

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei to Meet With A Group of University Students And the Representatives of Students Associations Via Videoconference Today

IRAN NEWS

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif Is to Deliver an Online Speech On the International Quds Day on Instagram, When the World Chides Zionist Regime's Cruelties on Last Friday of Ramadan (May 22)

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Gov't May Use Military Against Locusts Threatening Crops

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Government may use its military for a second year to help fight locusts that have invaded the south of the country, an Agricultural Ministry official was quoted as saying on Friday, as the swarms threaten to destroy crops worth more than \$7 billion.

The locust invasion, seen as the worst in decades, compounds problems facing Iran, already hard-hit by the coronavirus outbreak at home and seeing its oil exports sink to a record low as the virus crisis sharpens the impact of U.S. sanctions which further limit shipments.

Mohammad Reza Mir, a spokesman for the ministry's Plant Protection Organization (PPO), said the desert locusts had attacked more than 200,000 hectares (494,000 acres) of orchards and farmland in seven of Iran's 31 provinces, the semi-official news agency ILNA reported.

The affected areas, stretching from eastern Iran on the border with Pakistan to the southwestern border with Iraq, were likely to soon increase to 1 million hectares, Mir told ILNA.

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Iran Records Lowest COVID-19 Daily Death Toll

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Health Ministry spokesman says only 35 people have died of the novel coronavirus in the past 24 hours, the lowest number of daily fatalities in 70 days.

Kianoush Jahanpour said on Saturday the new deaths increase the overall fatalities to 6,937.

He also confirmed 1,757 new cases of COVID-19 infection, raising the total number of cases to 118,392.

So far, he said, 93,147 patients have recovered from the disease and been discharged from hospitals across the country.

However, 2,716 are currently in severe conditions of the disease, the spokesman added.

He also noted that 672,679 COVID-19 tests have been taken so far in Iran.

According to Jahanpour, the south-western Khuzestan province is still in red conditions, and has the highest number of hospitalizations and screening.

Meanwhile a health official yesterday said combating coronavirus products are sufficiently produced to meet the country's needs and other countries.

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Eid al-Fitr Prayers to Be Held Nationwide With Observance of Protocols



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani has said that the country will hold Eid al-Fitr and Quds Day events in compliance with protocols set to combat the COVID-19 outbreak.

Speaking on Saturday, Rouhani said that Eid al-Fitr prayers, which mark the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan, will be held in religious centers across the country.

He added, however, that the prayers will only be held in local religious centers as opposed to major prayer grounds where worshippers usually convene in each city to mark the event.

Rouhani, who made the comments addressing the National Headquarters against the Coronavirus, said that Quds Day will also be commemorated in "white" regions where the coronavirus is not deemed a threat.

He added that Quds Day will take place without its usual annual rallies and will instead be held within the perimeters of Friday prayers, which coincide with Quds Day.

Rouhani exempted the capital Tehran from the measure, where the Quds Day event will be organized in the form of a car protest.

"It will be a symbolic measure using vehicles and it will be organized by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)," he said.

Pro-Palestine activists in Iran and elsewhere are making plans to replace street rallies with online events to mark the International Quds Day.

As a legacy of the late founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Imam Khomeini, Quds Day has been designated on the last Friday of the fasting month of Ramadan to mark worldwide Muslim solidarity with the Palestinian cause.

International Quds day has become a global movement against colonialism and arrogant powers and really an unjust global system.

The event was commemorated every year with major rallies across Iran and beyond.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Rouhani said that Iranians have to recognize that the country's "difficult days" have yet to go by and that the country is still facing a "dangerous virus".

He added that the country has to prepare itself for "a few months of life with the coronavirus".

"However, our situation is better than before," the president added.

"During this time, people and health workers have become much more adept," in countering the coronavirus, he said.

"During the initial days of the outbreak, we didn't know if our N95 masks were enough or whether we could make our own...we didn't know if we had enough ventilators or if we could produce our own," he said.

"Today, we have gone past that," he added.

Iran to Remain Key Energy Source for Iraq

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Until suitable alternatives materialize, Iran will continue to be a crucial supplier of energy to rapidly growing Iraq for years to come, insists Luay Al-Khatteeb, the former Iraqi minister of electricity.

Al-Khatteeb spoke with Abbas Kadhim, director of the Atlantic Council's Iraq Initiative—barely a week after leaving the government post he had led since October 2018.

Despite having spent only one year on the job, Al-Khatteeb said he's proud of his ministry's achievements under very difficult conditions.

"When we were sworn in by parliament, it was on the basis of a four-year program, and the major work was to materialize in year two, three, and four as opposed to year one. Having said that, although our tenure was cut short, we succeeded in delivering 25 percent extra in power generation compared to 2018 levels—the equivalent of 3,500 megawatts," Al-Khatteeb said during the interview, which was co-hosted by the Atlantic Council's Global Energy Center.

"To put this in context, when Iraq witnessed regime change back in 2003, power generation hardly exceeded 3,000 megawatts, so to add 3,500 in one year is quite a milestone."

