message to Chief Commander of Iran's Army Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi on Tuesday, the Leader extended solemn condolences over the "painful and regrettable" incident that led to the martyrdom 19 Iranian Navy personnel.

Ayatollah Khamenei urged responsible Iranian authorities to properly shed light on the circumstances surrounding the incident, identify those potentially at fault, and take necessary measures to make sure such bitter incidents will not happen again in the future.

The Leader stated that the grief of losing the youths is heart-rending for their bereaved families, expressing his deep condolences to them.

The incident happened on Sunday as a number of Navy vessels were conducting an exercise near the waters lying close to Jask and Chabahar ports that respectively belong to neighboring provinces of Hormozgan, and Sistan and Baluchestan, the Navy's Public Relations' Department said in a statement on Monday.

Nineteen people have lost their lives and 15 others been injured in the accident involving the Iranian Navy's Konarak logistical vessel.

Army Quashes Rumor IRGC Shot Konarak Vessel

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The Iranian Army's spokesperson categorically denied a rumor that the Navy's Konarak vessel has been shot by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).

In remarks on Wednesday, General Shahin Taqikhani dismissed the media speculation about the recent fatal accident involving the Navy's Konarak vessel in the southern waters of Iran.

He also denied the false and malicious rumor that the doomed military vessel has been shot by IRGC boats.

The spokesman lashed out at some hostile media for spreading such wild rumors, saying the adversaries are making every effort to foment discord among the Iranian Armed Forces.

"All dimensions of this incident are being investigated and meticulous expert teams are looking into it," he added.

Tehran Condemns Terrorist Attacks in Afghanistan

TEHRAN (IFP) - Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran has condemned the terrorist attacks on a hospital in Kabul and a funeral service in Nangarhar that have killed dozens of civilians in a double tragedy for Afghanistan.

In a statement on Tuesday, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Seyed Abbas Mousavi deplored the terrorist offensive on a hospital in Kabul, the attack on a funeral in Nangarhar, and the other military actions in various regions of Afghanistan, condemned the strikes on civilians and non-military sites, and voiced concern about the rise in violence in Afghanistan. The Iranian spokesperson also expressed sympathy with the Afghan government and people, particularly with the families of victims of the recent attacks. Mousavi finally called on all forces engaged in the military operations to cease the armed actions in honor of the holy month of Ramadan and prepare the ground for dialogue and sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

On Tuesday morning, gunmen attacked a hospital that houses a maternity clinic in Kabul, killing at least 16 people including two newborn babies. In another terrorist attack in the morning, a suicide bomber killed at least 24 others at a funeral in Nangarhar province, eastern Afghanistan.

4 Military Teams Investigating Naval Tragedy

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Army Commander Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi says four teams of military experts are probing into the accident in a recent naval training exercise that killed 19 servicemen on board 'Konarak' support vessel in the country's southeastern waters.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the funeral of the martyrs at an airbase in Tehran on Tuesday, Major General Mousavi said four teams of experts have been dispatched to the scene of the fatal accident to investigate the case.

The four teams, representing the General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, the Defense Ministry, the Army and the Navy, have launched a probe into the incident, he added.

The senior commander said arrangements have been made to carry out all necessary measures to investigate the incident.

Looking into such accidents usually requires a very complicated process, because a careful and detailed examination should be conducted to ascertain whether a problem relates to the technical issues or the human error, the Army chief explained.

He also praised the Navy rescue and relief teams for saving the crew of the doomed vessel after the accident, saying 16 servicemen were evacuated from the ship, one of whom was pronounced dead later.

"The measures that are being taken at present are aimed at discovering the cause of the incident," Major General Mousavi concluded.

Belgrade Willing to Develop Economic Ties With Tehran

BELGRADE (IRNA) - Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said that his country is eager to promote relations with Iran, especially in trade and economic fields.

Vucic made the remarks on Tuesday after receiving credentials of the new Iranian Ambassador to Belgrade Rashid Hassanpour.

He conveyed his warm greetings to President Hassan Rouhani and stressed developing cooperation and promoting friendly relations.

Vucic condoled with victims of coronavirus in Iran and expressed hope for both countries to successfully confront it and to implement mutual cooperation plans.

"Enjoying rich history, civilization and culture and with its brave and freedom-seeker people, Iran has an important position among the Islamic countries," he added.

Serbian president appreciated Iran's support for Serbia's national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Meanwhile, Hassanpour underlined the importance of developing relations, especially in economic and cultural fields.

Referring to Iran's stance in supporting Serbia in international organization, the Iranian diplomat highlighted Iran's political willingness and interest in developing all-out relations with Serbia.

Iran Ranks First in Liver Transplantation in Region

TEHRAN (IP)- The Head of Iran's Health Ministry's Transplantation Department said Iran is one of the aptly-named countries in the organ transplantation field to the extent that it is ranked first in the region and in some occasions has gained a worldwide reputation.

Speaking on Iran's organ transplantation status, Mehdi Shadnough said Shiraz center, south of Iran, has gained the first place in the world in liver transplantation.

Shadnough highlighted Iran carries out usual and normal transplantations along with the world, noting even Iranians are the inventors of technics in the field that are applied by global transplantation centers.

The Health Ministry official said in organ donation Iran has significantly improved in comparison to the last year.

Health Ministry's head of the Transplantation Department, Mehdi Shadnough in had a meeting with UNICEF's envoy Gillas Chevalier on Tuesday, discussing the status of the Iranian children suffering EB (Epidermolysis Bullosa).

Shadnough referred to the U.S. sanction against Iran including medicine and medical equipment and highlighted that the Iranian noble and distinguished nation would not forget those who stand still beside them during tough and harsh conditions.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:00
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:21
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:20
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:58

24. The Companions of the Garden will be well, that Day, in their abode, and have the fairest of places for repose.
25. The Day the heaven shall be rent asunder with clouds, and angels shall be sent down, descending (in ranks),- Surah 25. The Criterion, The Standard (24 - 25)

Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan Agree to Ease Curbs on Borders

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Transportation authorities from Iran, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have agreed to adopt joint measures that could ease movement across the borders as they seek to restore trade exchanges hampered by the new coronavirus pandemic.

Iran's transportation minister Mohammad Eslami said the agreement was reached earlier on Tuesday in his video-conference meeting with counterparts from the two Central Asian countries. "We agreed in the meeting to have joint protocols for controlling coronavirus in order to resume exchanges between the three countries," said Eslami, according to remarks covered by the IRIB News.

Among the measures agreed on Tuesday was setting up disinfection facilities for trains and trucks crossing the border between Iran and Turkmenistan.

Eslami said that a series of 20-meter-long tunnels will be set up within the next 10 days on the border between the two neighbors to allow trade to resume after nearly two months of border closure.

He said Iran and Turkmenistan signed a memorandum of understanding to share transportation data through electronic means. The minister said Uzbekistan was also invited to join the mechanism to further ease the transit of goods from Iran to Uzbekistan via Turkmenistan.



Eslami said Uzbekistan also agreed to clear border restrictions for a group of Iranian trucks that have been stuck in the country because of the closure of the crossings into Turkmenistan.

He said the agreements reached on Tuesday came after Iranian President Hassan Rouhani spoke with his Turkmen and Uzbek counterparts last week to help easing of border controls and restore trade between the three states.

He said two similar meetings are due to be held between foreign ministers of Iran, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as well as heads of trade committees of the three countries to further coordinate on measures to resume trade exchanges now that the pandemic appears to be slowing down.

Hemmati Declares Improvement In Access to Financial Resources

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Abdolnaser Hemmati in an Instagram Post declared improvements in access to CBI's financial resources abroad, saying over \$2.5b has been supplied through central bank and non-oil exporters over the last 50 days.



Despite problems caused by COVID19 outbreak, preventive measures taken by neighboring countries and closure of border terminals and money changers over the last 50 days, over \$2.5b has been supplied through central bank and non-oil exporters, Hemmati said.

He added that gradual reviving of non-oil and oil exports will result in normalizing non-oil exports and supplying currency.

