

Head of Iran's Health Ministry's Public Relations Office Said on Friday That 91,836 People out of a Total of 116,635 Infected With the COVID-19 Have Survived and Recovered While 6,902 Have Lost Their Lives

IRAN NEWS

According to Reports, Economic Activities Have Resumed at Pakistan, Iran's Taftan Border as the Border Was Open After More Than Two Months and Trade Activities Will Continue Thrice a Week

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2 DOMESTIC

People's Cooperation Key Factor in Controlling Pandemic



> SEE PAGE 2

3 DOMESTIC

Tehran, Yerevan Voice Readiness for Easing Trade Exchange, Transit



> SEE PAGE 3

4 INTERNATIONAL


Taliban Claim Deadly Attack On Court In Afghanistan



> SEE PAGE 4

8 SPORTS

Dortmund Braced For Most Unusual Derby in History



> SEE PAGE 8

INSTEX Transactions Unconvincing and Limited

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Deputy FM for Diplomatic Affairs Gholamreza Ansari said that the business transactions done through INSTEX are not considered plausible for Iran.

Referring to the fact that the European Union's financial settlement mechanism INSTEX (Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX)) has been conducting limited operations with Iran for several months.

Gholam Reza Ansari added that the Central bank of Iran is anxious to see the INSTEX have been activated so that this SPV could pave the ground for Iran's future European purchases.

Iran's Senior diplomat further elaborated on the quality of European contribution regarding INSTEX, saying although the European side is cooperating, the goods are limited in terms of number and type.

Ansari went on to highlight that despite all this, INSTEX as the special-purpose vehicle should prepare the ground for good exchange in all sectors.

See Page 7

Iran-Turkey Trade Down by 70% in Q1



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Trade between Iran and Turkey has declined significantly in the first quarter of 2020, a new report shows, as the two neighbors struggle to maintain exchanges despite the American sanctions imposed on Iran and a pandemic that has seriously affected movement across the borders.

The Tehran Chamber of Commerce, or TCCIMA, said in a survey published on Thursday that Iran-Turkey trade topped a total value of \$645 million at the end of March, a decline of 70 percent compared to the first quarter of 2019.

It said Iran's exports to Turkey totaled \$270 million over the period, a slight increase compared to the last quarter of 2019 but significantly down from figures seen over the first three months of the same year.

The report insisted that a main reason for declining Iranian exports to Turkey, a trend visible since the end of the first quarter last year, was restrictions imposed by the United States on Iran's trade of crude and petrochemicals.

Iran had maintained a trade surplus of over 1\$ billion with Turkey at the beginning of 2019 mainly because of its growing exports of products derived from crude.

However, the TCCIMA survey said that Iranian petchem exports to Turkey declined by a staggering figure of 99 percent over the past year causing Iran's balance of trade with Turkey to slide into the negative territory.

Trade deficit narrowed from \$250 million in early 2019 to \$117 million in the first quarter this year, said the report.

It said Iran's total imports from Turkey amounted to \$376 million over the first quarter, a decline of 35 percent compared to the similar period last year. The reduction was mainly blamed on fewer shipments of tobacco, plastic products and cardboard from Turkey into Iran.

The report concluded that first quarter trade between Iran and Turkey was significantly down in March when a new coronavirus pandemic caused a closure of border crossings between the two neighbors.

Meanwhile yesterday, Turkish media reported Turkey's Customs Administration as saying that Turkey's steel exports to Iran from January through April 2020 plunged by 55.3 percent compared to the same period in 2019, amounting to \$10.4 million.

Iran's Oil Exports Dwindle to Record Low

LONDON (Reuters) - Iran's oil exports have sunk to a record low as the coronavirus crisis compounds the impact of U.S. sanctions already limiting shipments, underlining the diminishing oil clout of what was OPEC's second-largest producer.

Exports averaged 70,000 barrels per day in April, down from 287,000 bpd in March according to Kpler, which tracks the flows. The difficulty assessing volumes means the total may be revised higher and Kpler told Reuters that could possibly be to as much as around 200,000 bpd, but even then it would still be lowest in decades, it added.

See Page 7



INTERNATIONAL TENDER NOTICE NO. 99002

Hereby Sirjan Jahan Steel Complex (SJSKO) invites reputable firms and companies to the tender No. 99002, in respect of selling and exporting 20,000 Mt of 5SP Steel Billets (Size: 150 x 150 mm) on the basis of FOB shipping point, therefore interested bidders are invited to obtain the tender documents by sending a formal letter of interest to the E-mail addresses below:

SJSKO.SALES@gmail.com

S No.	Description	End Date
1	Submission of Financial Bid	7 (seven) days from tender notice publication

Terms & Conditions:

- The tender documents will be sent to the bidders via E-mail.
- All bids should be sent in sealed envelopes.
- Conditional bids shall not be accepted.
- LOI should be prepared on company's heading, stamped and signed by the authorized signatories.
- No financial bid shall be accepted later than above-said end date of bid submission.
- SJSKO reserves the right to reject any or all the proposals.

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ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

Terrorism, the Law of Jungle

In these days and immediately after assassination of brigadier of all hearts, Martyr Lieutenant Qassem Soleimani, the more Americans talk about terrorism, the more they become disgraceful in the eyes of the world public.

On Wednesday, the Department of State of this abomination land, the U.S., notified the Congress that Iran, North Korea, Syria, Venezuela, and Cuba were certified under Section 40A(a) of the Arms Export Control Act as "not cooperating fully" with U.S. counterterrorism efforts in 2019. This certification prohibits the sale or license for export of defense articles and services and notifies the U.S. public and international community that these countries are not fully cooperating with U.S. counterterrorism efforts.

So they materialize distinguishing the true name in the two issues with such a statement. Indeed, they really shut their eyes while stealing cream due to their ignorance, and they are unaware of the world public opinion towards them. The amount of current hatred of the world towards the U.S. has not been so unprecedented, since the discovery of the land of the Yankees, that it is today.

The U.S. takes a gesture of fighting with terrorism and threatens other countries with arms embargo for not cooperating with it in counterterrorism while its hands are stained with blood of the best courageous man of the world Martyr Soleimani, Abu-Mahdi al-Muhandis and his comrades as well as thousands of freedom-seekers and its opponents. The country has also a long history of supporting terrorism in any part of the world. Is not it really the U.S. which has created terrorist groups of Daesh, Al-Nusra, Jaish al-Harb and the likes since decades ago by arming and organizing most of them worldwide?

Are not these U.S. Government and Congress which have always created hurdles in way of international efforts and joint co-operations for counterterrorism and have always tried to impose their own double standards regarding terrorism issue in favor of them and their allies? See Page 7

Russia, China Slam U.S. Plan to Extend UN Arms Embargo on Iran

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - China and Russia have rejected US plans to extend a UN arms embargo on Iran along with a probable push to trigger a return of all sanctions on Tehran at the UN Security Council.

"It has no right to extend an arms embargo on Iran, let alone to trigger snapback," China's UN mission wrote in a tweet on Thursday.

"Maintaining [the] Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is the only right way moving forward," it added. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov also vehemently rejected the plan as a "cynical" measure plunging the UNSC into "crisis".

"The conclusion is that the next crisis in the UN Security Council and the UN as a whole is imminent, taking into account this US stubbornness," he said.

"Washington will not have an easy road here in any case," he added.

Over the last month, Washington has stepped up calls for the extension of a UN arms embargo on Iran that will expire in October under UNSC resolution 2231, which endorsed the landmark Iran nuclear deal in 2015.

The Trump administration has threatened that it may seek to trigger a snapback of all sanctions on Iran if it attempts to extend the arms embargo fail.

The United States threatens to trigger a return of all United Nations sanctions on Iran if the UN Security Council does not extend an arms embargo on Tehran that is due to expire in October.

Tehran, however, has firmly rejected Washington's plans as the U.S. is no longer a party to the nuclear deal ever since it withdrew from the multilateral agreement in 2018.

Iran says the U.S. has forfeited all rights to address the issues concerning the 2015 nuclear deal.

China and Russia, which are both signatories to the JCPOA, echoed Tehran's position in their statements on Thursday.

See Page 7

First Shipment of Iranian Health Aid Delivered to Tajikistan

TEHRAN (IRBA) - Deputy Minister of Energy of Iran for International Affairs announced the delivery of the first shipment of medical supplies of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Tajikistan.

"Following the official request of the Tajik government, the Energy Ministry has conducted numerous consultations with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

the Trade Promotion Organization and the Ministry of Health of Iran to develop relations between the two common-language nations," Mohammad Farahnakian said.

"The first shipment of medical supplies was sent to this country by an Iran's Ariana Dam Tunnel Company operating in Tajikistan," he said.

People's Cooperation Key Factor in Controlling Pandemic

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani says solidarity among Iranian officials and good cooperation from people were major factors that helped the country rein in a deadly outbreak of the new coronavirus.

Speaking at a meeting of the National Headquarters for Managing and Fighting the Coronavirus on Thursday, Rouhani said, "I have said time and again that the unity and solidarity among officials at various levels and across the country as well as good cooperation from people were the most important factors, which were key to successful management and control of the deadly coronavirus."