More importantly, he said, "we added significant capacity to the transmission and distribution systems of liberated provinces that hadn't had electricity since the occupation of ISIS back in 2014. Mosul, Anbar, and other provinces started to receive power—not the maximum level we aspired to, but acceptable when judging the limitations of time and resources."

Al-Khatteeb is considered a top regional energy expert. Before his stint as minister of electricity, he was founding director of the London-based Iraq Energy Institute (IEI); he's also a foreign policy fellow at the Brookings Institution, and his articles have appeared in the New York Times and Foreign Affairs.

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Trump, Pompeo, Hook Represent U.S. Dangerous Ruling Class

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) has lambasted US President Donald Trump, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook for their "mindless and dangerous" behavior.

"The Trump-Pompeo-Hook triangle has created an image of the American ruling class which is considered unreliable by its allies, a threat by its rivals and incompetent by its citizens," Ali Shamkhani said in a tweet.

"The rule of the incompetent and mindless is only a source of danger," he added.

Under the Trump administration, many observers have said Washington has gained notoriety among friends and foes alike for its dubious behavior, commonly discarding international norms and even forfeiting its own allies for short-term gains.

Washington's withdrawal from the multilateral 2015 Iran nuclear deal in 2018, along with its subsequent obsession with denying Tehran of any economic respite, is regarded as one of the main defining pillars of Trump's unruly foreign policy.

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UN Official Urges Lifting, Suspending Anti-Iran Sanctions

TEHRAN (IRNA) - UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet called for removing or suspending sanctions against Iran to help the country in its ongoing fight against the coronavirus.

In an interview with France 24, she urged the US to lift sanctions on Iran and Venezuela, stressing that the sanitary situation called for such a move in order to save lives.

Bachelet added that the medical exemptions to those sanctions touted by the Trump administration were too narrow and said only a suspension or a lifting of the sanctions would have a real impact.

The UN human rights chief voiced concern that some governments were taking advantage of emergency powers, lockdowns and curfews to further stifle dissent and crack down on political foes, human rights defenders and journalists.

Bachelet also warned that if Israel were to annex the West Bank, as the new government plans to do, this would be an "unacceptable" violation of international law.

She also said she was deeply worried about the worsening situation in Libya, noting that the warring parties had ignored the call for a ceasefire and admitting that the UN's efforts were unsuccessful for now.

South Korea Imports No Iran Crude

SEOUL (Reuters) - South Korea's U.S. crude oil imports in April increased 32.1% from a year earlier, although overall crude imports fell as some refiners lowered run rates to cope with a slump in demand, customs data showed on Friday.

In April, U.S. crude imports were 1.92 million tons, or 468,244 barrels per day (bpd), compared with 1.45 million tons a year earlier and 1.68 million tons in March. The United States ranked as South Korea's No. 3 crude supplier after Saudi Arabia and Kuwait last month.

South Korea's intake of U.S. crude oil jumped following the end of U.S. sanction waivers in May 2019, which allowed South Korea to buy Iranian crude oil, mainly condensate, or an ultra-light form of crude oil.

With the sanctions in place, South Korea's imports of Iranian crude oil, have remained zero since May 2019.

South Korea's crude imports from Saudi Arabia, its top crude supplier, were 3.04 million tons in April, or 741,841 bpd, down 15.4% from 3.59 million tons a year earlier, the data showed.

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Iran, Russia, Syria Cooperation On Fighting Terrorism

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Strategic cooperation among Iran, Russian and Syrian will continue to help the campaign against terrorism, according to Iranian Foreign Ministry's special assistance for political affairs Ali-Asghar Khaji. Khaji made the remarks during a meeting in Tehran on Saturday with Syrian ambassador to Iran Adnan Hassan Mahmoud. The Iranian official also said that the three countries will combine efforts to find a political settlement to the Syrian crisis.

He underlined the need for cooperation of Iran, Russia and Turkey within Astana peace process over the humanitarian crisis in Syria. Referring to the U.S. unilateral sanctions against Syria amid the global outbreak of coronavirus, Khaji urged the international community to provide support for the Syrian people and the country's national sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Syrian ambassador, for his part, appreciated strategic relations between Iran and Syria, calling for more enhanced negotiations between the two countries on bilateral and regional issues.

Tehran City Council Chairman Calls for Lifting Brutal Sanctions

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Chairman of the Islamic City Council of Tehran in a message to his counterparts in 25 metropolis cities throughout the world urged them to defend the legal rights of Iranian citizens against the US brutal sanctions enabling Iran to cope with the coronavirus humanitarian crisis.

Mohsen Hashemi Rafsanjani asked presidents of urban parliaments to use all their "legal power and capacity" in negotiations with the parliament and the national government and defend the legal rights of Iranian citizens.

Hashemi Rafsanjani wrote in part of his message, "While the world's difficult experience in dealing with the COVID-19 virus has shown that without global cooperation, no country can cope with this complex and destructive virus, unilateral sanctions against the Iranian government have made it impossible for the Iranian people to cooperate with the international community. In other words, the sanctions have effectively severed ties and made it impossible for the 80 million-strong nation to use international cooperation."