Earlier, Hemmati stated the most important monetary policy is to curb inflation, adding that despite the decrease in oil revenues under the influence of oppressive sanctions and a sharp decline in oil prices, the situation of the country's foreign exchange bank reserves is appropriate and unprecedented in the country's history.

"These achievements have been achieved through the efforts of the banking system and due to the correct policy of the central bank, and if the banking system is supported, we will see greater achievements in the future," he added.

Contrabandists of Shoes Making Sky-High Profits



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Handmade Shoemakers Union of Iran has called for full imposition of ban on imports of shoes and also combatting with smuggling of shoes into the country.

Speaking to ILNA, Rasool Shajari said that imports of some low quality shoes have inflicted damages on the national economy and domestic shoe production and the government should impose ban on importing any kind of shoes.

He admitted that usually shoemakers are inactive and in limbo during April and June but this year they have faced another problem and because of the outbreak of the Coronavirus, they lost their best times of sales and productions in March and April.

On the imports of shoes, he said because of the devaluation of the national currency, imports of shoes are not economical and the government slapped ban on imports in order to boost domestic production. He noted that till the end of the last Iranian calendar year, only imports of some certain kinds of shoes like sports shoes with certain brands were allowed.

Shajari added that this license was an opportunity for imports of some low quality shoes and it inflicted damages on the economy and domestic production, and for this reason the union has called for slapping bans on imports of any kinds of shoes. He added that the imports of sports shoes had been issued for only free trade zones while they are taken into Tehran and big cities.

Shajari added that because of the ban, the domestic shoe sales enjoyed growth but by issuing this license for imports of shoes in the free trade zones, the domestic shoes production lost the market and it created opportunity for profiteers.

He reiterated that Iranian shoes can compete with their foreign-made likes, adding that Iranian shoemakers can make any kind of shoes for skiing, tennis, football or any other sports based on the domestic demands. Shajari claimed that some of the domestic shoes productions are so high quality that they are labeled with foreign brands and sold. He reiterated that if the ground and raw material is prepared, Iran can make some 400m pairs of shoes annually and today because of country's focus on non-oil exports, it is a necessity for the government to pay more attention to the domestic shoemakers.

He further said that Iran is one of the best shoe leather producers in the world but lack of proper promotion and lack of self-confidence in the domestic production has paved the way for foreign brands to be welcomed in the domestic market. He also criticized the media for promoting foreign brands. He pointed to the international exhibition EMPEX 2019 which was in Tehran and welcomed Italian guests, adding that although Italians are of the best shoes producers in the world, they took Iranian shoes as souvenirs.

He also pointed to the sky-high profits which are made by smugglers of shoes, adding that all should work to save the domestic shoemaking industry.

Exporting Oil and Gas Products Increase

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's exporting oil and gas products have been increased amid tough sanctions imposed by the U.S. according to official sources.

The Oil Ministry has over the past seven years undertaken numerous measures for increasing Euro-grade fuel production. Therefore, in addition to improving the quality of fuel production at refineries, exporting oil and gas products have been increased amid tough sanctions imposed by the U.S., Iran Petroleum quotes an official source.

Compressed natural gas (CNG), an alternative fuel, has been used in Iran's transportation fleet for more than a decade. Environmental regulations, low costs, and the abundance of gas reserves constitute the main reason for choosing this fuel. However, one significant point is not out of the loop. Each cubic meter of CNG would save one liter of gasoline for exports, which would be instrumental in helping Iran shed selling unprocessed hydrocarbon.

Another potential challenge for Iran is gasoline consumption under conditions of sanctions. Should gasoline consumption not stop, Iran would have to import gasoline anew as long as sanctions are in effect.

Increasing production capacity of refined petroleum products and boosting that of clean gasoline and other fuels in Iran would be significant when the country would be able to export fuel in addition to meeting domestic needs.

UNICEF Sends Dressings for Iranian Children With EB

TEHRAN (IRNA) - With the financial support of the German government, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was able to prepare and send dressings for Iranian children suffering from Epidermolysis Bullosa (EB).

Dressings produced by the Swedish Pharmaceutical Company Mölnlycke were dispatched to Iran in cooperation with UNICEF Global Supply Center in Copenhagen.

Iran's Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education will take delivery of the packages weighing 8.5 tons to distribute them among the Iranian families with children suffering from EB.

Epidermolysis bullosa (EB) is a group of rare



genetic conditions that result in easy blistering of the skin and mucous membranes. Blisters occur with minor trauma or friction and are painful. There is no cure for the condition.

UNICEF is a United Nations agency responsible for providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide.

UNICEF's activities include immunizations and disease prevention, administering treatment for children and mothers with HIV, enhancing childhood and maternal nutrition, improving sanitation, promoting education, and providing emergency relief in response to disasters.

Nakhchivan Ready to Restart Operation of Passenger Train With Mashhad

BAKU (IRNA) - Railroad authority of Nakhchivan Autonomous republic said on Wednesday that it was ready to restart routine operation of Nakhchivan-Mashhad passenger train.

Mahir Aliev said in the meeting with Iran's Consul General in Nakhchivan that the measure is a gift to the people of the two countries, especially to people of Nakhchivan who are devoted to Imam Reza (PBUH).

Aliev underlined that all infrastructures were ready to restart operation of the train and if the Islamic Republic of Iran was ready, it can be relaunched as soon as possible.

Iran's Consul General Ahmad Hosseini announced Tehran's readiness to take all necessary measures in this regard. Nakhchivan-Mashhad passenger train was initiated two years ago but halted shortly after due to unknown reasons.

2nd Indian Wheat Ship to Afghanistan Docks in Chabahar

CHABAHAR (IRNA)- Ports and Maritime authority of Sistan and Baluchestan province said that a ship containing the second part of India's aid package to Afghanistan docked on Wednesday in Chabahar port, Iran.

Behrouz Aqae said that 435 twenty-foot containers holding 10,000 tons of wheat were delivered by the ship 'Kashan' from India, as the second part of Indian aid package to Afghanistan.

He said that the first part of the package which consisted of 203 containers holding 5,000 tons of wheat

was transferred to Afghanistan 12 days after it arrived at Chabahar port.

The new series of India's humanitarian aid to Afghanistan - 75,000 tons of wheat - has been planned to be delivered to the country via Chabahar, according to Baqae.

He also said that the aid will be transported to Herat, Kandahar, Baghlan, Kabul and Balkh provinces of Afghanistan through Milak-Zaranj cross on the border between Iran and Afghanistan.

Gov't Allows Export of Number of Medical Supplies

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - N95 masks, medical uniforms and diagnostic tests are allowed to be exported from Iran without restrictions, said Iran's Acting Minister of Industry, Mines and Trade Hossein Modarres Khiaabani.

According to Khiaabani, the production of medical supplies and medical equipment related to coronavirus in Iran covers the actual domestic need.

He added that at the same time, the ordering and import of domestically produced medical supplies to support Iranian manufacturers has been banned.

KSC's Greenspace Beyond All Standards

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Governor of town of Neishaboor hailed Khorasan Steel Company (KSC)'s efforts for increasing greenspace in its complex and called it beyond all necessary standards.



During the ceremony for inaugurating three projects in KSC, Mr. Alireza Ghamati hailed the company for paying attention to the environmental issues and increasing its greenspace, adding that the greenspace of the company is beyond the necessary standards.

He added that the company has allocated some 720 hectares of its area to greenspace and by equipping this area with pressure irrigation system, the company has minimized the water consumption and maximized efficiency.

Ghamati noted that industrial factories are obliged to allocate at least 10 percent of their areas to the greenspace in line with observing environmental responsibility, adding that fortunately, KSC has allocated 270 hectares out of 1400 hectares of its area and it is two times of the standards.

He further said 95 percent of company's greenspace has been equipped with drip and pressure irrigation system and this measure for protection of environment is appreciable.

Ghamati also pointed to the significance of the company for job creation in the region, adding that 2570 people are directly working in the company of which 95 percent are natives of Neishaboor and 98 percent are natives of Khorasan Razavi Province.