He advised that all paths and resources shall be exhausted in order to thoroughly and constantly inform and educate the people about the phenomenon, citing the absence of a definite projection for complete elimination of the virus threat and some expert suggestions that the world's people may eventually have to learn to live with the pandemic.

Still hailing Iran's performance in the face of the disease, Rouhani noted how the viral outbreak has faced some advanced countries that were always considered models of development "with a quandary and resulted in [a state of] confusion and bipolarity [in those countries]."

In those countries, the differences that followed the pandemic over such issues as potential resumption of business activities have "complicated" management of the outbreak, Rouhani said.

More than 299,000 people have died worldwide since emergence in central China of the novel virus that can result in a potentially deadly respiratory infection called COVID-19.

Referring to the uncertainty of the timing of the end of coronavirus and the predictions and comments of world experts on educating and preparing people to live with the virus, the President said: "People must be given precise information, one of which is the website of the Ministry of Health."



President Rouhani added: "It is necessary to receive information about the symptoms of this disease and the various types of the patients and how to deal with this virus in different stages and provide the necessary information to the people."

Referring to the importance and necessity of keeping Quds International Day alive, the President referred to the research carried out by the officials of the Security and Social Committees and said: "While this day is important in condemning the occupying regime in Al-Quds and supporting the oppressed people of Palestine, observe ring health protocols are also essential."

Rouhani described the role of the media more and more seriously in this regard and stated: "We must take steps to condemn the occupying Zionist Regime and support the oppressed people of Palestine by using various and more effective methods than in previous years."

The President also referred to the conditions of holding Eid al-Fitr prayers discussed in the security and social committees and said: "Considering the great importance of this magnificent spiritual ceremony, consultations have been held with the relevant officials and suggestions made in this regard."

President Rouhani also referred to the reopening of the holy shrines and said: "This issue has been discussed in the Security and Social Committee in recent weeks."

The President added: "Consultations have been held with the custodians of the holy shrines and they have proposed the conditions and steps along with the special instructions."

Tehran Deplores 'Rampant Racism' Against Afro-Americans Under Trump

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry said the Washington government has failed "disastrously" to address the COVID-19 crisis across the US, particularly in dense black populated areas, due to "rampant racism and class inequality in the age of Trump."

"From #AhmaudArbery being lynched by racist yahoos w/horrible injustices against him to #BreonnaTaylor being killed mistakenly by botched police raid to the Afro-Americans' COVID 19 death at skyrocketing pace, U.S. fails disastrously due to rampant racism, class inequality in age of Trump," the ministry said in a tweet.

The tweet was particularly referring to the killing of Ahmaud Arbery - a black man lynched by a white ex-cop and his son - and Breonna Taylor, who was mistakenly shot dead in a botched police raid, as well as the increasing number of African-Americans dying of COVID-19.

A recent study in the United States provided more evidence that the coronavirus is killing more African-Americans than whites or other ethnic groups, highlighting longstanding disparities in access to health care and economic opportunity.

Almost All Smuggled Goods Into Iran Come Through Legal Ports

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Majlis has disclosed in a report that 95 percent of smuggling into the country is done through legal ports of entry and procedures, using 31 different techniques.

The report covering a long period of more than a decade was read in the open session of the Iranian parliament on May 12.

According to the report, contrary to the statements of Customs authorities, 95% of smuggling into Iran is carried out through "official ports of entry and procedures".

The report's authors say they have identified 31 methods and techniques of smuggling goods through legal procedures and official ports of entry, but they stop short of elaborating on the legal methods used to smuggle goods into Iran and the ways to combat them.

Earlier, several lawmakers had also claimed that 70 to 90 percent of smuggling into Iran takes place through official borders and legal procedures.

Nevertheless, Iranian customs officials have repeatedly denied the allegations.

There is also smuggling of gasoline, oil products and food staples the neighboring country, due to subsidized prices in Iran.

Tehran, Baku Have Good Neighborly Relations

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Azerbaijan, Iran have good neighborly relations, says Hikmat Hajiyev

There are friendly and good neighborly relations between Azerbaijan and Iran, Assistant to Azerbaijan's president, Head of Foreign Policy Affairs Department of the Presidential Administration Hikmat Hajiyev said.

Hajiyev made the remark at the briefing in the Operational Headquarters under the Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan.

"These relations are also maintained during the coronavirus pandemic," assistant to Azerbaijan's president said. "The mutual understanding has been reached between the countries in connection with the closure of borders and ensuring the movement of citizens."

The assistant to Azerbaijan's president stressed that the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry and the Iranian side clarified the issue of the construction of the 'Khudafarin' and 'Giz Galasi' hydro-junctions and hydroelectric power plants on the Araz River.

"The discussions were held in this sphere between our countries in terms of dialogue and mutual understanding," Hajiyev added.

Zarif Derides U.S. Claim of JCPOA Participation



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in a message dismissed the claims made by Americans with regard to participating in Iran nuclear deal, saying they have withdrawn the deal long time ago.

"Those who muse about injecting disinfectant to 'clean' the coronavirus, also argue that they are a 'participant' in a UN Security Council Resolution endorsing a deal that they long ago 'ceased participating' in. Their own words," Zarif wrote on his Twitter account on Thursday.

"If only Kafka were around," he added.

He also released a separate message in response to "The Guardian" new report that half of the world nuclear arms spending was related to the United States last year, saying: "Need I add anything?"

The world's nuclear-armed nations spent a record \$73bn on their weapons last year, with the US spending almost as much as the eight other states combined, according to a new report.

Earlier, Zarif in a message said Iran nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is part of UNSCR 2231 and advised U.S. secretary of state to read the resolution.

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

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has recently claimed that the U.S. is still a participant to the UNSC Resolution 2231 and can request an extension of Iran's arms embargo based on the Article 11 of the Resolution.

Palestine Most Significant Issue in Muslim World

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's Foreign Ministry has released a statement on the occasion of the Nakba Day, which marks the anniversary of the establishment of the illegitimate Zionist regime of Israel, naming Palestine the most important issue in the Muslim world.

The Palestinian land witnessed one of the most tragic incidents in the history of Islam and the world on May 14, 1948. Ever since the people of this territory have not savored the taste of tranquility and calm. Seventy-two years ago this day, Zionist immigrants, relying on racist and deviant ideas and thoughts, murdered the native people of Palestine, including innocent men and women, young and old, as well as children or forced them to quit their land and houses. Zionists started ruling Palestinian land, the incident with terrible consequences for West Asia, the statement said.

The Islamic Republic of Iran re-announces its support and unity for Palestinians and once again rejects the so-called 'Deal of Century'. It regards Palestine as the first and most significant issue in the Muslim World, it underlined.

While expressing its full solidarity with the cause of the Palestinian people, Iran once again reiterates the key responsibility of the international community, especially the United Nations, to put an end to the organized occupation of the Palestinian territory and holy al-Quds and to help the people of this land determine their destiny, return to their homeland and establish an independent Palestinian state with al-Quds as its capital, it added.

May 15, known as the Nakba Day, marks the establishment of the Israeli regime in 1948 and the forcible expulsion of about 700,000 Palestinians from their lands and their scattering across refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza, and neighboring countries.

U.S. Urged to Stop Its State Terrorism

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said in a Twitter message on Thursday that Washington "must stop its state terrorism."

In reaction to the U.S. absurd claim that Iran does not cooperate with the US in fighting terrorism, Abbas Mousavi wrote, "With a history of founding, funding & arming different terrorist groups, a record of state terrorism, and its outright support for another terrorist regime, the U.S. is not a good yardstick for measuring anti-terrorism efforts."

"U.S. must stop its state terrorism."

In a statement late on Wednesday, the U.S. Department of State accused Iran and four other countries of not cooperating with Washington in the fight against terrorism.

The U.S. Department of State alleged that Iran, North Korea, Syria, Venezuela and Cuba have not cooperated with Washington in fighting terrorism in 2019 and that's for the same reason that sales and export of US defense equipment and services to these countries is forbidden.

U.S. Holds Its Covetous Interests Above Int'l Law

MOSCOW (IRNA) - Iran's Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali said that the U.S. is violating the International Law just to gain its covetous interests aiming to extend arms embargo on Iran in contravention of the stipulations of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Kazem Jalali told RIA-Novosti on Wednesday that the US is now trying to introduce itself as a JCPOA member to use the mechanism in the JCPOA, but they have forgotten that they quit the international deal two years ago.

Jalali reminded that all the current problems exist because the US violated the JCPOA and the UNSC Resolution 2231 by withdrawing from the deal.

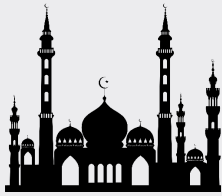
He added that as President Rouhani said the U.S. needs to return to the deal and remove all the sanctions in good faith as a part of their commitments.

Answering a question about Iran's reaction to possible extension of the arms embargo, Kezemi said that as stated in President Rouhani's letter to the heads of JCPOA signatory states, Iran's reactions will be severe. Iran has several moves, but it looks for a peaceful and legal settlement of the issue, as proved by history.

He also said that providing the country with military and defense tools is Iran's rights.