He added that the sanctions imposed as of 2018, while being inconsistent with Security Council Resolution 2231 and in contravention with the provisions of the UN Charter and International Human Rights Law, violate the October 3, 2018 provisional measures adopted by the International Court of Justice, which found the Iran sanctions illegal. The sanctions are aimed at restoring widespread and complex restrictions in various areas, including financial, banking, transportation, shipping and insurance sectors, making it impossible for Iran to trade with the rest of the world.

He said as a result of these sanctions and the fear of international companies from



establishing any financial and trade relations with Iran, which may lead to severe financial sanctions against them, Iran's banking and financial transactions face widespread challenges and also purchase of drugs and medical items by Iran has faced with many problems and become almost impossible.

The Tehran City Council chairman further stated that sanctions imposed on pharmaceuticals and medicines from the beginning have resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Iranian citizens with cancer, butterfly disease, and more.

For this reason, although Iranian medical staff has high capabilities and global credibility and is serving the patients with all their power, dealing with coronavirus has faced many challenges in terms of shortages of pharmaceutical and medical items such as sanitary disinfectants and respirators, he noted.

He said, "As global confrontation with pervasive viruses is not possible without the participation of all countries, we have already seen widespread global cooperation in the face of diseases with much less pervasive effects, such as SARS."

Online Int'l Conf. On Quds to Replace Rallies

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – According to Ayatollah Alireza Araf, head of the Islamic Seminaries of Iran, a two-day online international conference will be held on the issue of Palestine.

Dubbed 'International Conference of the Holy Quds', the event will be held online on May 18-19 from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM, Iran's local time, said Araf during a press conference in Tehran on Saturday.

He noted that the conference will be aired online from 'live.alarbaeen.ir' and also from the site's accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube.

Guests from 18 different countries will deliver speech in the event, he said.

According to the conference's poster, the main subjects of the event are 'Quds in the thoughts of Imam Khomeini and Leader', 'Zionist regime's state terrorism', 'Islamic Resistance discourse and freeing the Holy Quds', 'the role of martyred commanders of the Resistance in the fight against Zionism', and 'deal of the century and American conspiracies' among others.

Araf said that after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, global equations changed and the Palestinian cause was put forward and the Israeli regime admitted defeat to Resistance movements.

Iran's doctrine is based on a free election in Palestine with the participation of all Palestinians, he said, adding that if this approach is not accepted, the Islamic Republic will support legal fight and resistance against occupation.

Quds Day is being marked annually on the final Friday of Ramadan where hundreds of thousands of people across the world take to the streets to voice support for the oppressed Palestinians. However, this year, as the novel coronavirus outbreak has hit all the globe, demonstrations will also be affected.



Iran's OPEC Governor Kazempour Ardebili Passes Away

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's governor to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has passed away after suffering a brain hemorrhage and falling into a coma.

Hossein Kazempour Ardebili, 68, died at a hospital in capital Tehran on Saturday.



The veteran politician was appointed governor to the OPEC oil group in 1985. He had also served as Iran's ambassador to Japan from 1990 to 1995.

Kazempour Ardebili was a survivor of the 1981 bombing of the Islamic Republic Party headquarters by the MKO terrorist cult in Tehran which killed 73 top Iranian officials. He was serving as trade minister at the time, appointed the year before.

Oil Minister Bijan Zangeneh issued a message, saying "I can't believe that my affable friend, Hossein Kazempour Ardebili, has suddenly left this mortal world for eternal destiny and I have sat in mourning for him."

"Nearly 23 years of close cooperation with Hossein Kazempour Ardebili have put me in a position to testify that he was a religious, educated, humble and very honorable man as well as a true and unassuming servant of the Iranian nation, who was loyal to the Islamic Republic and loved Iran, and its pride and progress was his constant concern," he said.

"He was a prominent diplomat who intelligently and vigorously defended our national interests at OPEC for more than three decades in the most difficult circumstances and in the face of all troubles," Zangeneh added.

Iran Dismisses U.S. Claim China Must Be Blamed for COVID-19 Outbreak

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran has rejected the US claim that China is to blame for the spread of the novel coronavirus, saying the move is aimed at diverting public opinion inside and outside the United States from the incompetence of the Trump administration.

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Seyed Abbas Mousavi wrote on his Twitter account on Saturday, "Iran rejects the U.S. regime's attempt to discredit and blame China for the spread of COVID-19."

Mousavi went on to say that the U.S. regime's move is aimed at diverting public opinion from the incompetence of the Trump administration to save American lives and reopen the country's economy.

He also called on independent states to stand up to this coercion by Washington.

In the latest escalation of U.S. tensions with Beijing, Donald Trump has blamed China for the scale of the coronavirus pandemic, slamming China over its lack of transparency and warning that Washington could cut off its ties with the Asian country.

"There are many things we could do," Trump told Fox News on Thursday. "We could cut off the whole relationship. Now if you did, what would happen? You'd save \$500bn."