He also hailed the staff and management of the company for their efforts in line with materializing the surge in production amid the cruel sanctions.

Iran-Tajikistan Resume Flight After COVID19 Outbreak

MASHHAD (IRNA)- Iran and Tajikistan have resumed the first flight after the outbreak of coronavirus, head of Mashad International Airport for public relations said on Wednesday.

Hassan Jafari said the flight resumed with 60 passengers on board between Mashhad and Tajikistan. He added that 3.5 tons medical and health consignment was also transferred through this flight to Tajikistan.

He noted that foreign flights of Mashhad Airport have been canceled. The deadly coronavirus radiating from Wuhan, China, in December 2019 has affected millions of people across the world.

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

Bolsonaro Not Worried About Investigations

BRASILIA (Reuters) - Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro said on Tuesday he is not worried about an investigation authorised by the Supreme Court into his motives for replacing the federal police chief, adding that the federal police had never investigated his family.

Former Justice Minister Sergio Moro resigned last month, accusing Bolsonaro of seeking to interfere in federal police investigations. Moro's legal team on Tuesday said investigators had reviewed video of a cabinet meeting confirming the allegations. Bolsonaro said the recording should have been destroyed.

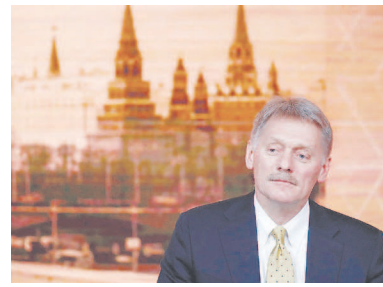


Russian President's Spokesman Tests Positive for Coronavirus

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday he had tested positive for the novel coronavirus and was receiving treatment at hospital, Russian news agencies reported.

"Yes, I am sick. I am receiving treatment," Peskov was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency.

Peskov said he had last met Putin in person over a month ago, the TASS news agency reported. The Kremlin says Putin's health is rigorously protected and that he gets the best medical treatment Russia has to offer.



Afghan Forces to Resume Offensive Operations



KABUL (AFP) - Afghan President Ashraf Ghani ordered the country's security forces Tuesday to resume offensive operations against the Taliban and other insurgent groups, following two separate attacks that killed dozens of people.

"I order all the security forces to end their active defense position, return to offensive postures, and resume their operations against the enemy," Ghani said in a televised address.

No group has claimed responsibility for Tuesday's attacks in the capital Kabul and the eastern province of Nangarhar, but Ghani blamed the Taliban and the Islamic State group.

"Today we witnessed terrorist attacks by the Taliban and Daesh groups on a hospital in Kabul and a funeral in Nangarhar, as well as other attacks in the country," Ghani said, using the Arabic abbreviation for IS.

At least 14 people were killed -- including newborns and nurses -- when gunmen stormed a maternity hospital in Kabul. A suicide blast at a funeral in the country's restive east also left two dozen mourners dead. The change in posture for the Afghan military comes months after they pledged to only react defensively to any Taliban attacks.

The move was meant to show good faith ahead of eventual peace talks, but the Taliban did not reciprocate, instead unleashing a wave of attacks that began the moment the insurgents signed a deal with the United States.

Ghani said a resumption of operations was necessary to "defend the country, safeguard our countrymen and infrastructure, and to repel attacks and threats by the Taliban and all other terrorist groups." The latest violence raises fresh questions about the fate of a hoped-for peace process that now appears in tatters, just as the country grapples with a slew of crises including rising coronavirus cases.

Gunmen stormed a maternity hospital in the western part of the Afghan capital Kabul, setting off an hours-long shootout with the police and killing 16 people, including two newborn babies, their mothers and an unspecified number of nurses. Photos from the Ministry of Interior showed two young children lying dead inside the hospital.

An image showed a woman who had been killed lying on the ground still holding tightly to her baby, who a nurse in the unit confirmed to Reuters news agency had survived and had been moved to an intensive care unit at another hospital. Security forces earlier cordoned off the area as they evacuated more than 80 women and infants from the hospital, where medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) runs a maternity clinic.

The interior ministry spokesman Tareq Arian said three foreign nationals were among those safely evacuated, without elaborating. It was unclear why the maternity hospital in Dashti Barchi, a 100-bed facility, was targeted - an attack Arian said was an "act against humanity and a war crime".

Turkey Accuses UAE of Sowing Chaos in the Middle East

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey accused the United Arab Emirates of bringing chaos to the Middle East through its interventions in Libya and Yemen, the latest in a war of words between the two countries that is likely to inflame tensions.

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu was responding on Tuesday to criticism of Turkey's role in the Libyan conflict, shortly after the foreign ministry in Ankara dismissed a declaration by Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, and the UAE that described Turkish military activity in the eastern Mediterranean Sea and Libya as seeking "regional chaos and instability".

At the beginning of the year, Turkey deployed military personnel to Libya, and it has helped send Syrian fighters to support the internationally recognised government in Tripoli, while the five countries party to the declaration have supported the forces of commander Khalifa Haftar in the general's attempt to capture the Libyan capital.

The joint missive on Tuesday also condemned Turkish gas-drilling off of the island-nation of Cyprus as "illegal".

Cavusoglu told Turkish broadcaster Akit TV that the UAE, along with Egypt and other countries he did not name, were "trying to destabilise the whole region". But he singled out Abu Dhabi for particular criticism.

"If you are asking who is destabilising this region, who is bringing chaos, then we would say Abu Dhabi without any hesitation," he said. "It is a reality that they are the force that unsettled Libya and destroyed Yemen."

The UAE did not immediately respond to Cavusoglu's criticism.

Ties between Turkey and the UAE have been strained in recent years, particularly over Ankara's support for Qatar after four Arab countries, including the UAE, imposed sanctions on Doha in 2017 over its independent foreign policy.

The UAE has presented itself as a bulwark against political forms of Islam, of which it views Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development (AK) Party. The UAE has also condemned the party's ties to the Muslim Brotherhood movement, which Abu Dhabi opposes.



Merkel Says Germany Must Help Other EU States Get Back on Their Feet

BERLIN (Reuters) - Germany must help its European Union neighbors revive their economies after the coronavirus crisis, Chancellor Angela Merkel told a meeting of lawmakers from her conservative bloc on Tuesday, according to several participants.

It is essential for Germany, as an export nation, that its EU partners also do well, Merkel told the lawmakers, with a view to consultations on an EU reconstruction programme, both the scale and the financing of which were open, the chancellor said.

Germany has been the most successful large European country in curbing the spread of the virus, partly thanks to massive testing, which has prompted a partial reopening of the economy.

It was in nobody's interest for only Germany to be strong after the crisis, Merkel told the meeting, the participants said.

The chancellor agreed with Ralph Brinkhaus, leader of the CDU/CSU conservative parliamentary bloc, that Germany would have to transfer considerably more money to Brussels, they added. The Bundestag would be involved in deciding on the financial aid.

Earlier, Brinkhaus said Germany wanted to help its EU partners, but had to know what the billions would be used for. The European Commission is expected to present revised budget proposals next week.

CDU budget expert Eckhardt Rehberg painted a gloomy picture of German finances at the meeting. He warned that it would probably take until 2023 for the tax take to recover to 2019 levels, with revenues down 6.5% this year, participants said. Merkel also warned the lawmakers against getting their hopes up too much about reopening Germany's borders, an issue her cabinet will discuss on Wednesday.

The government wants to move towards normalisation in the EU's passport-free Schengen zone, but Merkel said France would certainly not open its borders before mid-June, according to participants.

Portugal to Take in 500 Unaccompanied Migrant Children From Greek Camps

LISBON (Reuters) - Portugal is to take in 500 children from Greek refugee camps as soon as restrictions on movement imposed to contain the spread of the coronavirus outbreak are lifted, the country's Foreign Minister Augusto Santos Silva said on Tuesday.