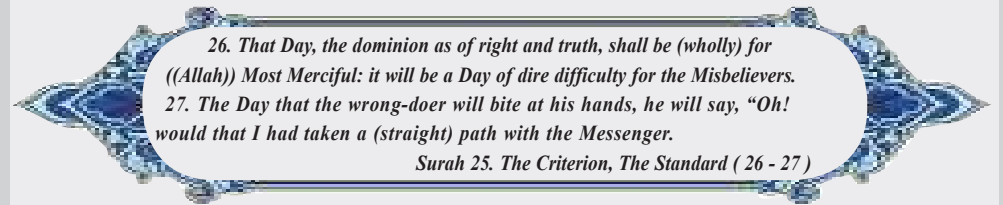
Regarding U.S. President Donald Trump's vetoing a bipartisan resolution that prevented him from starting an unauthorized war with Iran, he said Trump did it either to use it in the coming elections or to start a war against Iran. But if the second one is the case, Iran's reaction will be crushing.

Answering RIA-Novosti question about the results of OPEC and OPEC-Plus decisions, he said Iran believes that oil price should be fair and stable, serving the interests of both the producers and the consumers.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:00
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:23
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:18
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:57



Tehran, Yerevan Voice Readiness for Easing Trade Exchange, Transit

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iranian and Armenian Customs Administrations officials announced their readiness to ease trade exchange and transit of goods from both states.

According to reports, Head of Iran's Customs Administration Mr. Mehdi Mir Ashrafi in a video conference with Armenia's Head of State Revenue Committee Mr. Davit Ananyan reviewed ways of boosting cooperation and resolving customs problems. During the virtual meeting, both sides put on the table their own proposals for resolving problems in their borders, and the Armenian side fully accepted his Iranian counterpart's suggestions.

Mir Ashrafi pointed to the effects of the outbreak of Coronavirus on the trade relations of the countries in the region, and expressed hope by containment of the virus, the trade level and customs cooperation between both countries would normalize.

He said both countries can minimize the problems through talks and cooperation, and since Iran's strategy is to boost ties with its neighbors, the country would do its best to increase its trade with them.

Mir Ashrafi noted that currently the trade volume between Iran and Armenia is not satisfactory, adding that by employing the capacities of the other party, both states can improve the current trade level.

He also pointed to the good cooperation of Armenia regarding the dispatch of cargos for fight with Coronavirus and hailed the country, adding that Iran has exported its first testing kit cargo to Germany.

Mir Ashrafi also mentioned the loading and unloading capacity of Armenia's Meghri customs checkpoint which borders with Iran's Nurdz customs checkpoint in East Azarbaijan Province, adding that because of good capacity and facilities of the checkpoint, in case Armenia agrees, 200 trucks can be load or unload their cargos at Nurdz customs checkpoint while before the outbreak of the virus, 80 trucks were loaded and unloaded.

He said since Iranian trucks are not mostly unloaded at the border checkpoints and they have to go inside the country and to get to Yerevan, they are escorted by the



police and there is no specified place for drivers to stop for saying their prayers and Armenia is recommended to allocate some specified place.

He noted that currently some 75 trucks are escorted by the police per day and Iran wants the number of trucks to be increased to 75.

Mir Ashrafi also urged his Armenian counterpart not to change the working hours of their border checkpoints without coordination with Iranian side because it may lead to waste of time and long queues.

Ananyan, for his part, expressed satisfaction for expanding cooperation on customs affairs and expressed his country's willing to resolve current problems and improve bilateral trade. He also expressed hope that soon the Coronavirus would be contained.

Confirming his Iranian counterpart's remarks, he said increase in the trade volume with Iran is very important for Armenia and for this reason, he would convey his Iranian counterpart's proposals for offering facilities to Iranian trucks at Nurdz border to Armenia's Foreign Ministry.

He also approved Mir Ashrafi's proposal for loading and unloading of trucks at Nurdz customs checkpoint instead of Meghri customs checkpoint, adding that soon, the preliminaries will start.

He also announced readiness of Armenia's Customs Administration for online exchange of information based on the agreement signed between both states in 2019.

Iran Eases Curbs on Exports of COVID-19 Test Kits

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's caretaker minister of industries says that the country has lifted restrictions on exports of some tests kits and personal protective equipment (PPE) needed to confront the new coronavirus pandemic amid a surge in production that outweighs domestic demands.

Hossein Modarres Khiabani said that curbs imposed on exports of N95 masks, surgical gowns and serological test kits had been eased.

Modarres said the measure could help domestic producers offset the losses suffered during the initial stages of the outbreak of COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus, in Iran while it would help other countries better cope with the pandemic.

The caretaker minister, who was appointed to the job earlier this week, said the government had also allowed a partial lifting of bans imposed on exports of ventilators, vital sign monitors and portable oxygen concentrating machines.

Iran, the worst-hit country in the Middle East region by the COVID-19, has largely relied on home-grown efforts to fight the disease as sanctions imposed by the United States have largely curbed the government's ability to import drugs and medical equipment needed to contain the virus.

Iranian biomedicine companies have already started exporting test kits used to determine the rate of immunity in a population against the pandemic. Local media reports said Germany had taken delivery of a first batch of those serological test kits earlier on Wednesday.

Modarres said that Iran would maintain a ban on imports of certain medical equipment and drugs used against COVID-19 that are abundantly produced inside the country.

He said a government registration system used for placing import orders had been closed to ensure none of those items would be shipped into Iran during the pandemic.

Iran, Georgia Discuss Customs, Transit Cooperation

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Ambassador to Georgia Javad Qavam-Shahidi called for closer cooperation between the two countries in the fields of customs house and transit to come up with more effective and quick ways for removing obstacles created following the spread of coronavirus.

According to Media Division of Iran's Embassy to Georgia, he made the remarks at a video conference to review the two countries' customs and transit collaboration which was also attended by the heads of Iran and Georgia customs houses.

The trilateral meeting attended by Iran's ambassador in Tbilisi, Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration Mehdi Mirashrafi and Director General of Georgia's Customs Mamuka Jangulashvili dealt with the latest situation of customs cooperation between the two countries, especially after coronavirus outbreak.

Highlighting the significance of the two countries' status in the North-South corridor transit route and access to Europe, as well as Georgia's role as Iran's gateway to Eurasia, Mirashrafi expressed hope that the relevant documents regarding the implementation of e-Tir project in the region and electronic exchange of customs information will soon be finalized between the sides.

New Data System for Bi-Fuel Vehicles Unveiled

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOPDC) unveiled a comprehensive data system for the country's bi-fuel vehicles.

In a press conference, the managing director of NIOPDC Mr. Veis Karami unveiled the system. Addressing the reporters, he referred to the above mentioned program as one of the biggest projects of the Oil Ministry. The official said that complete implementation of this plan will increase the daily CNG consumption by 12 million cubic meters, while reducing the gasoline consumption by 12 million liters per day.

As announced by the NIOPDC, the average gasoline consumption in Iran stood at 94.4 million liters in the beginning of the past Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019), which fell to 75.5 million liters in the end of the ninth Iranian calendar month of Azar (December 21)



after the rationing plan was implemented.

"While a short time has passed since the cars in Iran have started CNG consumption, we have built 2,400 CNG stations throughout the country" Veis-Karami said, adding that the daily CNG consumption has been 24 mcm in the country in February, but these stations can supply up to 40 mcm of CNG per day.

In the press conference, during which a comprehensive data system of the country's bi-fuel vehicles was unveiled, Mohammad Rezaei, the director for research and technology in NIOPDC, elaborated on the system.

He said while the system was designed in February, it did not become operational because the plants for converting the vehicles to the dual-fuel cars halted activity due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The system has been running on trial since the last week, and some 6,000-7,000 applicants have been already registered he said.

Gov't Enacts Law On Granting Residency To Foreign Investors

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian authorities say they have prepared the paperwork needed to enforce a new law on according residency to foreign investors.

An Iranian deputy interior minister said that foreign investors would soon be able to apply for the five-year residency in Iran based on regulations approved by the government last summer.

Babak Dinparast said that application forms in three languages will soon be available to foreigners through platforms run by the Iranian Foreign Ministry, the Interior Ministry, Iran's department on foreign investment and the Central Bank of Iran.

He said the Iranian president Hassan Rouhani had authorized the implementation of the new law in an order issued earlier this month.

Based on the government regulations approved on July 6, 2019, foreign investors will be able to settle in Iran if they have carried out an investment in the country of more than \$250,000 or its equivalent in other foreign currencies.

The law also applies to foreigners who deposit the same amount of cash in the Iranian banks and credit institutions. The new law is meant to attract more investment into Iran and to help government plans to diversify the economy away from oil.

That comes as the government has sought to ease restrictions on foreign direct investment in Iran while introducing a series of measures to encourage foreigners to invest in the country.

Dinparast said details of the new law, including how permits are issued and extended and how many dependents and relatives of the investor would be allowed to reside in Iran, have been sorted out during intensive meetings held over the past months between representatives of various government departments.

Iran to Expand Port Container Capacity to 8m TEU

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Port and Maritime Organization CEO said that it had planned to enlarge the capacity of trade ports from seven million twenty-foot containers to eight million TEU.

Mohammad Rastad said that the enlargement is equivalent to increasing the nominal capacity of Iran's ports from the current 246 million tons to 264 million tons.

He said that establishing 100,000-ton silos in Chabahar Port and phase 3 and oil quays in Shahid Rajaei Port are among the measure taken for that purpose.