Mayors of Tehran, Kabul Discuss Joint Action Against COVID-19

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The mayors of Tehran and Kabul discussed ways to broaden cooperation between the two municipalities and share experiences in the battle with the novel coronavirus.

In a videoconference session on Friday, Mayor of Tehran Pirooz Hanachi and Mayor of Kabul Mohammad Daoud Sultanzy weighed plans to promote cooperation between the capitals of the two neighboring states in various fields.

Highlighting the common cultural and religious values between the Iranian and Afghan people, Hanachi said the outbreak of the coronavirus has made it necessary for the cities to enhance coordination in the fight against the disease.

Tehran and Kabul have a lot of things in common and can share many issues, he added.

For his part, Sultanzy said the Municipality of Kabul seeks to take advantage of the experiences of Tehran to develop the urban structures and improve the relations between the people of Afghanistan and Iran.

He also invited the mayor of Tehran to pay a visit to the Afghan capital after containment of COVID-19 to hold meetings and share experiences.



Call For Prequalification to Hold A Public Bidding

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT

Water and Wastewater Company of Isfahan Province



Water and Wastewater Company of Isfahan Province intends to hold a prequalification for a public bidding through the Iran Public e-Procurement System based on the following information:

Item	Subject	Reference No.	Iran Public e-Procurement System No.
1	International Bid for Financing (Foreign Finance), Inspection and Rehabilitation of the Mains and Sub-mains of Isfahan Sewage Collection System	99-1-25	2099001434000001

The whole bidding process from receipt and delivery of the prequalification documents up to sending invitation for the other bidding processes will be held through Iran Public e-Procurement System (www.setadiran.ir); in case the bidders have not registered in the mentioned website yet, they are required to register and obtain their electronic signature certificate in order to attend the bidding. The publication date of call in website is 13/05/2020. Information and bidding documents will be submitted to the bidders through the Iran Public e-Procurement System after holding prequalification process and sending invitations.

Title	Hour	Day	Date	Remarks
Deadline for receiving the prequalification documents	14:00	Thursday	18/06/2020	One month after publication
Deadline for responding to prequalification documents	08:00	Sunday	19/07/2020	Two months after publication

Information of the bidding holder in order to take more information about the prequalification documents:

Address : Isfahan wastewater renovation project management's office- Isfahan water and wastewater building- Ferdousi Street- Isfahan- Iran ,Phone No: (+9831)32223700 Fax: (+9831)32228800

Contact information of Setadiran website in order to attempt the registration process:

4-1- Call center: 021-41934 4-2- Registration Office: 021-88969737 & 021-85193768

Majlis National Security Committee Ratifies Anti-Zionism Motion

TEHRAN (MNA) – National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the Iranian Parliament, on Saturday, approved a motion which obliges the Iranian government to take certain measures against hostile measures of the Israeli regime.

According to the ratified motion, all Iranian state-run organizations are urged to take advantage of the regional and international capacities to counter the hostile actions of the Zionist regime including its terroristic measures, restriction and displacing the Palestinian people besides occupying the territories of Palestine such as the Golan Heights.

It also prohibits any direct or indirect cooperation with real or legal persons from the Zionist regime in exhibitions, conferences, and gatherings.

Any cooperation or espionage in favor of the Zionist regime will be considered as Muharebeh (waging war against God) and corruption.

Accordingly, it is forbidden for Iranian citizens to travel to the occupied Palestinian territories, in addition, all Zionists are prohibited from entering the Islamic Republic.

It also urges the Iranian ministry of culture to support making films illustrating the Zionist regime's inhumane crimes. The motion, which deals with hostile actions of the Israeli regime against regional peace and security, was addressed on the May 12 session of the Parliament.

After being brought up in the open session, no parliamentarian voiced any opposition to the motion and its 'double-urgency' was approved unanimously. 'Down with Israel' MPs chanted after the approval.





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:00
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:24
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:17
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:56

28. "Ah! woe is me! Would that I had never taken such a one for a friend!
29. "He did lead me astray from the Message (of Allah, after it had come to me! Ah!
the Evil One is but a traitor to man!"
Surah 25. The Criterion, The Standard (28 - 29)

Iran-Turkey Borders To Reopen Very Soon

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran-Turkey Joint Chamber of Commerce Mehrdad Saadat Dehghan says Turkey will soon reopen its land border to Iran which will resolve problems for trade between both states.

Speaking to Eghtesadonline, Saadat Dehghan said two weeks after talks between officials of Iran and Turkey for reopening the land border, borders are still closed but the problem of Turkish trucks which were in Iran was solved.

On the reason for Turkey's delay for reopening the borders, he said the Coronavirus is the main reason but since several Turkish ministries are involved in decision-making over reopening of the borders, it would take time.

He added that finally efforts of the joint chamber paid off and traders of both countries came out of the limbo.

Saadat Dehghan noted that private sectors of both countries are determined for reopening of the joint border to minimize their losses because of delay.