At least 5,200 unaccompanied minors live in Greece, many of them under harsh conditions in camps on islands in the Aegean, and concerns are mounting over how the disease has affected this vulnerable group. Most refugees in Greece come from Syria, with others from Afghanistan, Iraq and African countries.

"The commitment to take in 500 of the (over) 5,000 unaccompanied minors in camps in Greece remains and it will happen as soon as restrictions due to the pandemic allow us," Santos Silva told a parliamentary committee, according to local news agency Lusa.

Santos Silva's announcement came after Socialist Party lawmaker Isabel Santos said on Saturday that 60 unaccompanied children from Greek refugee camps were expected to arrive in Portugal within the next few weeks. The member of the European Parliament did not specify a date.

Portugal, which has reported 27,913 cases of the

virus, with 1,163 deaths, said it was willing to take in some children as part of a voluntary European scheme to relocate around 1,600.

Other countries, including Germany, Ireland, France and Luxembourg, are also involved in the initiative. The first relocations took place last month when 12 minors were transferred to Luxembourg. Since then, Germany has received around 50 children.

Though Santos Silva said the reception and reintegration of the 500 children was currently being prepared by the government, Left Bloc lawmaker Beatriz Gomes Dias said the conditions of the accommodation given to refugees in Portugal is often not adequate.

Hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees fleeing conflicts and poverty in countries such as Syria have used Greece as a springboard to gain entry to other European countries.

In February, tens of thousands of migrants tried to enter Greece after Turkey said it would no longer prevent them from doing so.

Turkey now hosts about 3.4 million refugees and migrants, while Greece has about 120,000 who are waiting for asylum applications to be processed.



Trump Senate Ally Seeks China Sanctions Over COVID-19 Probe

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A leading U.S. Republican senator proposed legislation on Tuesday that would authorize the U.S. president to impose far-reaching sanctions on China if it fails to give a full account of events leading to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

Senator Lindsey Graham, a close ally of President Donald Trump, said he was convinced that had it not been for "deception" by the ruling Chinese Communist Party, the virus would not be in the United States, where it has now killed more than 80,000 Americans.

Graham said China had refused to allow investigators to study how the outbreak started. He added in a statement: "I'm convinced China will never cooperate with a serious investigation unless they are made to do so."

Graham said his "COVID-19 Accountability Act" would require the president to make a certification to Congress within 60 days that China had "provided a full and complete accounting to any COVID-19 investigation led by the United States, its allies or U.N. affiliate such as the World Health Organization (WHO)." It would also require certification that China had closed all "wet markets" that have the potential to expose humans to health risks, and released all Hong Kong pro-democracy advocates arrested in post-pandemic crack-downs, he said.

The bill would authorize the president to impose a range of sanctions, such as asset freezes, travel bans and visa revocations, as well as restrictions on loans to Chinese businesses by U.S. financial institutions and banning Chinese firms from listing on U.S. stock exchanges. The legislation was co-sponsored by eight other Republican senators. China's embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment, but Beijing has insisted it has been transparent about the outbreak, which began in the Chinese city of Wuhan.

The U.S. national security adviser, Robert O'Brien, and Larry Kudlow, the national economic adviser, have warned against investment of federal retirement dollars in Chinese firms given "the possibility of future sanctions will result from the culpable actions of the Chinese government" with respect to the coronavirus. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has also hinted at future sanctions on China for the devastation caused to the global economy and human life.





Shanon
(adviser)

Velenjak Apt (\$2400)
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S/pool, S, J
L.balcony
fireplace
Fully Furn

Niavaran Villa (\$6000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, & pkg
marble floor
Fully Furn

Parsian

Fereshteh (\$2600) 300sq.m, 4bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F

Kamranieh (\$2200) 180sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, balcony, F.F

Gheitarieh (\$1600) 130sq.m, 2bdrs, S/p, balcony, F.F

Niavaran (\$2000) 160sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, balcony, & F.F

Jordan (\$1700)
3bdrs, 200sq.m, F.F

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China Announces New Tariff Waivers for Some U.S. Imports

BEIJING (Reuters) - China announced on Tuesday a new list of 79 U.S. products eligible for waivers from retaliatory tariffs imposed at the height of the bilateral trade war, amid continued pressure on Beijing to boost imports from the United States.

China's finance ministry said in a statement the new waivers will take effect on May 19 and expire on

May 18, 2021. The latest list waives tariffs on products including ores of rare earth metals, gold ores, silver ores and concentrates.

The ministry did not disclose the imports value of the products. Beijing in February said it will grant exemptions for 696 U.S. goods including key products such as soybeans and pork based on applications from companies.



China Factory Prices Plunge as Virus Hammers Demand

BEIJING (AFP) - China's factory-gate prices fell to a four-year low, official data showed Tuesday, with firms suffering from the economic devastation unleashed by the coronavirus on the global economy.

The producer price index (PPI) -- which reflects what factories charge wholesalers -- dropped again, fuelling concern among analysts about the post-pandemic recovery in the world's second-largest economy.

The PPI plunged 3.1 percent on-year in April -- a 1.3 percent monthly drop compared with March -- according to China's National Bureau of Statistics.

Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics noted that the slump in PPI was its "steepest monthly drop since the Global Financial Crisis" of 2007-08.

The pandemic has hammered the world economy, which is facing its most severe downturn since the Great Depression, with businesses shuttered and huge spikes in unemployment.

The economic shock has depressed demand across the planet, with companies forced to charge less for their products. That, in turn, hurts profits and the ability to grow, and could also drain momentum from the economy at large.

The Chinese PPI drop "is consistent with broader evidence that demand remains very weak and is recovering more slowly than output," Evans-Pritchard added.

Analysts also pointed to reduced prices of raw materials and manufactured goods, as well as plummeting global oil prices, to explain the drop in Chinese factory prices.

The April drop was more severe than the 2.5 percent fall forecast by analysts, highlighting the continued stress on industries as they resume production after the economy was almost completely shut down at the height of the outbreak in China.

The consumer price index (CPI), on the other hand, grew 3.3 percent in April, but less than the 3.7 percent forecast in a Bloomberg poll of analysts.

This was the slowest pace since last September when inflation rose three percent, and NBS senior statistician Dong Lijuan attributed the easing pace in part to an increased supply of fresh vegetables and fluctuations in global oil prices.

Another factor, said Nomura analysts, was reduced consumer demand. But the cost of livestock continues to push inflation upwards, with pork prices -- a staple meat in China -- rising 96.9 percent last month after a 116.4 percent on-year spike in March.

China's pig herds were ravaged by African swine fever, and prices have been rising since, at times forcing authorities to release supplies from reserves.

Indian Economy Seen Contracting 0.4% in 2020-21



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Economists are forecasting the Indian economy to shrink 0.4% in the year to March as a result of steps to contain the coronavirus pandemic, according to the latest survey by Bloomberg News.

The forecast has been slashed thrice since February and represents a sharp cut from the 1.7% expansion seen in April, according to the median of 19 economists surveyed between May 6 and 11. The economy had last contracted in 1980, when gross domestic product shrank 5.2%.

Economic activity in India came to a virtual standstill after Prime Minister Narendra Modi ordered a 21-day nationwide lockdown starting March 25 to stem the spread of the coronavirus. The shutdown has since been extended twice through May 17, with some relaxations to allow resumption of economic activity.

"There remains uncertainty with respect to the timeframe through which the lockdown may continue," said Indranil Pan, chief economist at IDFC First Bank Ltd. "Significant areas of the country continue to see increases in infection numbers and opening up the country from the lockdown might not be seamless."

Despite some businesses and factories allowed to resume operations, there's a dearth of workers as many returned to their rural hometowns amid the lockdown.

Still, some see India's economy avoiding a contraction on the back of consumption picking up once restrictions are lifted.

"For the entire fiscal 2021 we expect growth of 0.8%," said Hugo Erken, senior economist at Rabobank International. "However, there is a possibility that India has to adopt a 'social distancing economy' in order to prevent re-emergence of the coronavirus."