The organization signed 11 contract with the private section last year to develop petroleum products reservoirs, cargo stores and industrial plants which led to 55,290 billion rials of private investment, according to Rastad.

The official said that private investment in Iran's ports reached 185,000 billion rials by the end of Iranian year 1398 (March 2020).

NIDC to Use 37 Rigs of Its Drilling Fleet for NISOC Projects

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of National Iranian Drilling Company says the company will use 37 drilling rigs of its drilling fleet in line with protecting and keeping the oil and gas production in the range of activities of National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC).



Seyed Abdollah Mousavi on Wednesday pointed to the consultations and agreements with the senior manager of NISOC, saying that the cooperation between both companies will be in line with the programs of National Iranian Oil Company and with timely response to the needs of national oil industry.

He added that according to the agreement, NIDC in the current programs and projects of the NISOC will have active presence.

Mousavi said currently the heavy and light onshore drilling rigs of the company are in charge of operation in an area of 400,000 kms, cooperating in NISOC's projects of completing the drilling of developmental-descriptive and workover wells which are under supervision of Oil and Gas Exploitation Company of five districts of Karun, Maroun, Aghajari, Masjed Soleiman and Gachsaran.

He added that due to the agreement, NIDC will use 37 drilling rigs in the operations.

Mousavi noted NIDC as the biggest drilling company in the country has 70 onshore and offshore drilling rigs and it has played a key role in drilling of oil and gas wells in the country and it can claim that almost two-thirds of some 4600 drilled oil and gas in the country in the past four decades have been carried out in collaboration between NIDC and NISOC.

He said the company is also determined to cooperate with the private sector in drilling and it cooperates with some private sector companies in the developmental projects of 28 reservoirs that some of its packages have been handed over to the private sector.

He added that the drilling fleet of the company, in the auxiliary services section of the drilling industry, is able to offer over 20 kinds of technical and engineering services, reiterating that the company enjoys having skillful staff and experts which are ready to boost the growth of the company in the year of surge in production.

Quality of Potable Water Is Equal in Isfahan Province

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Isfahan Province Water and Wastewater Company underlined that the quality of drinking water in all towns and cities of Isfahan Province is the same and based on the standards.



Addressing the managers and staff of the refining and monitoring the quality of water and wastewater division of the company, Eng. Hashem Amini said that the staff of this department should study and have comprehensive research on identifying all newfound and emerging pollutants and they should study the impacts of those pollutants on the quality of water and wastewater. The department has recently received international 17025 standard certificate on quality control.

Amini further said that research and study over how to improve the quality of water is very important in boosting the satisfaction of people in offering services in this industry, adding that studies and researches should be in compliance with the modern knowhow. He also called for identifying the ways for improving the quality of drinking water in order to assure people and consumers of the quality of the water.

Amini reiterated that the current produced water is in compliance with all standards, reiterating that drinking water is the red line of the industry and people should be certain that drinking water is free of any chemical or microbial pollutant and the supplied water is fully verified by the competent centers.

He further said that people should not have any concern about Coronavirus in drinking water, reiterating that the quality of drinking water is checked based on all standards at the Baba Sheikhali Water Refining plant and it is also screened online in the provincial water distribution network and there is no need people to worry.

He also pointed to the post-Coronavirus era, saying that the refining and monitoring the quality control of water and wastewater division should start studying the effects of the virus on the wastewater.

Nicaragua Moves Over 2,800 Prisoners to House Arrest



MABAGUA (Dispatches) - Nicaragua has moved more than 2,800 prisoners to house arrest to contain the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Authorities jailed at least 86 opposition figures and supporters of rights groups under the government of Daniel Ortega - a former rebel hero whose most recent term in power started in 2007 and who is now accused of running a repressive dictatorship.

Many of those prisoners were arrested during the 2018 protests against Ortega that rights groups said left 300 people dead.

Turkey, Russia Hold 11th Joint Patrol in Idlib, Syria



ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish and Russian military elements performed the 11th joint patrol along a key highway in Idlib, northwestern Syria, the Turkish National Defense Ministry said on Thursday.

"Within the framework of TUR-RF Agreement/Protocol, the 11th TUR-RF Combined Land Patrol on M-4 Highway in Idlib was conducted with the participation of land and air elements," the ministry said in an official statement.

The M4 highway, also known as the Aleppo-Al Hasakah road, is about 30 kilometers (19 miles) from Turkey's southern border.

Taliban Claim Deadly Attack On Court in Afghanistan



KABUL (Dispatches) - A truck packed with explosives blew up near a military court in the eastern Afghan city of Gardez on Thursday, killing at least five people in an attack claimed by the Taliban armed group.

The explosion comes two days after at least 56 people were killed in attacks elsewhere in the country, including women and newborn babies, dealing a setback to peace plans in the war-ravaged nation.

"A car bomb explosion took place near a military court in Gardez city, which is a populated area. Dozens of civilians are feared to be dead and wounded," said Tariq Arian, an interior ministry spokesman.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement the armed group was responsible for the attack.

Emal Khan Momand, a military spokesman in Paktia province where Gardez is located, said the attack was carried out by a truck packed with explosives. Five people were killed, and 14 were wounded, he said.

Arian blamed the armed group the Haqqani Network, which has ties to the Taliban and the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba armed group. These groups rarely publicly claim responsibility for attacks.

The blast comes after gunmen attacked a maternity hospital in Kabul, killing 24 people, including new mothers and newborn babies, on Tuesday. A suicide blast claimed by the ISIL (ISIS) armed group at a funeral in eastern Nangahar on the same day killed 32.

President Ashraf Ghani condemned the attacks and said he had ordered the military to switch to offensive mode rather than the defensive stance it had adopted as the United States withdraws troops and tries to broker talks with the Taliban.

The Taliban denied any involvement in those attacks, but the government accused the group of fostering an environment in which "terrorism" thrives or of working with other armed groups who could have been involved, straining efforts by the US to bring the armed group and the Afghan government together.

Libyan Army Inflicts Severe Losses on Haftar Militias

TRIPOLI (Dispatches) - Libyan Army has neutralized a large number of militias loyal to renegade commander Khalifa Haftar as part of Operation Peace Storm launched on March 26 to counter attacks on the capital Tripoli.

A total of four aircrafts, a helicopter, two drones, a vast number of tanks, artillery, armored vehicles, heavy weapons as well as facilities used by Haftar's militias were also destroyed by the army, according to information obtained by Anadolu Agency.

Turkish soldiers continue to provide training and consultancy services to the Libyan Army in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 2259 and upon an official call by the Libyan government.

The soldiers are carrying out their activities in the region which is secured by the Libyan government without any casualties so far.

Attacks carried out by Haftar's militias continue to cause considerable civilian casualties in the country.

A total of 28 people, including women and children, were injured, while at least five civilians were killed in recent attacks by the Haftar's militias south of Tripoli, according to the figures released by the UN Support Mission in Libya.

The Libyan Army has recently gained advantage against Haftar's militias, which are supported by France, Russia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, while Haftar's forces suffered heavy casualties and had to retreat to the south.

Japan Lifts Emergency in Most Areas But Not in Tokyo, Osaka

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe lifted a state of emergency in large parts of the country on Thursday but said it would remain in place in Tokyo until the novel coronavirus is contained.

Abe lifted the emergency in 39 of Japan's 47 prefectures but left it in force in the capital and in the second-largest urban area of Osaka, as he tries to cushion the economic blow while stopping the virus.

Abe said he would begin work on a second extra budget and as part of the economic stimulus, the government would take more steps to ease corporate funding strains, if needed.

"While controlling the spread of the virus as much as possible by acting on the premise that the virus is all around us, we will restore ordinary work and daily life," Abe told a news conference.

The world's third-largest economy declared the nationwide state of emergency a month ago, urging citizens to reduce person-to-person contact by 80% to slow the spread of the virus and ease pressure on medical services.

Economists said normalisation would be gradual as the government keeps a wary eye on the possibility of a second wave of infections, as seen in countries such as South Korea and China. The emergency gives governors more authority to tell people to stay at home and to close schools and businesses, but there is no penalty for non-compliance.

Some non-essential businesses, even in areas hit hard by the coronavirus, have started to reopen, even before Thursday's announcement, and the scope of restrictions has varied across the country. Osaka's governor has announced criteria for gradually lifting some restraints on businesses including eateries and bars.

The 39 prefectures in which the emergency has been lifted account for 54% of Japan's population but the greater Tokyo area accounts for a third of the economy.

"Tokyo is the heart of the Japanese economy. It's like driving a car with three wheels," said Jesper Koll, chief executive of asset manager WisdomTree Japan.

The government is set to add four economists to its advisory panel for combating the epidemic and a review will be conducted again in about a week.



Trump Threatens China Ties, Says in No Mood for Xi Talks



WASHINGTON (AFP) - U.S. President Donald Trump further hardened his rhetoric towards China on Thursday, saying he no longer wishes to speak with Xi Jinping and warning darkly he might cut ties over the rival superpower's handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

Tensions have ratcheted up between Washington and Beijing as they trade barbs over the origin of the pandemic -- which first appeared in late 2019 in the Chinese city of Wuhan, and which Trump has dubbed the "Plague from China."

"I have a very good relationship (with Xi), but I just -- right now I don't want to speak to him," Trump told Fox Business. "I'm very disappointed in China. I will tell you that right now," he said.