He also announced that Turkey has increased the tariff on import of watermelon, adding that it has been four-folded.

He said this decision has been taken while Iranian watermelon has been loaded in trucks and they are on way of reaching Turkey and consequently, exporters may suffer losses.

Saadat Dehghan noted that the chamber expected Turkey to announce its



decision before loading of trucks because in this condition, export of watermelon to Turkey has no economic justification.

Turkey's deputy trade minister and head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization last week and in a videoconference discussed ways to solve the problem and they solved some issues which were a good news for traders but the joint borders are still closed.

He added that representatives of all organizations' bodies who are involved in the trade were present in the video-conference.

Meanwhile head of Iran-Turkey Economic and Trade House said Turkey has witnessed 99 percent drop in hosting Iranian tourists while the country earns significant share of its revenues through its tourism.

Seyed Jalal Ebrahimi noted that the outbreak of Coronavirus has seriously affected trade between both countries especially in tourism and airliners.

PR, a Vital Element in Boosting Surge in Production

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Public Relations and international affairs of Persian Gulf Star Oil Company (PGSOC) says public relations can be a vital element in boosting the surge in production by paving the ground for better performance of their organizations and encouraging staff through proper consultations and information.

Felicitating the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, Narges Sedaqat said that naming May 17 as the Telecommunications and Public Relations Day indicates the key role of public relations in the organizations.

She said undoubtedly modern day is era of communications, adding that the role of public relations, as the pioneers of public enlightenment and information dissemination by using different skills and arts for better and transparent dissemination of information and awareness of the public opinion and organizations, is undeniable.

She further said that today the significance of the public relations, in the era of communications and at the time of dissemination of information, comes through more than ever so that successes and achievements of all organizations in their specialized activities depend on the performance of their public relations.

Sedaqat added that in a year which has been named Surge in Production by the Supreme Leader, the role of public relations is very distinguished, and public relations should move in the direction of presenting capacities of their organizations.

She then congratulated the day to her colleagues in all organizations and seniors of this field.



Official Calls for Cutting Drinking Water Consumption by 10% in Isfahan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Utilization and Water Development Department of Isfahan Province Water and Wastewater Company has urged subscribers to reduce water consumption by 10 percent in order to avoid any water outage during the summer.

Mr. Naser Akbari said that to pass from the summer heat without any interruption in supply or drop in the water pressure, subscribers should at least lower their water consumption per capita by 10 liters per day.

He said the company has some 1.18m subscribers of which 800,000 are households and in case they reduce their daily water consumption by 10 liters, they will save 8m liters per day which is a significant amount.

Akbari added that since the beginning of the current year, water consumption has increased 18 percent on average comparing to the same period last year and it is because of the outbreak of the Coronavirus and emphasis of officials on health care and washing hands.

He noted that the water consumption per capita was 149 liters per day two years ago and the figure rose in last months of the past year, adding that reducing at least 10 liters of water consumption per day is a must for the current year to avoid any drop in water pressure or water supply.

Akbari noted that this record for water consumption has been registered while the summer has not started yet.

He also urged the subscribers to observe any principle and measure for reducing their water consumption and waste of water.

He said using water reducer equipment in the houses is a crucial solution for managing water consumption.

Akbari also said that using the greywater generated in households during washing for irrigation of the vases and gardens will help the water consumption cut.



Shiraz Ready for Cultural Cooperation With Florence

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Mayors of cities of Shiraz and Florence of Italy in a videoconference discussed some issues like the outbreak of the Coronavirus and bilateral cooperation on the historical and cultural commonalities.

During the virtual meeting, Mayor of Shiraz is Heidar Eskandarpour said the outbreak of the Coronavirus showed that regardless of borders, races and geography, people in the world are facing with a common problem and to overcome this problem, they should work together for a joint solution.

He added that after the containment of the virus, the world would be a different world and those cities which have cultural commonalities can play more roles in this climate.

Eskandarpour announced Shiraz readiness for cooperation with Florence in the cultural commonalities.

Mayor of Florence Mr. Dario Nardella, for his part, said that Shiraz because of its rich history is famous internationally.

He added he is interested in Shiraz and Iran because his father was an orientalist especially working on Middle East issues and he knew Persian language and there were lots of books on Persian language in his house.

Nardella added that Florence is on the verge of resuming economic activities but the city faces social and economic crises which have damaged the city.

He reiterated that the city is trying to reduce the damages because Florence as a tourist destination hosts 14m visitors annually and it is currently facing serious problems.

Nardella added that Florence is to hold the 700th anniversary of Italian poet Dante and it will have an international program, adding that they can invite Iranian and Italian linguists from Shiraz and Florence to the ceremony.

He admitted that due to his interest to Shiraz, he had plans to visit Iran this year but he is sure that Florence can bolster ties with Shiraz in 2021.



Important Role of Public Relations in Year of Surge in Production

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of National Iranian Copper Industries Co (NICICO) in a message felicitated World Telecommunications and Information Society Day.

Dr. Ardeshtir Saad Mohammadi in his message on the occasion of May 17, World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, felicitated those who are involved in the public relations and dissemination of information field.