Aramco Tips Difficult 2020 as Crisis Hits Quarterly Profits

RIYADH (AFP) - Energy giant Saudi Aramco on Tuesday posted a 25 percent slump in first-quarter profits and said the coronavirus crisis which triggered a crash in oil prices would weigh heavily on demand in the year ahead.

Aramco was listed on the Saudi stock market in December following a historic \$29.4 billion initial public offering -- the world's largest -- but since then has faced a torrid environment.

Oil prices slumped to nearly two-decade lows in March, losing almost two-thirds of their value as the coronavirus pandemic sent the world into recession.

Prices plummeted further in April amid a price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia as the major producers scrambled to secure market share. "The COVID-19 crisis is unlike anything the world has experienced in recent history and we are adapting to a highly complex and rapidly changing business environment," CEO Amin Nasser said in a statement.

Aramco said that a steep decline in global demand for energy caused by the pandemic would undermine its full-year results.

"Longer term we remain confident that demand for energy will rebound as global economies recover," Nasser said.

The world's largest listed firm posted a net profit of 62.5 billion riyals (\$16.66 billion) in the three months to March, compared to \$22.2 billion a year earlier.

The company said that the drop in earnings mostly reflected a decline in crude oil prices, as well as shrinking margins in the refining and chemicals businesses.

During the price war, Saudi oil production soared to a record 12.3 million barrels per day, pushing stockpiles to unsustainably high levels and causing chaos on global oil markets.

However, top producers agreed last month to slash output by 9.7 million barrels a day after US WTI crude prices crashed to below zero as lockdowns to contain the coronavirus pandemic sapped global demand and supplies swelled.

On Monday, Riyadh announced it would cut output by more than it had pledged -- reducing by an additional 1.0 million bpd -- providing markets with a much-needed boost as the world economy cautiously emerges from lockdown.

The move means that in June, Aramco production will drop to 7.5 million bpd -- its lowest level since mid-2002, according to analysts.

Almost all global energy giants, including Exxon Mobil, Chevron and BP, have reported huge losses in the first quarter amid the severe downturn.

Aramco, which is responsible for the stewardship of Saudi's huge energy reserves, has relied on its extremely low production costs to remain profitable.

The company said however that capital spending will be trimmed this year, in a range between \$25 billion and \$30 billion, down from \$32.8 billion in 2019.

Its share price rose 0.5 percent to 31.05 riyals at the start of trading on Tuesday, down three percent from the listing price of 32 riyals.

French Economic Activity Down 27% in April

PARIS (Dispatches) - French economic activity plunged 27 percent in April compared with its expected trajectory before the coronavirus pandemic but this was still a slight improvement on March, the Bank of France said Tuesday.

The economy had been predicted to grow 0.1 percent in the first quarter of the year, the central bank said, with the 27 percent drop counted from where it would have reached in April.

While the lost output was massive, the outcome actually represented an improvement on the last two weeks in March after the lockdown began, when the downturn was running at an estimated 32 percent, it said.

"With a full month of lockdown in April, economic activity hit a particularly low level," it said.

Industrial capacity use, for example, fell from 77 percent in February to 56 percent in March and then 46 percent in April, "the lowest level ever recorded," the Bank of France said in a regular report.

For April alone, industrial capacity in use varied from 77 percent in the pharmaceutical sector to just eight percent in the auto industry.

The central bank noted that companies had adapted to the new conditions, putting in place health measures for workers and this meant fewer plant closures and the resumption of output.

Services such as restaurants and hotels were badly hit, with closures running at 24 days for the month of April, while other sectors such as programming and consultancy suffered much less.

"For the month of May and after the lockdown, companies expect a pickup in activity, with the exception of hotels and restaurants, but this will be a long way from making up for the losses of the two previous months," the central bank said.

Separately, Bank of France governor Francois Villeroy de Galhau said the two-month coronavirus lockdown from mid-March had already knocked nearly six percentage points off GDP and worse could be to come.

"The loss for the whole year will be larger than that because as things get going again, activity will remain partial," he told France Inter. France has been badly hit by the coronavirus but the government began easing lockdown restrictions on Monday in an effort to limit the economic damage.



Toyota Expects 79.5% Annual Operating Profit Drop Due to Virus

TOKYO (AFP) - Toyota on Tuesday said it expected a 79.5 percent drop in its annual operating profit this fiscal year as

it suffers "significant" fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

The Japanese auto giant declined to give a net profit forecast for the fiscal year to March 2021 but noted that the impact of the crisis on its business was "wide-ranging, significant and serious".

The company now expects an annual operating profit of 500 billion yen (\$4.6 billion), down 79.5 percent from the 2.44 trillion yen logged in the past year to March.

Toyota forecast a near-20 percent drop in annual sales to 24 trillion yen, compared with 29.93 trillion yen achieved in the past fiscal year.

The company's net profit for the past year to March came to 2.076 trillion yen, up 10.3 percent on the year.

"As for the global economy going forward, there is concern that there will be a sharp decline in many countries and regions due to the impact of COVID-19," Toyota said in a statement.

"While we assume that the global automobile market as a whole will gradually recover after bottoming out during April and June of 2020... the impact of COVID-19 is wide-ranging, significant and serious, and it is expected that weakness will continue for the time being."

Uzbek Senate Approves Accession to EEU

TASHKENT (Dispatches) - The Senate of Uzbekistan considered the country's cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) Monday and voted in favor of joining the union as an "observer state." The Senate of the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan held its fourth plenary session by video conference. The senators attended remotely, from studios in the capital, Tashkent, Nukus, and other regions.

The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is an economic union of states located in central and northern Asia and Eastern Europe. The Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union was signed on 29 May 2014 by the leaders of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, and came into force on 1 January 2015.

It was reported that 20 issues, including 10 laws, were included in the agenda of the plenary session. Of Uzbekistan's 100 senators, 91 took part in the voting. Of these, 71 voted in favor of joining the EEU as observers. Sixteen senators opposed the Senate resolution, while four senators abstained. The lower house of the Uzbek Parliament considered the country's cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union on April 28. The Legislative Chamber approved its accession as an observer. At that time, 86 deputies voted in favor of the resolution, 32 opposed it, and 14 abstained.

The issue of Uzbekistan's accession to the EEC is one of the most hotly debated political issues in recent years. Many bloggers and activists believe that this is one of the most important decisions in the modern history of Uzbekistan. In fact, April 28, 2020, will remain an ominous day in the history of Uzbekistan, they say.

Many observers and analysts see the Eurasian Economic Union as a reflection of Russian President Vladimir Putin's efforts to rebuild the former Soviet Union. However, the other side— especially Russian politicians— insists that there is no political

purpose in the union. They say it is organized only to increase economic cooperation between the post-Soviet states.

Today, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia— former members of the former Soviet Union— are members of the Eurasian Economic Union. Moldova has the status of an observer state. The only customs control is established in the territory of the member states of the Union. In addition, citizens of member states are not required to obtain a work permit in the country where they work as migrant workers.



Police Busts One Ton of Drugs in Saravan County

SAHEDAN (MNA)- The anti-narcotic forces of Sistan and Baluchestan province, southeastern Iran, have captured one tone of different illicit drugs in a single operation in Saravan county.

Deputy Police Chief of Sistan and Baluchestan Second Brigadier General Ahmad Taheri said Wednesday that

following an armed clash between the police and the smugglers in the rural regions of Saravan County, the anti-narcotics forces captured 1,092 kilograms of different drugs, including 992kg of opium and about 100kg of hashish.

Three offenders have been arrested along with three sedan vehicles and a number of AK47 rifles, he added.



U.S. Oil Producers Struggle to Stay Afloat in Sea of Excess

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - For the companies that drill the highest-producing deposit of oil and natural gas in the world, straddling the border between Texas and New Mexico, the crash in oil prices has led to spectacular losses.

Craig Blair, the co-owner of the Capitan Energy oil and natural gas company, has seen his production in the Permian Basin collapse from 15,000 barrels of oil a day to just 6,000.