Asked how the United States might choose to retaliate, Trump gave no specifics but struck a threatening tone, saying: "There are many things we could do. We could do things. We could cut off the whole relationship."

"If you did, what would happen?" Trump asked. "You'd save \$500 billion if you cut off the whole relationship."

Trump has for weeks accused China of concealing the true scale of the outbreak, allowing it to spread unchecked across the globe and claim the lives of 300,000 people to date.

Beijing strongly denies the charge, insisting it transmitted all available data as soon as possible to the World Health Organization.

But Trump doubled down on Fox Business, insisting: "They could have stopped it. They could have stopped it in China where it came from. But it didn't happen that way."

"It's very sad what's happened to the world and to our country, with all of the deaths," he said.

The U.S.-Chinese standoff over the pandemic has raised questions over the fate of a partial trade deal inked in January that had marked a truce in their bruising economic war.

Trump earlier this week ruled out renegotiating that deal, when asked about reports that China was looking to reopen talks.

U.S. Republicans Win Upset Victory in California Congressional Race

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - A former Navy combat pilot claimed victory Wednesday in the fight for an open US House seat north of Los Angeles, a win that would mark the first time in over two decades that a Republican captured a Democratic-held congressional district in California.

"I'm ready to go to work," Republican Mike Garcia said. His Democratic rival, Christy Smith, congratulated Garcia, calling him the "likely victor".

However, she said she expected to win in November, when the two meet again in a rematch for the full, two-year House term that begins in January. "This is only one step in this process," she said in a statement.

Garcia, a political newcomer, had a 12-point edge over Smith in Tuesday's special election for the swing 25th District. An unknown number of ballots remained uncounted. Los Angeles County, where most of them are located, was not expected to update its tally until Friday. All voters received mailed ballots because of the coronavirus outbreak, though a sprinkling of polling places were available for those who wanted to vote in person.

The contest took on outsized importance as the only competitive House race in the country in the middle of the coronavirus crisis. It is seen nationally as a proxy vote on President Donald Trump's leadership and a possible harbinger for November elections.

Trump, who lost the district that runs through a swath of suburbs and small ranches in 2016, urged voters to support the political newcomer Garcia, while former President Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and other high-profile Democrats backed Smith.

Garcia's win provides a jolt of encouragement for the state's beleaguered GOP, which has been drifting towards obscurity in California for years.

The seat became vacant last year after the resignation of Democratic Representative Katie Hill, who stepped down after admitting to an affair with a campaign worker and the U.S. House opened an ethics probe into an allegation that she was involved with a member of her congressional staff, which Hill denied.

Only 4.4% of French Population Infected By Coronavirus



PARIS (Reuters) - A study led by the Pasteur Institute says a mere 4.4% of the French population - or 2.8 million people - have been infected by the novel coronavirus, much higher than the official count of cases but way too low to achieve so-called "herd immunity".

In a study published on Wednesday in the journal Science, researchers say the infection rate in the worst-hit parts of France - the eastern part of the country and the Paris region - is between 9 and 10 percent on average.

"Around 65% of the population should be immune if we want to control the pandemic by the sole means of immunity", the study says.

Herd immunity refers to a situation where enough people in a population have immunity to an infection to be able to effectively stop that disease from spreading.

The rate of infection was measured by the Pasteur Institute as of May 11, the day when France started to unwind its almost two-month-long national lockdown.

"As a consequence, our results show that, without a vaccine, the herd immunity alone will not be enough to avoid a second wave at the end of the lockdown. Efficient control measures must thus be upheld after May 11", researchers say.

France's overall death toll from the virus rose to 27,074 on Wednesday, the fifth-highest in the world, and total number of cases officially stood at 177,700, the seventh-highest total.

The Pasteur Institute also said the lockdown put in place on March 17 in France led to a drastic decline of the coronavirus' reproduction rate, going from 2.9 to 0.67 over the 55-day virtual standstill of the country.

A Spanish study also published on Wednesday showed similar results, saying about 5% of the country's population had contracted the disease and that there was no herd immunity in Spain, also emerging progressively for long lockdown.

Shanon
(adviser)

Parsian

Jordan Apt (\$2000)
220sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
yard, & pkg
Fully Furn

Shariati Villa (\$3500)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p, S
green yard
Fully Furn

Velenjak (\$1400)
2bdrs, S/p, S, F.F

Farmanieh (\$3000)
300sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p
S, J, L.balcony, pkg
Fully Furn

Jordan Villa (\$4000)
700sq.m, 4bdrs, yard

Elahieh (\$1800)
3bdrs, balcony, F.F

Vanak bldg (\$7000)
4storey, 12bdrs, pkg

Darrous Apt (\$2500)
280sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J
balcony, pkg, & Fully Furn

Cell: +989121907875
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IEA Still Sees Record 2020 Oil Demand Fall

LONDON (Reuters) - Oil demand is still set for a record fall in 2020, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Thursday, but it trimmed its forecast for the drop citing easing lockdown measures.

Demand is expected to fall by 8.6 million barrels per day (bpd), the IEA said in its monthly report, trimming its estimate by 690,000 bpd.

Around 2.8 billion people will be living under confinement measures aimed at containing the coronavirus at the end of May, down from 4 billion in April, the Paris-based IEA said. In trimming its forecast it also cited stronger-than-expected mobility in some European countries and the United States as well as higher Chinese demand as it recovers from the virus outbreak.



Iraq Agrees With Oil Majors to Cut Output

BASRA (Reuters) - Iraq is cutting its oil output by around 700,000 barrels per day (bpd), a third less than required under an OPEC+ supply pact, after it failed to persuade international oil majors operating its giant fields to agree to deeper reductions.

Iraq has agreed with oil majors operating its five giant southern oilfields to cut 300,000 bpd, Iraqi oil officials told Reuters on Wednesday. OPEC+ agreed last month to slash output by 9.7 million bpd for May and June, a record production cut.

Iraqi acting oil minister Ali Allawi said in a statement Iraq remained fully committed to the oil cut agreement reached by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies - a group known as OPEC+ - but did not elaborate.

The country's oil output cut target under the OPEC+ supply reduction pact is 1.06 million bpd for May and June.

OPEC+ agreed last month to slash output by 9.7 million bpd for May and June, a record production cut.

The agreement with the oil majors came after what Iraqi officials described as "a defensive position" by the international oil companies developing Iraq's southern fields. The refusal by the oil majors to cut more oil indicates the difficulties which are facing Iraq to fully comply with the OPEC+ crude supply reduction pact. Two senior Iraqi officials who are part of the talks with foreign companies said they had to agree this deal to avoid paying the companies for the curtailed production.

Foreign oil companies, such as BP, Exxon Mobil Corp, Italy's Eni and Russia's Lukoil, which are developing Iraq's giant southern oilfields operate under service contracts which pay them a fixed dollar fee for their output and are also compensated in crude cargoes.

This type of contract shields oil companies against sharp falls in oil prices. But it also means that with the OPEC cuts, Iraq ends up with less crude to sell bringing lower revenue to its state budget.

"Companies accepted to cut around 300,000 bpd which is considered nominal," said a senior official at Iraq's Basra Oil Company (BOC) who has direct knowledge of the discussions with the oil majors.

"We are in a critical situation where we cannot exert more pressure on the foreign firms and at the same time, we have to respect the OPEC agreement which is very difficult to fully implement" said another senior BOC official, who also asked not to be named.

Iraq has often lagged other OPEC+ producers in their previous deal to cut production and had not complied fully with its agreed output targets.

"We are optimistic that OPEC and other producers will understand Iraq's situation when we meet next month," the second BOC official said.

At least one European and two Asian customers will receive reduced oil supplies from Iraq in June, industry sources familiar with the matter said, as OPEC's No.2 producer cuts some of its output.

European oil major Total's allocation of Basra crude will be cut by over 25% in June and India's Bharat Petroleum Corp will get about 25% less oil from Iraq. South Korea's GS Caltex was also told that it would receive less in June.

Italy Approves Long-Delayed Economic Stimulus Package

ROME (Reuters) - The Italian government has approved a long-delayed, 55 billion-euro (48.7 billion pounds) stimulus package aimed at helping Italy's battered businesses and struggling families survive the coronavirus crisis.

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte had promised to introduce the measures last month, but repeated rows within his increasingly shaky coalition over various aspects of the decree, which runs to almost 500 pages, led to repeated holdups.

"We have worked on this decree aware that the country is in great difficulty," Conte said on Wednesday following a Cabinet meeting. The decree takes immediate effect.

Rome has forecast that the economy will contract by at least 8% this year as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, which has so far killed 31,106 people in Italy - the third-highest death toll in the world after the United States and Britain.

After a two-month lockdown, tight restrictions on businesses and movement are being gradually rolled back.

"This decree provides the prerequisites so that this phase of reopening can immediately offer the prospect of an economic and social recovery," Conte told reporters.

The stimulus package, which follows an initial 25 billion-euro package introduced in March, includes a mix of grants and tax breaks to help firms ride out the downturn. It also offers help to families, including subsidies for childcare and incentives to boost the ravaged tourism sector.

The Treasury has predicted that the extra spending, coupled with a collapse in tax revenues, will push the budget deficit to 10.4% of gross domestic product this year, while public debt was seen surging some 20 percentage points to 155.7% of GDP.