In his message, he said it is a great opportunity to him to express his gratitude to those who are in the public relations which are important institution for reflection of activities of an organization.

He said the public relations by their efforts can thwart any rumors or fake news which is spread in the virtual space. He added that despite fake news, there are some committed media outlets which act as the eyes and ears of organization by reflecting the truth especially in the sanctions era.

Saad Mohammadi added that undoubtedly services, records and developments of NICICO as the pioneer of national economy which were achieved in the year of pick-up in production (last year) were impossible without reflecting them in the society by a dynamic public relations.

He then congratulated the day to the public relations of the company and all who are busy in public relations departments, reiterating that public relations has an important task in the year of surge in production.



KSC Sets New Record for Daily Production, Smelting

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Khouzesan Steel Company hailed the endeavors and efforts of the staff of the company for setting another record for daily production and melting which happened during the holy month of Ramadhan.



Mr. Ali Mohammadi said that the company for the second time in the current year set a record for production as the company produced 13521 tons of ingot steel in 81 smeltings.

He further said that while the outbreak of Coronavirus has affected the mental condition of the society, such records can bring hope and spirit to the society.

He said the achievement is the result of endeavors of workers of the company who stand firm in any condition.

Mohammadi added that the company in the year of Surge in Production and for the second time set record for daily production of steel ingot as well as smelting.

He added that the ingot steel production of the company surpassed 13,000 tons and it hit 13521 tons, adding that the monthly production of the company in last month and after two years touched 345,000 tons.

He reiterated that it seems the company is marching towards more success in the current year. He expressed hope the company's sustainable production would continue till the end of the year and touch the target of 3.8m tons.

Over 530K Tons of Commodities Traded on IME Last Week

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Approximately, 530,783 MT of commodities worth over \$595m were traded last week on the Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME).



According to the report from IME International Affairs and PR, on the domestic and export metal and mineral trading floor of IME, 93,142 MT of various products worth close to \$249m were traded.

On this trading floor, 81,314 MT of steel, 5,320 MT of copper, 6,180 MT of aluminum, 160 MT of zinc, 150 MT of molybdenum concentrates, 18 MT of precious metal concentrates as well as 38 kg of gold bullion were traded by customers.

The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of IME, 437,563 MT of different commodities with the total value of \$367m were traded.

On this trading floor, 157,894 MT of bitumen, 104,000 MT of VB feed stock, 79,796 MT of polymer products, 37,000 MT of lube cut oil, 33,692 MT of chemical products, 3,642 MT of base oil, 6,000 MT of slaps waxes, 2,214 MT of insulation as well as 13,325 MT of sulfur were traded.

Furthermore, the side market of the IME experienced trading of 78 MT of metal scrape.

Brazil Health Minister Resigns Amid Coronavirus Crisis

BRASILIA (AFP) - Brazilian Health Minister Nelson Teich resigned Friday after less than a month on the job over what an official said was “incompatibility” with President Jair Bolsonaro’s approach to fighting the country’s spiraling coronavirus crisis.

The far-right president, who has compared the new coronavirus to a “little flu” and condemned the “hysteria” surrounding it, has now gone through two health ministers since mid-April.

Brazil’s death toll in the pandemic has meanwhile surged to become the sixth-highest in the world, with nearly 14,000 dead.



Italy to Allow Travel to and From Abroad From June 3

ROME (Reuters) - Italy’s government on Saturday approved a decree which will allow travel to and from abroad from June 3, in a major development as it moves to unwind one of the world’s most rigid coronavirus lockdowns.

The government will allow free travel across the country from that same day. Some regions had pushed for a swifter rollback, but Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte has insisted on a gradual return to normal to prevent a second wave of infections. More than 31,600 Italians have died of COVID-19 since the outbreak came to light on Feb. 21, the third-highest death toll in the world after that of the United States and Britain.



Europe at Odds as U.S., China Fight Over Pandemic at UN



UNITED NATIONS (AFP) - The clash between China and the United States over COVID-19 has caused a rift between European nations at the UN Security Council over a call for ceasefires in some conflict zones during the pandemic.

For two months, France has been trying to corral Washington and Beijing into a compromise on the resolution, which would urge a halt to fighting in countries like Afghanistan and Yemen as they struggle to cope with COVID-19. France and Tunisia had teamed up to draft the resolution.

But on Tuesday, Germany and Estonia threw their hats in the ring with a competing resolution -- one they did not coordinate with France, and which includes language that would placate the prickly administration of US President Donald Trump.

The same day, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke by telephone with Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu, with the State Department saying they “discussed cooperative efforts” at the Security Council.

“Everybody knows who is behind the new draft,” quipped one diplomat under condition of anonymity.

“Estonia and Germany are just trying to clean up the mess the US has created,” said Richard Gowan, who follows the United Nations for the International Crisis Group, which studies conflict resolution.

At the heart of the dispute is Trump’s offensive against the World Health Organization, from which he has vowed to cut all U.S. funding.