Blair pointed to a yard full of neatly lined-up generators, construction and drilling machinery, all of it covered by sheds to protect it from blinding sun and ubiquitous beige dust.

"If you'd have been here six months ago, there wouldn't have been anything underneath that shed," sighed the 63-year-old Texan.

His silvery hair pulled back in a pony tail and wearing jeans and a blue shirt, Blair has built up his business as a model of self-sufficiency: as well as extracting oil and gas, he has a repair shop and offices, and was planning to get into ranching too.

But his grand plans have been put on hold because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has hit the oil industry hard.

On April 20, the price of a barrel of oil fell below zero because the market was so heavily saturated and demand had evaporated.

That day alone, Blair estimates he lost half a million dollars. Lacking anywhere to store the oil he had pumped for the long-term, he had to pay \$37 a barrel just to have it taken away.

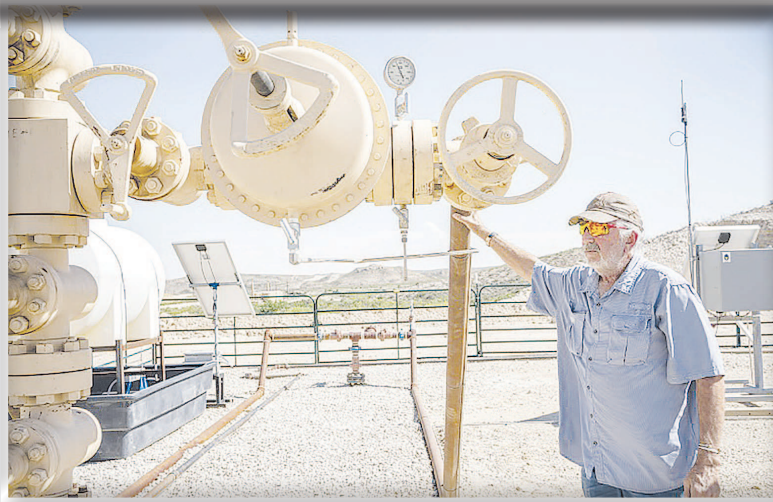
Blair co-owns the company with his cousin, and it does not have any shareholders.

When the price of oil dropped by 50 percent, he responded quickly. "The only way you can make ends meet is, everything has to be cut by 50 percent. So that's why we did, the wages, any contractor out there, if they were charging me 100 dollars an hour, they're 50 dollars an hour or they're not working for me now."

That has stopped "the bleeding out from happening here now."

But in two or three months, he fears he will have to start laying people off, something he has managed to avoid until now.

Capitan Energy has mineral rights to 70,000 acres, with fields dotted with green and brown hills, oil and gas storage tanks and hydraulic fracking sites.



There are also new wells planted in the sandy soil. These could not be completed before the crisis hit, a \$30 million project in itself.

If it was just down to him, Blair would have shut down the fields until the market improved. But his outstanding contracts with pipeline companies oblige him to continue pumping, even though prices are at rock bottom.

"We've stopped any project that we wasn't in the middle of doing, if we could stop it we've stopped it, and we won't start it back up again until the price of oil gets probably around 50 dollars a barrel," he said.

Blair glances at the screen of his cell phone. "\$23.35," he grumbles. "That's one of the bad habits I have right there, looking at stupid prices about 40 times a day."

But with so much surplus oil being held without demand, he does not expect prices to go up soon. "I don't see any way the oil prices are going to get better until we use it up," he said.

Wuhan to Test Entire Population After New Virus Cluster



WUHAN (AFP) - Wuhan plans to conduct coronavirus tests on the Chinese city's entire population after new cases emerged for the first time in weeks in the cradle of the global pandemic, state media reported Tuesday.

Officials had been ordered to submit by noon on Tuesday plans to administer nucleic acid tests on all residents in the city of 11 million people, according to an official notice carried by news outlets. "Each district should make plans and arrangements to conduct nucleic acid tests on the entire population in its jurisdiction within a 10-day time limit," the notice said, although it was unclear when testing would begin.

The planned tests come after Wuhan reported the first cluster of new COVID-19 infections since the city re-opened after a 76-day lockdown on April 8.

Six new cases were reported on Sunday and Monday from a residential compound in Dongxihu District.

But an official from the Dongxihu District epidemic prevention and control commanding office told AFP that they have "not yet received news about this notice".

China has largely brought the virus under control, but it has been on edge about being hit by a second wave as it has lifted lockdowns and restrictions across the country.

Virus clusters have appeared recent weeks in the northeastern provinces of Jilin and Heilongjiang, which border Russia.

With the virus taking hold in other nations, China has barred most foreigners from entering the country.

Wuhan has reported 3,869 deaths since the novel coronavirus first emerged there in December, accounting for most fatalities in China. Scientists believe the virus jumped from animals to humans at a market that sold wildlife in the city.

Asia's Pandemic Stimulus May Slow the Demise of Coal

SINGAPORE (Reuters) -

Coal power plant construction will push ahead in Asia despite falling electricity demand and environmental concerns as policymakers prioritise boosting economies crippled by the coronavirus pandemic, analysts say.

Fossil fuel demand will plummet this year as lockdowns sap electricity use, the International Energy Agency said in a report last month.

The European Union, International Monetary Fund and the United Nations have said that marks a once-in-a-generation opportunity to launch a 'green recovery', which includes Asia joining the global trend of ending support for coal power.

But there are already signs that China and other Asian giants like South Korea and Japan will steer recovery funds into struggling coal-focused state financiers, equipment suppliers and construction firms. That could create a short-term jolt at the cost of efficiency and environmental damage, analysts say.

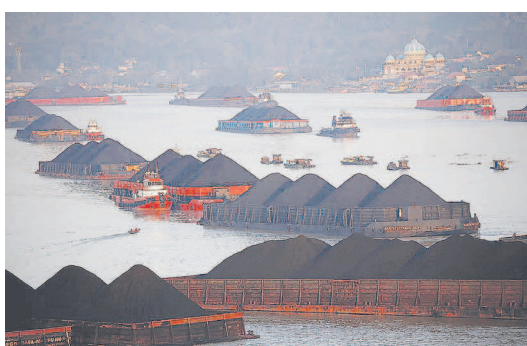
"China and other governments may be tempted to invest in coal power to help their economies recover after the COVID-19 pandemic," said Matt Gray, co-head of power and utilities at Carbon Tracker, a climate think tank. "This risks locking in high-cost coal power that will undermine global climate targets."

China, which produces and consumes about half of the world's coal, has in recent weeks said it would allow more provinces to start building coal power plants starting in 2023. It also accelerated the construction of five plants and committed billions of dollars to cross-country electricity transmission lines.

China's coal imports in April surged 22% from a year earlier, as traders jumped on low prices to build stockpiles and prepare for a recovery in domestic demand.

Coal power infrastructure in Asia relies heavily on state-backed financing from China, South Korea and Japan.

Japan and South Korea are expected to continue to fund coal plants in developing countries like Vietnam and Indonesia to support state-backed industries hurt as



domestic coal operations wind down to meet carbon-emission commitments, analysts said. Many planned coal-fired plants are not economically viable and will burden governments with stranded assets and billions of dollars of debt, analysts said.

The global long-term outlook for coal power is gloomy. Governments, banks and energy companies - under

public and investor pressure - are dropping the fossil fuel, which is seen as the greatest risk to the 2015 Paris agreement to cap global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius.

That goal already looks out of reach, environmental experts say, partly because of new coal plants being built in Asia, the biggest energy-consuming region and largest growth market.

About 500 gigawatts of coal power capacity is planned or under construction around the world, with an investment cost of \$638 billion, according to Global Energy Monitor, an NGO supporting fossil fuel phase-out. More than 80% of that is in Asia.

Even a handful of new plants will boost CO2 emissions and drive demand for coal mining in countries like Australia and Indonesia.

Two of Japan's biggest banks, Mizuho Financial Group and Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group Inc, announced plans last month to end coal financing, although the change does not apply to projects already announced.