Conte said the decree set aside 25.6 billion euros to help employees and the self-employed, including additional funding for temporary layoff schemes that enable firms to furlough rather than shed staff.

The new measures also include a norm to let irregular migrants obtain temporary work papers to enable them to be hired as farm labourers or carers. The ruling 5-Star Movement initially fought the initiative, but eventually gave way rather than risk seeing the government fall apart over the issue.

The bill provides for payments of between 400 and 800 euros a month for a maximum of two months to help those with no income who are excluded from the current welfare safety net.

Among a raft of other measures, Conte said regional taxes due to be paid by businesses in June would be scrapped at a cost of 4 billion euros.

There was also a provision to create an equity fund for state lender Cassa di Risparmio di Venezia (CRV) to invest in non-financial firms deemed strategically important.



Boeing Scores Deals to Deliver More Than 1,000 Missiles to Saudi

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Boeing has been awarded two contracts worth more than \$2 billion for the delivery of more than 1,000 air-to-surface and anti-ship missiles to Saudi Arabia, the Pentagon said Wednesday.

A first contract, worth \$1.97 billion, is for the modernization of SLAM ER cruise missiles as well as delivery of 650 new missiles "in support of the government of Saudi Arabia," it said.

The contract is to be completed by December 2028 for the SLAM ERs, a GPS-guided air-to-surface missile with a range of up to 155 nautical miles (approximately 180 miles, 290 kilometers).

The Pentagon also announced a more than \$650 million contract for delivery of 467 new Harpoon Block II anti-ship missiles, including more than 400 to Saudi Arabia.

The others will be delivered to Brazil, Qatar and Thailand. Support equipment will be supplied to India, Japan, the Netherlands and South Korea, the statement said.

In a separate statement, Boeing said the new contracts would ensure the continuation of the Harpoon program through 2026 and restart the SLAM ER production line.

Boeing, which said it delivered its last SLAM ER weapon system in 2008, put the total of the contracts at \$3.1 billion. A spokeswoman said that included a previously announced order.



Healthy Oceans:

Keeping Asia and the Pacific Afloat

By: Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana

Memories of idyllic beaches and sonorous waves may seem far away while we remain at home. Yet, we need not look far to appreciate the enduring history of the ocean in Asia and the Pacific. For generations, the region has thrived on our seas. Our namesake bears a nod to the Pacific Ocean, a body of water tethered to the well-being of billions in our region. The seas provide food, livelihoods and a sense of identity, especially for coastal communities in the Pacific island States.

Sadly, escalating strains on the marine environment are threatening to drown progress and our way of life. In less than a century, climate change and unsustainable resource management have degraded ecosystems and diminished biodiversity. Levels of overfishing have exponentially increased, leaving fish stocks and food systems vulnerable. Marine plastic pollution coursing through the region's rivers have contributed to most of the debris flooding the ocean. While the COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily reduced emissions and pollution on the ocean, this should not be moment of reprieve. Rather, recovery efforts have the potential to rebuild a new reality, embedded in sustainability and resilience. It is time to take transformative action for the ocean, together.

Despite a seascape celebrated in our collective imaginations, research shows that our picture of the ocean is remarkably shallow. Insights from Changing Sails: Accelerating Regional Actions for Sustainable Oceans in Asia and the Pacific, the theme study of this year's Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, reveal that without data, we are swimming in the dark. Data are available for only two out of ten targets for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14: Life Below Water. Due to limitations in methodology and national statistical systems, information gaps have persisted at uneven levels across countries. Defeating COVID-19 has been a numbers game and we need similar commitment to data for the state of our shores.

While there is much we cannot see, images of plastic pollution have become commonplace. Asia and the Pacific produce nearly half of global plastic by

volume, of which it consumes 38 per cent. Plastics represent a double burden for the ocean: their production generates CO2 absorbed by the ocean, and as a final product enter the ocean as pollution. Beating this challenge will hinge upon effective national policies and re-thinking production cycles.

Environmental decline is also affecting dwindling fish stocks. Our region's position as the world's largest producer of fish has come at the cost of overexploitation. The percentage of stocks fished at unsustainable levels has increased threefold from 10 per cent 1974 to 33 per cent in 2015. Generating complete data on fish stocks, fighting illicit fishing activity and conserving marine areas must remain a priority.

Economic activity from shipping must also be sustainable. While the most connected shipping economies are in Asia, the small island developing States (SIDS) of the Pacific experience much lower levels of connectivity, leaving them relatively isolated from the global economy. Closing the maritime connectivity gap must be placed at the center of regional transport cooperation efforts. We must also work with the shipping community to navigate toward green shipping. As an ocean-based industry, shipping directly affects the health of the marine ecosystem. Enforcing sustainable shipping policies is essential to mitigate maritime pollution.

The magnitude of our ocean and its challenges represent how extensive and collaborative our solutions must be. Transboundary ocean management and linking ocean data call for close cooperation among countries in the region. Harnessing ocean statistics through strong national statistical systems will serve as compass guiding countries to monitor trends, devise timely responses and clear blind spots impeding action. Through the Ocean Accounts Partnership, ESCAP is working with countries to harmonize ocean data and provide a space for regular dialogue. Translating international agreements and standards into national action is also key. We must fully equip countries and all ocean custodians to localize global agreements into tangible results. ESCAP is working with member states to implement International Maritime Organization (IMO) requirements on



emissions reduction and environmental standards.

Keeping the ocean plastic-free will depend on policies that promote a circular economy approach. This strategy minimizes resource use and keeps them in use for as long as possible. This will require economic incentives and disincentives, coupled with fundamental lifestyle changes. Several countries in the region have introduced successful single use plastic bans. ESCAP's Closing the Loop project is reducing the environmental impact of cities in ASEAN by addressing plastic waste pollution and leakages into the marine environment.

Our oceans keep our health, the economy and our lives above the waves. In the post-COVID-19 era, we must use the critical years ahead to steer our collective fleets toward sustainable oceans. With our shared resources and commitment, I am confident we can sail in the right direction.

Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana is the United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP

Iran Emphasize Controlling Joint Borders With Afghanistan

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian border guards stressed the need for controlling the joint borders with neighboring Afghanistan.

In a joint meeting held between border officials of the two countries of Iran and Afghanistan on Thursday, Iranian officials emphasized commonalities and cultural, religious, and ethnic relations between the people of two countries and called on Afghanistan border guards to have more control on joint borders and to activate border checkpoints in Afghanistan that have been inactive as soon as possible.



WHO Warns Virus May Be Here to Stay

GENEVA (Dispatches) – The coronavirus may never go away and populations will have to learn to live with it just as they have HIV, the World Health Organization has warned, as the global death toll from the disease nears 300,000.

There were also gloomy forecasts from the US Federal Reserve, which said prolonged shutdowns to stem the spread of the virus could cause lasting economic damage in America.

Washington ratcheted up tensions over the pandemic by accusing China of trying to steal research into a vaccine, while U.S. President Donald Trump upped the rhetoric with a colourful phrase that could anger Beijing.

“We just made a great Trade Deal, the ink was barely dry, and the World was hit by the Plague from China. 100 Trade Deals wouldn’t make up the difference -- and all those innocent lives lost!” Trump tweeted.

The United States logged more than 1,800 deaths on Wednesday, bringing the nation’s total to 84,059.

The president has increasingly looked to pin the blame on China, where the virus first emerged late last year.

Two U.S. security agencies piled further pressure on Beijing Wednesday by saying Chinese hackers were attempting to steal intellectual property related to treatments.

“China’s efforts to target these sectors pose a significant threat to our nation’s response to COVID-19,” the FBI and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) said.

Neither agency offered evidence to support the allegation.

A vaccine could allow countries and economies to fully re-open from lockdowns and potentially earn millions of dollars for its creators.

But the WHO said the virus may never be wiped out entirely.

“This virus may become just another endemic virus in our communities and this virus may never go away,” said Michael Ryan, the global health body’s emergencies director in Geneva.

“HIV has not gone away -- but we have come to terms with the virus.”

The prospect of the disease hanging around leaves governments across the world facing a delicate balancing act between suppressing the pathogen and getting economies up and running.

Trump has been pushing for a swift resumption of economic activity in the US, often against the advice of health officials, as he tries to jumpstart the world’s largest economy before a November election.



Top infectious diseases expert Anthony Fauci has said re-opening too soon risks triggering uncontrollable outbreaks, but the president Wednesday dismissed that call for caution as “not acceptable”.

In an excerpt of an interview with Fox Business to air in full on Thursday, Trump said: “I totally disagree with him on schools.”

The tensions between health and the economy were thrown into sharp relief Wednesday when Federal Reserve chief Jay Powell warned of a potential “wave of bankruptcies” that could cause lasting harm.

Further signs of the damage to businesses emerged Thursday when Lloyd’s of London forecast the pandemic will cost the global insurance industry about \$203 billion.

And Australia released figures showing almost 600,000 people lost their jobs as the country’s virus shutdown took hold in April, the steepest monthly drop in employment since records began more than 40 years ago.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison called the number “terribly shocking”.