Trump has accused the WHO of responding too slowly to the illness that has killed more than 300,000 people worldwide, and of blindly accepting China’s initial assurances about the virus first discovered in its metropolis of Wuhan.

Beijing denies wrongdoing and, as do others, accuses Trump of seeking to shift attention from his handling of COVID-19 in the United States, which has suffered by far the highest death toll.

China has threatened for the past two months to veto any resolution that does not reference the WHO, while the United States has indicated it would do likewise if the text does mention the UN agency.

The French-Tunisian draft tried to skirt around the rift by speaking of the role of “specialized health agencies.”

The United States and China both indicated last week that they were fine with the compromise -- but Washington reversed course a day later.

That prompted the new initiative by Estonia, which holds the rotating presidency of the Security Council this month. The Estonian-German draft makes no mention of the WHO.

“The Europeans are united on the substance but disagree on the method,” another diplomat said.

Several diplomats said that some countries were taken aback by the Estonian-German effort, and said it would be difficult to resolve the two texts.

“The French are not happy,” Gowan said, but he doubted that any Council member “really thinks a resolution will make a difference at this stage.”

“It is just necessary to end this pointless debate at last,” he said.

Violence in Afghanistan, Libya and Yemen has continued despite the virus, and despite calls first led by Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for global peace.

Even if France and Tunisia press ahead, their room for maneuver is limited.

A diplomat doubted that either the United States or China wanted a resolution, believing it would only strengthen the hand of Guterres in the future.

Several sources saw growing tension between France, the only EU member with a Security Council veto, and the non-permanent European members, as Paris chose to focus on negotiating with the other permanent members. The three EU members have divergent interests, Gowan noted.

Jordan Warns Israel of Massive Conflict Over Annexation

AMMAN (Dispatches) - Jordan’s king warned Israel of a “massive conflict” if it proceeds with plans to annex large parts of the occupied West Bank, as European Union foreign ministers agreed to step up diplomatic efforts to try to head off such a move.

Israel has promised to annex Jewish settlements and the Jordan Valley, which could spell the end of the long-stalled peace process by making it virtually impossible to establish a viable Palestinian state. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has moved a step closer by reaching an agreement to form a government after more than a year of political deadlock. “Leaders who advocate a one-state solution do not understand what that would mean,” Jordan’s King Abdullah II said in an interview with the German magazine Der Spiegel published on Friday.

“What would happen if the Palestinian National Authority collapsed? There would be more chaos and extremism in the region. If Israel really annexed the West Bank in July, it would lead to a massive conflict with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan,” he said.

Jordan is a close Western ally and one of only two Arab states to have signed a peace treaty with Israel. Abdullah declined to say whether annexation would threaten that agreement.

“I don’t want to make threats and create an atmosphere of loggerheads, but we are considering all options. We agree with many countries in Europe and the international community that the law of strength should not apply in the Middle East,” he said.

Khaled Elgindy, senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, said Israel’s annexation plans could pose a threat to the Jordanian monarchy.

“When the king himself comes out and essentially puts his relationship with Israel and the treaty with Israel on the line, its very serious,” he told Al Jazeera from Arlington in the United States.

“For the monarchy in Jordan, an end to the two state solution - which this plan and annexation is really aimed at achieving - an end of any prospect of a Palestinian state poses not just a strategic threat, but quite possibly even an existential threat to the monarchy in Jordan.”

EU to Launch Diplomatic Push Against Israeli West Bank Annexation

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Union will make a diplomatic push to try to stop Israel from going ahead with a plan to annex parts of the occupied West Bank, the bloc’s foreign policy chief said on Friday.

Josep Borrell said the EU would use “all our diplomatic capacities” to try to dissuade Israel’s incoming government from going ahead with the move, approved under United States President Donald Trump’s Middle East plan.

The region’s Palestinians, whose land has been under an Israeli military occupation since 1967, are outraged at the notion that Israel could be allowed to claim Palestinian territory without their consent.

While member states of the EU - Israel’s largest trading partner - are alarmed at the prospect of annexations, which they say would violate international law and harm the chances of peace, they are divided about what action to take against Israel. “What everybody agreed is we have to increase our efforts and our reach out to all relevant actors in the Middle East,” Borrell said after the talks.

“We are ready to do that and we will do that in the next days using all our diplomatic capacities in order to prevent any kind of unilateral action.”

The push will involve talking to Washington and Arab countries as well as Israel and the Palestinians, Borrell said.

Israel’s long-awaited unity government will be sworn in on Sunday - after three inconclusive elections in less than a year and a power-sharing agreement between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former rival Benny Gantz.

Some EU countries have pushed for the bloc to take a hard line against Israel, with Luxembourg’s veteran foreign minister Jean Asselborn in particular calling for the recognition of a Palestinian state.

But others have urged caution and dialogue with Israel, which is seen as an important EU partner in the Middle East. “We are in a dialogue with the responsible parties, including in Israel,” German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said.