The banks did not give specific details on each planned project, including the \$2 billion Vung Ang 2 coal-fired power station in Vietnam, which activists have warned will be disastrous for local communities and the environment.

South Korea's Democratic Party announced a Green New Deal after its landslide election victory last month, including investment in cleaner energy and an end to coal financing.

A month earlier, South Korea's Doosan Heavy Industries and Construction Co Ltd, a leading constructor of coal-fired power plants, had made a quieter announcement that two state policy banks would provide it with a \$2 billion bailout.

Stockpiling Gasoline...

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The coronavirus has also caused a temporary suspension of some upstream and downstream projects in the oil industry, especially the Pars Special Economic Energy Zone which handles Iran's giant South Pars oil and gas resources, Zangeneh said.

Iran's sprawling petrochemical industry is not unscathed. "A 40 percent drop in feedstock supplies in downstream petrochemical units from last year, a shutdown of most bitumen production sectors and a drop in sales of petroleum products are other effects of the coronavirus outbreak," the minister said.

However, "our analysis is that the jobs which have faced difficulties in the oil industry will be revived; they will not be eliminated from the country's employment cycle", Zangeneh added.

On Tuesday, the National Iranian South Oil Company said 20 oil rigs laid down by the Ministry of Petroleum will be put back to work.

Zangeneh has said Iran's oil, gas and petroleum sectors are on the frontline of the fight against the United States' "maximum pressure" which President Donald Trump has primarily applied on the oil industry because it accounts for a big chunk of Iran's hard currency earnings. Iran has unveiled its first oil rig manufactured by domestic companies, fulfilling a dream which the country's petroleum industry cherished for long.

Pompeo...

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"The United States has always been a terrorist and has stood up against independent and oppressed nations, but it is unprecedented to oppose the export of medicine to Iran amid the global health crisis of coronavirus," he added.

Iranian President referred to the distribution of aid packs among needy and the poor families during the holy month of Ramadan, adding: "The fact that people are helping each other and thinking about each other is rooted in our culture and our adherence to the family of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali, who has been the same in his whole life."

Referring to the naval accident of Iranian vessel in the Gulf of Oman on Sunday, Rouhani expressed condolences over the martyrdom of navy sailors and stressed that the reasons for the accident would be determined and announced in the near future.

Tehran, Kuala Lumpur...

FROM PAGE 1

President Rouhani and Prime Minister Yassin further stressed the need to expedite the implementation of the financial and trade agreements signed between Tehran and Kuala Lumpur in the past, specifically the deals inked during the previous Malaysian premier's tenure.

They also promised to spare no effort to strengthen mutual cooperation between the two Muslim nations, which has been in progress and has grown over years.

The Iranian president finally invited the Malaysian leader to pay a visit to Iran at an appropriate time.

In December 2019, President Rouhani visited Kuala Lumpur to take part in the KL Summit 2019. He also held a meeting with former prime minister of Malaysia Mahathir Bin Mohamad, who had expressed the Southeast Asian country's determination to continue economic and trade relations with Iran in defiance of the "illegal" sanctions against Tehran.

Turkey's Dithering...

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In January, the presidents of Turkey and Russia formally launched the TurkStream pipeline to carry Russian natural gas to southern Europe through Turkey.

Fars warned that Iran may lose its biggest gas market to rivals, which could cost the country \$150 million-\$200 million in lost revenues a month.

The U.S. has the necessary incentive to remove Iranian gas from the Turkish market in order to increase economic pressure on Iran, while Turkey seeks to diversify its energy sources and reduce gas imports from Iran and Russia, the agency said.

The U.S. is currently pushing Trump's "energy dominance" agenda that seeks to advance diplomatic and policy objectives through rapidly expanding U.S. oil and gas exports. Iran has already lost its biggest condensate market in South Korea which imported 300,000 barrels per day (bpd) of the ultra light oil from the Middle Eastern country.

The Koreans stopped the shipments under pressure from the United States which is aggressively thrusting its fast-growing condensate into Asia.

According to the news agency stated, Turkey has expanded its LNG terminals to take in 25 billion cubic meters of cargoes - 2.5 times more than the imported gas from Iran. They terminals are currently operating only with 25 percent of their nominal capacity. The existing gas deal with Turkey is valid until 2016, but US energy inroads have prompted calls on Iran's Ministry of Petroleum to initiate negotiations on having it extended and even expanded.

Russia Slams U.S...

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He was referring to the ability of a participant to the nuclear deal - known as the JCPOA - to trigger a so-called snapback of all U.N. sanctions on Iran.

"This is ridiculous," Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia told reporters. "They are not members, they have no right to trigger," he said. Diplomats say the United States would face a messy battle if it tries to trigger a return of sanctions, which includes an arms embargo on Iran. It was not immediately clear how or if a Security Council member could stop such a move.

Nebenzia said the United States should consider whether it would be worth it.

"Snapback will definitely be the end of the JCPOA ... The most intrusive inspections of a country by the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) will cease," he warned. "Is it in the U.S. interests that it happens?"

The United States has raised with the European parties to the deal the possibility of restoring sanctions if it is unable to get the 15-member Security Council to stop an arms embargo on Iran from expiring in October.

A resolution to do so needs nine yes votes and no vetoes by Russia, China, the United States, France or Britain.

Asked if Russia would veto such a resolution, Nebenzia said: "I never answer questions before the right time comes, but you may make a wild guess ... I do not see any reason why an arms embargo should be imposed on Iran."

EU...

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Elsewhere in his remarks, Dehghani expounded on the economic relations between Islamic Republic of Iran and European Union from 2010 to 2019 and termed its ups and downs under the US pressure as a clear sign of the Europeans' failure in living up to their commitments under JCPOA to maintain balance of this international deal in economic aspects.

Dehghani then pointed to the possible U.S. action taken against JCPOA and UN Security Council Resolution 2231 and emphasized, "according to the UN Security Council Resolution 2231, arms embargoes against the Islamic republic of Iran will be lifted in Oct. 2020 and any move that prevents realizing this issue could ditch the remaining balance at JCPOA irreversibly."

Ancient Archery Event Cancelled Due to Virus

LONDON (AFP) - A British archery competition that has been running for more than 300 years has been cancelled for the first time since the 1940s because of the coronavirus pandemic. The Ancient Silver Arrow tournament had been set to take place in northern England on May 16. Organisers describe it as the world's longest-established and oldest recorded sporting event, dating back to 1673. The Society of Archers was formed in that year for the purpose of maintaining the skill.

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Portuguese Top-Flight To Resume on June 4

LISBON (Reuters) - Portugal's top-flight soccer division will restart on June 4 after being halted since March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the league's organising body said in a statement on Tuesday. The government had initially given May 30 as the date for action to resume but the league said the first match would take place on June 4 in order to allow enough time for stadiums to be inspected and for all players to undergo tests for the virus.

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SPORTS

THURSDAY MAY 14, 2020

Premier League Braced For TV Losses as Player Protests Mount

LONDON (Dispatches) - Premier League clubs face having to pay a huge refund to broadcasters even if they manage to complete the coronavirus-disrupted season behind closed doors.

Broadcasters would be reimbursed for matches not being played as scheduled and the lack of atmosphere in empty stadiums is also a factor.

The BBC reported the bill facing the English top-flight, which continued talks on "Project Restart" on Monday, could be as high as £340 million (\$420 million).

"We were able to update our clubs today on our situation with broadcasters, which is obviously confidential," said Premier League CEO Richard Masters.

"Whatever happens, there's going to be significant loss of revenue for clubs. That is inevitable.

"We were able to paint a picture today about what would happen in various scenarios, playing out the season and not playing out the season, to allow them to have a picture of that as we stand in the early part of May."

The rebate to broadcasters would surge to an estimated £760 million if the season cannot be completed. Masters has previously warned of a £1 billion loss once the absence of gate receipts is taken into account. For the first time on Monday, the 20 Premier League clubs discussed models that may have to be used to decide final standings if it is not deemed safe to resume.