Virus Eminently Capable of Spreading Through Speech



LONDON (Dispatches) – Microdroplets generated by speech can remain suspended in the air in an enclosed space for more than ten minutes, a study published Wednesday showed, underscoring their likely role in spreading COVID-19.

Researchers at the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) had a person loudly repeat the phrase “Stay healthy” for 25 seconds inside a closed box.

A laser projected into the box illuminated droplets, allowing them to be seen and counted.

They stayed in the air for an average of 12 minutes, the study published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS) showed.

Taking into account the known concentration of coronavirus in saliva, scientists estimated that each minute of loudly speaking can generate more than 1,000 virus-containing droplets capable of remaining airborne for eight minutes or more in a closed space.

“This direct visualization demonstrates how normal speech generates airborne droplets that can remain suspended for tens of minutes or longer and are eminently capable of transmitting disease in confined spaces,” the researchers conclude.

The same team had observed that speaking less loudly generates fewer droplets, in a work published in the New England Journal of Medicine in April.

If the level of infectiousness of COVID-19 through speech can be confirmed, it could give a scientific boost to recommendations in many countries to wear a face mask, and help explain the virus’s rapid spread.

As Japan Slow-Walks Stimulus, Small Businesses Fear Collapse

TOKYO (Reuters) – For Japan’s shell-shocked small businesses, a promised \$1.1 trillion in stimulus is proving too little, too late, raising the likelihood of a surge in bankruptcies at companies that employ nearly three-quarters of the workforce.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s government last month declared a state of emergency in response to the coronavirus crisis and rolled out a package equal to 20% of economic output, including loans for small businesses.

But seven business owners told Reuters of deep frustration at a process they said was taking too long and not delivering enough. Abe, under fire for his handling of the crisis, has said the government would take additional stimulus measures.

But small businesses, which employ 70% of the workforce, are already on the brink of disaster. The outbreak has pushed more than 140 companies to bankruptcy since February, with more expected toward the end of the month, according to research firm Tokyo Shoko Research.

Yuji Hara, 63, the president of Kaze Travel agency in Tokyo, said the biggest worry was his employees. He has applied for government assistance for his workers, which pays employees 8,330 yen (\$78) a day. But the money hasn’t arrived yet and he borrowed from a state-backed lender to pay salaries.

With no revenue in April and probably none for the next few months, he’s not sure when he’ll be able to repay that.

“Liquidating the business would be the most decent decision, but I have 30 employees I need to support,” said Hara, sitting in an empty office.

As of Wednesday, 16,724 businesses had applied for



such aid, and 6,571 cases had been approved.

In the worst-case scenario, almost 40% of Japan’s 1.5 million companies could go bankrupt if sales continue to fall by 50% for 11 months without bank loans or government stimulus, research firm Teikoku Data Bank predicts.

Although that scenario appears unlikely, it does illustrate how critical government aid is to small companies.

“We know the current situation is not the best,” said an official at the labour ministry, which is charge of some aid.

“We are considering measures to provide the money more quickly,” said the official, who was not authorised to speak to the media and was speaking anonymously. The official added that there was a limit to financial resources for the payments.

Japan is due to lift its state of emergency for much of the country on Thursday, although Tokyo – the heart of the economy – will remain under restrictions.

On weekday in April, the lobby of the Shinjuku ward office in Tokyo was crowded with people lining up to apply for interest relief on new loans – a sharp contrast with the government’s call for social distancing.

To get subsidies, applicants must make an appointment for an initial meeting, then another appointment for a guarantee letter. After that, they need a bank appointment to negotiate the terms.

Nobukazu Aoki, the 69-year-old owner of an izakaya restaurant, was among those waiting in a line last month. He said sales had fallen by 90%.

Weeks later, he told Reuters he had yet to receive a loan.

Terrorism...

FROM PAGE 1

During the 2016 U.S. presidential campaigns, was not it the current President Donald Trump who accused his rival Hillary Clinton of creating the Daesh group? Was not it the U.S. which officially stated that it killed Osama bin Laden and dumped his body into the sea? Was not it the U.S. which in facing with the assassination of Saudi Arabian journalist Jamal Ahmad Khashoggi remained deadly silent? Was not it the U.S. Director of the National Security Agency William Odom under President Ronald Reagan in his recent interview said, “In every aspect one looks and calculates it, Americas have been taking advantage of terrorism for long. Is not it shameful that between 1978 and 1979, the U.S. Congress tried to approve a law on international terrorism. In reckless and open copy of the Act, the Congressmen (disgraceful and savage) announced that the U.S. should be itself an exception?”



Nature of terrorism is a savagery one and is far behind the logic and justice, and committing terrorist act is a savage and out of the human logic context, and anybody, who commits it, is savage and wild. Brave and honest men cannot stand tyrannies of governments and decide to revolt against them. So the United Nations should without any delay, first, condemn the tyranny, secondly condemn the state terrorism, and thirdly where the governments do not abide by law, it should recognize the struggles of nations against the tyranny and make it legal. Only with this attitude and performance, the culture-less law of the jungle can be wiped out of the world.

INTEX...

FROM PAGE 1

In May 2018 U.S. President Donald Trump announced that his country was withdrawing from the JCPOA and re-imposing sanctions on Iran.

A year later, Iran announced that it would gradually downgrade its nuclear commitments unless the EU, France, the UK, and Germany (E3 countries) take measures to save the deal. With the U.S. scrapping JCPOA, the E3 countries promised to compensate for the unilateral exit of the US through the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX).

INSTEX was set up to try to enable legitimate trade with Iran to continue without falling foul of U.S. sanctions.

Russia, China...

FROM PAGE 1

“U.S. failed to meet its obligations under Resolution 2231 by withdrawing from Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action,” China’s UN mission said.

Also noting that Washington is in gross violation of UNSC resolution 2231, Ryabko also stressed that “no one is allowed to implement UNSC Security Council resolutions selectively and extremely fragmentarily”. Ever since withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal, Washington has sought to pressure Tehran with a growing list of widespread sanctions targeting the Islamic Republic. Tehran has responded to the sanctions and the failure of JCPOA signatories – specifically Britain, France and Germany – to protect the deal by gradually suspending its own commitments to the nuclear accord.

In an opinion piece published by the U.S.-based Bloomberg magazine on Thursday, U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein called on the U.S. to revise its provocative policies towards Iran at a time when the U.S. is preoccupied with upcoming elections and the COVID-19 pandemic. She also lambasted Washington’s “haphazard” behavior towards Iran as lacking “any clear policy or overarching strategy” which could inadvertently lead to a war.

“The administration is at times threatening and at times conciliatory, giving Iran little sense of what actions the president will take,” she said. Feinstein highlighted that Washington has sought to defend the efficiency of its sanctions by saying that Iran’s economy is on the verge of collapse and has denied sanctions relief amid the pandemic by claiming Iran is “flush with cash”.

Iran’s Oil...

FROM PAGE 1

“We’ve seen a reduction in Iranian exports, which is driven by lower Chinese purchases,” said Daniel Gerber, chief executive of Petro-Logistics, which also tracks the flows. “We are not yet seeing any improvement in Iranian exports in May.”

The drop in oil demand caused by government lockdowns to contain the coronavirus, and slide in prices, have increased buyer choice, making it harder to find customers willing to take the oil which U.S. President Donald Trump reimposed sanctions on two years ago. “Finding customers is not easy,” said Sara Vakhshouri of consulting firm SVB Energy International. “Currently there is a huge oversupply and there is plenty of low-priced oil available in the market.”

Iran and fellow OPEC member Venezuela, which is also under sanctions, have had to compete with discounts offered by other producers like Saudi Arabia, as well as pay commission to those that buy and sell their crude, she said.

“If you add the discounts to the commissions and the operational costs, there won’t be any profit,” Vakhshouri added.

China’s official buying of Iranian oil is now at a record low, based on the latest figures showing March arrivals.

Data on Refinitiv Eikon shows that Syria remains a customer, while other cargoes sail without destinations added.

Gerber of Petro-Logistics said spot purchases by Chinese refiners took a hit in the first quarter as the coronavirus outbreak limited their processing rates, or crude runs. “When Chinese refiners ramped up runs, demand for Iranian crude remained weak as large volumes of distressed spot barrels from other exporters, notably Russia, were available to the market because of reduced demand in Europe,” he said.

The exact level of Iranian exports has become more opaque since the return of U.S. sanctions. Some exports are under the radar, analysts and industry sources say, meaning estimates tend to fall into a range. A third company that tracks the exports, which declined to be identified, said Iranian shipments in April could have been as high as 350,000 bpd, while so far in May the country had shipped about 200,000 bpd.

Unofficially, one independent Chinese refiner has been a regular buyer of shipments that may have been blended and transhipped via Malaysia, sources said. The latest export figures are a fraction of the more than 2.5 million bpd that Iran shipped in April 2018, the month before U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew his country from a nuclear agreement between Iran and world powers.

Iran had been the second-largest producer in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries for decades until being overtaken by Iraq in 2012. Oil output and exports from Iran recovered during 2016 after Iran and six world powers had reached the nuclear deal.

Tour of Britain

Cancelled Due to Virus

LONDON (Dispatches) - The 2020 Tour of Britain has been cancelled after organizers decided it was not practical to stage the race during the coronavirus crisis.

Dutchman Mathieu Van Der Poel won the Tour of Britain last year, but the Alpecin-Fenix rider will have to wait until 2021 to defend the title.

The event was set to start in Penzance on September 6 before finishing in Aberdeen a week later.

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Quail Hollow Named Host For 2025 PGA Championship

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Quail Hollow, where American Justin Thomas captured his first major title in 2017, was named the host club for the 2025 PGA Championship on Thursday by the PGA of America.

The Charlotte, North Carolina, course opened in 1961 and has been a regular US PGA Tour stop. In addition, the 7,600-yard layout is set to host next year's Presidents Cup matches. "Quail Hollow's course has a well-earned reputation as a stern test for the world's finest players," PGA of America president Suzy Whaley said.

Dortmund Braced For Most Unusual Derby in History

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Borussia Dortmund's young stars Erling Braut Haaland and Jadon Sancho will be hunting more goals on Saturday in "the most unusual derby in history" against Schalke as the German Bundesliga returns behind locked doors.

Dortmund usually expect 82,000 spectators at Signal Iduna Park for a home derby, but the stadium will be near-empty with only a handful of media and officials admitted.

Even national team coach Joachim Loew will not be allowed in to watch his Germany players live on their return to action.

"It will be the most unusual derby in history," former Dortmund captain Sebastian Kehl told German daily Welt.

Normally, a home derby against Schalke comes alive "through the fans, from their emotions, from the enthusiasm in the stadium," Kehl added.

Dortmund are looking to close the four-point gap behind leaders Bayern Munich, who visit Union Berlin on Sunday.

However, Dortmund's iconic south stand, dubbed "The Yellow Wall" and normally packed with 25,000 passionate fans will - like the rest of the stadium - stand empty.

"The players will miss the chance for extra motivation by the fans and the atmosphere," admitted Kehl.

While league action in England, Spain and Italy is still at least a month away, the German Football League (DFL) has drawn up detailed hygiene guidelines to restart.

The Bundesliga is set to become the first top European league to return during the pandemic, which has so far claimed around 7,700 lives in Germany.

At games around the country, substitutes will wear masks, goal celebrations will be replaced by elbow taps while handshakes and hugs before kick-off are a no-go.

"A lot of things will start from scratch on Saturday," Dortmund winger Julian Brandt told Sky.

"There will be no real advantages and disadvantages to playing home or away.

"In the end, it depends on who best accepts this situation and can best deal with it."

The pressure is on Haaland, 19, and Sancho, 20, to continue their goal-rich partnership, despite the empty terraces, and steer injury-depleted Dortmund to victory.

Midfield enforcers Emre Can and Axel Witsel are out with muscle strains, while playmaker Marco Reus is recovering from a groin problem.

Haaland was in stunning form when the league was suspended in mid-March with nine goals in eight Bundesliga appearances since joining from Salzburg.

Sancho also terrorised defences with 14 goals and 16 assists in 23 league games.

At third-placed RB Leipzig, Germany striker Timo Werner is aiming to move closer to his goal target for the season against Freiburg.

"Not many players my age have scored 20 goals in a season once and I've done it twice," said the 24-year-old Werner who has netted 21 times this term. "I'd like to score 30 in a season."

Julian Nagelsmann's Leipzig trail leaders Bayern by five points following draws against Leverkusen and Wolfsburg before matches were halted due to the virus outbreak.

The league's top scorer is back from injury and looking to add to his 25 goals this season on Sunday against Union in Berlin.

With nine games left, the 31-year-old Poland international is set to beat his previous best haul of 30 league goals, achieved in both 2015/16 and 2016/17.

It will also be worth watching Bayern's Canadian teen Alphonso Davies, 19, who has extended his contract until 2025 after several impressive displays at left-back.



Bayern Close To Agreeing Price for Sane

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bayern Munich and Manchester City are reportedly close to agreeing a transfer fee for Germany winger Leroy Sane, according to the German media on Thursday.

Magazine Kicker claims City want 50 million euros (\$54 million) for the 24-year-old Sane, but Bayern are offering around 10 million euros less.

Last week, magazine Sport Bild reported that Sane has already agreed a transfer to Bayern on a five-year contract.

Kicker claims defending Bundesliga champions Bayern have cut off talks with RB Leipzig's Germany striker Timo Werner, because they are nearing a deal with Sane.

Since joining from Schalke in 2016 reportedly for around 50 million euros, Sane has won the Premier League title twice under Pep Guardiola at City.

However, he has not played for the first team since suffering a torn knee ligament in the Community Shield match against Liverpool last August.

Kicker claims City had wanted 125 million euros for Sane before injury struck.

Leconte Opposes French Open Without Spectator

PARIS (Dispatches) - Henri Leconte says the French Open should be cancelled if it is impossible to have spectators at the claycourt Grand Slam event.

"I think there is just no interest in having Roland Garros behind closed doors," Leconte, who lost to Mats Wilander in the 1988 final, told L'Equipe TV.

The French tennis federation has moved the tournament from its initial May 24-June 7 dates to September 20-October 4 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"It will be difficult for the players to deal with it," Leconte said. "This is above all else a political decision. The federation hopes that in a few months we'll be able to play Roland Garros (in normal conditions)... but playing it behind closed doors, no."

"I think it would be better to cancel it and start again by having a real season in 2021."

French federation president Bernard Giudicelli has said holding the tournament without spectators was one possibility being considered.

The organizers of Wimbledon have cancelled the 2020 tournament while the US Open remains for now in its original August-September slot.

Ronaldinho Closing in on 70 Days Detention in Paraguay

A SUNCION (Dispatches) - Brazilian great Ronaldinho's lawyers are hoping the former world player of the year will be allowed to go home after more than two months of detention in Paraguay over a forged passport.

"We're hoping to convince the prosecution to allow Ronaldinho and his brother to return to their country. We can do nothing but wait for the investigation to end," a defense source told AFP.

Former Barcelona, AC Milan and Paris Saint-Germain star Ronaldinho and his brother, Robert de Assis Moreira, are facing up to five years in jail if convicted.

The brothers spent more than a month behind bars after they were accused of entering Paraguay in possession of false passports.

Mourinho Desperate for Premier League Return

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho says he is "desperate" for the return of Premier League action despite mounting concerns about the English top-flight's restart plans.

Several stars including Sergio Aguero, Raheem Sterling and Danny Rose have gone public with fears about resuming the season during the coronavirus crisis.

Some top-flight bosses are also understood to have expressed concerns about the plan to play from mid-June when they spoke during a League Managers Association meeting on Wednesday.

But Mourinho said he would relish the chance to get back to work despite the challenges and risks posed by the pandemic.

"I have not asked for any delay," Mourinho said in a statement on Thursday.

"I want to train, and I am desperate for the Premier League to return as soon as it is safe to do so, particularly now we are seeing other leagues preparing to return to action."

Mourinho was forced to apologise in April after being spotted breaking lockdown restrictions to hold a training session with midfielder Tanguy Ndombele in a public park.

Serge Aurier and Moussa Sissoko also had to say sorry after the Tottenham pair flouted social-distancing guidelines to train together.



Alli Survives Horrible Knifepoint Burglary

LONDON (Dispatches) - Knife-carrying burglars broke into Tottenham midfielder Dele Alli's home in London early Wednesday, the England playmaker escaping serious injury after being hit in a scuffle with the robbers.

Alli, 24, has been in isolation at his house with his brother, their partners and a close friend, the Daily Mail reported, ahead of Tottenham resuming training.

Two men broke in after midnight and following an altercation with Alli they made off with jewellery.

Alli and the other occupants in the house were said to be shaken by the ordeal, but otherwise unharmed.

"Thank you for all the messages. Horrible experience but we're all okay now. Appreciate the support," Alli tweeted.

A police spokesperson told the Mail: "Police were called at approximately 00:35hrs on Wednesday, 13 May to reports of a robbery at a residential address in Barnet."

"Two males gained entry to the property and stole items of jewellery, including watches, before fleeing."

"One male occupant of the property, aged in his 20s, suffered a minor facial injury after being assaulted. He did not require hospital treatment."

No arrests have yet been made.

Alli is due to start training with Spurs next week ahead of the Premier League's intended resumption next month.



Ricciardo to Join McLaren In 2021

LONDON (Dispatches) - Australian Daniel Ricciardo will drive for McLaren in Formula One next season after signing a "multi-year" deal that will see him replace Ferrari-bound Carlos Sainz, the British team announced on Thursday.

Ricciardo, 30, will line up alongside Britain's Lando Norris, 20, at McLaren in 2021 after he leaves Renault at the end of this season.

Ferrari are also expected to announce the arrival of Sainz, who will take the place of Sebastian Vettel at Maranello next year after the four-time world champion announced this week he was leaving the Italian team.

"Daniel is a proven race-winner and his experience, commitment and energy will be a valuable addition to McLaren and our mission to return to the front of the field," said McLaren team principal Andreas Seidl.

"With Daniel and Lando as teammates, I believe we have two racers who will continue to excite our fans and help the team grow."

Ricciardo has won seven races and recorded 29 podium finishes since his F1 debut with the HRT team at the British Grand Prix in 2011.

He drove for Red Bull's junior team Toro Rosso in 2012 and 2013 before making the jump to the flagship Red Bull team in 2014. He finished third in the drivers' standings in 2014 and 2016.