New government guidelines have paved the way for elite sport to return behind closed doors in England from June 1.

Amiens Launch Legal Battle Against Unjust Relegation

PARIS (Dispatches) - French club Amiens have launched legal proceedings in a bid to overturn what they consider to be their "unjust" relegation from Ligue 1 after the season was ended early due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"We find that this decision goes against sporting fairness. The decision is a punishment from the league. It is unjust," the club's president, Bernard Joannin, said during a press conference on Tuesday.

"We have been forced into fighting, into going to court to try to overturn this unfair decision." The LFP, which runs the top two divisions in French football, decided late last month to call an end to the season with 10 of the 38 scheduled rounds of games unplayed because of the coronavirus-induced suspension.

That was after the French government ruled out any prospect of matches returning before August.

The decision confirmed Paris Saint-Germain as champions and also meant that the bottom two, Amiens and Toulouse, were condemned to relegation to Ligue 2. Lorient and Lens have been promoted in their place.

Amiens, from the north of the country, were four points away from what would have been safety when action was suspended, but were still due to play several of their rivals in the relegation battle.

"We are not contesting the decision to stop the season. That is not really the object of these proceedings. It would be a bit inappropriate," said the club's lawyer, Christophe Bertrand. "However, what we are contesting are the consequences of the decisions that were taken."

The appeal has been filed at the Paris Administrative Court. Amiens, who were playing in just their third top-flight season having won promotion in 2017, believe a proposal to temporarily increase the number of clubs in Ligue 1 from 20 to 22 should have been considered, thereby saving them and Toulouse from the drop.

Lyon have also threatened legal action with their president Jean-Michel Aulas vehemently opposed to the league's decision, which left his club seventh and set to miss out on a place in Europe next season for the first time in almost quarter of a century.

However, England internationals Raheem Sterling and Danny Rose are the two latest high-profile players to raise their concerns over a return to contact sport when the rest of society is being advised to follow social-distancing guidelines.

"The moment we do go back it just needs to be a moment where it's not just for footballing reasons, it's safe for not just us footballers but the whole medical staff, referees," Sterling told his YouTube channel.

"(I am) not scared, but reserved and thinking what the worst outcome could be.

"I've had friends whose grandma has passed away, I've had family members as well that have passed away."

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in parliament on Monday that the return of sport on TV would "provide a much-needed boost to national morale" in a country that has been one of the worst hit by the global pandemic, with the government officially recording more than 32,000 deaths from COVID-19.

"People's lives are at risk," Rose, who is on loan at Newcastle from Tottenham, told an Instagram live.

Witsel and Can Miss Bundesliga Restart After Quitting Quarantine

BERLIN (AFP) - Former Liverpool star Emre Can and Belgian international Axel Witsel will miss Borussia Dortmund's derby with Schalke 04 on Saturday as German football makes a tentative return.

As with all other fixtures in the rest of the Bundesliga season, it will be played behind closed doors with the players quarantined for a week before kick-off.

Because Can and Witsel both need treatment to muscle strains, they have had to leave the team's quarantine 'bubble' so cannot play on Saturday.

Known as the Ruhr derby, Dortmund v Schalke is a key fixture as German football blazes a trail for Europe's top leagues by resuming two months after it was halted, but without spectators.

It will be the first major European league to resume after the outbreak of the pandemic, which has so far claimed around 7,500 lives in Germany.

As the Bundesliga restarts Dortmund are second in the table, four points behind Bayern Munich and a single point ahead of third placed RB Leipzig.

Witsel and German central midfielder Can, who spent four years at Liverpool and recently joined Dortmund on loan from Juventus, both picked up injuries in training after the long lay-off.



"Football shouldn't even be spoken about coming back until the numbers have dropped massively."

But Gordon Taylor, the chief executive of England's Professional Footballers' Association, said many of his members would be open to playing again provided "everything that can be done is being done" to assure their safety.

"We've got to try it, see if we can do it and see if we can return to some form of activity," Taylor told the Mirror. "But it's also being as careful and having as many assurances as possible that it's achievable."

The Premier League are due to meet the PFA and the managers' union later this week to discuss protocols for a return to group training.

A further complication for Project Restart is where any matches would be played, with the clubs opposed to a proposal for a limited number of neutral venues to be used.

The UK's national football policing lead, previously stated resuming matches on a home-and-away basis would "present challenges" to the emergency services.

But Mark Roberts said on Tuesday that police, government and football authorities were working together on a plan "which minimises any risks to public safety and unnecessary pressure on public services, but facilitates a sensible restart to the season."

London Mayor Sadiq Khan has come out against the idea of playing matches in the capital at this stage, with the city having been particularly badly hit by the pandemic.

Five of the 20 Premier League sides are based in London.

"With the country still in the grips of this crisis, and hundreds of people dying every day, he believes that it is too early to be discussing the resumption of the Premier League and top-flight sport in the capital," Khan's spokesperson told the Evening Standard.



Verstappen Rules Out Ricciardo Move to Ferrari

PARIS (AFP) - Max Verstappen suggested on Tuesday that Carlos Sainz would replace Sebastian Vettel at Ferrari after saying he didn't think Daniel Ricciardo would move to the Italian Formula One outfit next season.

Ricciardo and Spaniard Sainz are the favourites to move to the 'Scuderia' following Vettel's announcement on Tuesday that he would be leaving at the end of the 2020 campaign.

Italian-speaking, Australia-born Ricciardo is in the last of a lucrative two-year contract with Renault.

Asked by former F1 racer David Coulthard whether the seat would go to an Italian sounding name or a Spanish sounding name, in reference to Ricciardo and McLaren driver Sainz, Verstappen said: "I think it's not going to be the Italian sounding name."

"Let's see. At the end of the day, it's just a guess. We'll have to wait and see," he added during the Instagram Q&A.

Ricciardo, 30, has won seven Grand Prix during his F1 career, while 25-year-old Sainz is yet to win a single race.

Verstappen also ruled himself out of moving to Ferrari, saying that he "definitely" would not be leaving Red Bull at the end of a season whose start has been delayed until July due to

Laporta Eyes Guardiola Return If Elected Barca President

MADRID (Dispatches) - (Reuters) - Joan Laporta has said he will seek to bring former manager Pep Guardiola back to Barcelona if his bid to return as president of the La Liga club in 2021 is successful, Spanish media reported.

Laporta was Barcelona president from 2003 to 2010 and was at the helm when Guardiola was promoted from the youth team to manager of the senior team in 2008.

Guardiola is under contract at Manchester City until June 2021 but his future is in doubt after UEFA handed the club a two-year ban from European competition for breaching Financial Fair Play rules, a ruling City have appealed.

"I'm working to introduce myself as a presidential candidate. I've been president before and I'm excited to be back," Laporta was quoted as saying on Catalan station TV3.

"I would very much like Guardiola to come back, but now he is at City and it is a decision that Pep should take. He is a benchmark for Barcelona and many Catalans would like him to coach Barca again.

"At the right time, I will speak to the person we think should be a Barca coach from 2021."

Barcelona won 14 trophies — including three league titles and the Champions League twice — during Guardiola's reign before his exit in 2012.



LONDON (Dispatches) - Four-time Formula One world champion Sebastian Vettel on Tuesday said he would leave Ferrari at the end of the season, saying there was no "common desire" to work together any more.

No replacement was named for Vettel, who dominated F1 with Red Bull before switching to the Italian marque in 2015. He said his departure was a "joint decision".

"My relationship with Scuderia Ferrari will finish at the end of 2020," the 32-year-old German said in a statement from Ferrari. "In order to get the best possible results in this sport, it's vital for all parties to work in perfect harmony."

"The team and I have realised that there is no longer a common desire to stay together beyond the end of this season."

Vettel, who has won 14 races with Ferrari, said financial considerations did not play any role in his decision. He said he would "reflect on what really matters when it comes to my future".

Vettel's departure will spark intense speculation about his replacement, with Mercedes' reigning world champion Lewis Hamilton among the drivers previously linked with Ferrari.