Slovenia Anti-Gov’t Protests Continue

LJUBLJANA (Reuters) - Thousands of cyclists took over the center of Ljubljana once again on Friday to protest against Slovenia’s center-right government of Prime Minister Janez Jansa, less than a day after the government called an end to the coronavirus epidemic, while loosening restrictions.

Protesters blew whistles and honked bicycle horns as they waved Slovenian flags in the capital city. Many wore face masks. They claimed the government is clamping down on civil rights by attacking the media and limiting the rights of environmental groups. Some called for the government to resign.

Among other changes, the government is pushing for legal amendments that will limit the rights environmental nonprofits in participating in the administrative review of infrastructure projects.

The government claims the change is necessary to speed up Slovenia’s economic development, saying present legislation enables even small environmental organisations to significantly slow down important construction, like the building of factories or power plants.

“I am here because the government disgustingly abused the coronavirus crisis to reduce people’s rights

and freedoms,” environmentalist Rok Rozman, who was among protesters, told Reuters.

Protests have taken place every week since last month when the national TV Slovenia reported government officials unlawfully favored some companies while purchasing face masks and ventilators. The government denies any wrongdoing.

Police said packed protests should not be held due to the coronavirus restrictions.

Slovenia has so far reported 1,465 coronavirus cases and 103 deaths. It is the first European country to call an official end to its coronavirus epidemic.

Although many restrictions that have been imposed in the middle of March have been lifted, people are still obliged to wear masks in indoor public spaces, disinfect their hands upon entering such spaces, stand at least 1.5 meters apart and are prohibited from gathering in groups of more than 50 people.

All shops, bars and restaurants will be allowed to open starting Monday, while some students will also return to school next week. Most shops, apart from food and drug stores, and all schools have been closed since the middle of March.



New Date for Intra-Afghan Peace Talks Under Discussion

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A new date for intra-Afghan peace talks is under discussion and the United States has heard positive reports about the formation of an inclusive Afghan government, U.S. Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad said on Friday.

Speaking to reporters on a conference call, Khalilzad said it would be best if intra-Afghan talks began while there is still a significant U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and that he would soon travel to push for a de-escalation in violence and the release of prisoners.

The pace of prisoner releases and disagreements over the Afghan government’s composition have helped delay intra-Afghan talks, which were to begin on March 10 under a Feb. 29 U.S.-Taliban agreement for the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

Two attacks in Afghanistan on Tuesday have raised questions about whether the U.S. peace effort may collapse. One attack, on a Kabul hospital’s maternity ward, killed 24 people, including two babies. Another, at a funeral in eastern Afghanistan, killed 32. Khalilzad repeated the U.S. assessment that an affiliate of the Islamic State (ISIS) militant group was responsible for both attacks. Afghan officials, however, have blamed the Taliban for the bloody hospital attack despite the militant group’s denials.

“There are forces such as the ISIS that doesn’t see peace in Afghanistan in its interest and are trying to increase violence to undermine the prospects for peace,” Khalilzad told reporters. “We are urging both sides not to fall into that trap but indeed to cooperate against terrorists including ISIS. So, we want this to happen as soon as possible when now, we’re still there in a significant way.”

The key provisions of the Feb. 29 agreement - to which the Afghan government was not a party - involved a U.S. commitment to reduce its military footprint in Afghanistan to 8,600 by mid-July.

The Pentagon said on Friday that the United States is continuing its drawdown of troops from Afghanistan and is expected to meet a timeline that had been agreed upon with the Taliban. “That is still going forward. We expect to meet that within the timeline laid out under the agreement with the Taliban,” Pentagon spokesman Jonathan Hoffman said during a press briefing.





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F.F

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Oman Considers Cutting Oil Output in June

MUSCAT (Dispatches) - Oman is considering cutting its oil output in June by another 10,000 to 15,000 barrels per day, the Omani oil minister told Reuters on Friday, after Saudi Arabia and other Gulf OPEC producers also made additional cuts to reduce a global glut.

"It is likely that this cut will be effective from June," Mohammed al-Rumhy said of Oman's plans, after the country had earlier signed up to making cuts in May and June alongside other members of the OPEC+ group.



Virus Could Cut Up to 9.7% off Global Economy

PARIS (AFP) - The coronavirus pandemic could cut up to 9.7 percent off the global economy, the Asian Development Bank said Friday, doubling its previous estimate as the virus stifles trade and leaves millions jobless.

The estimated impact would cost as much as \$8.8 trillion based on a range of scenarios, but ADB said government interventions could help offset the losses inflicted by the crisis.

Up to 242 million jobs will be lost due to the virus, more than seven times higher than the employment losses seen during the global financial crisis a decade ago. Foregone labour income could top \$1.8 trillion.

"These will be difficult to recoup," the Manila-based lender said, warning it could not discount the possibility of a financial crisis if the pandemic was not contained quickly enough to prevent defaults and bankruptcies.

The coronavirus has killed 300,140 people worldwide, according to an AFP tally based on official sources.

The World Health Organization has said the virus may become just another endemic virus in communities and populations will have to learn to live with it.

Over 4.4 million cases have been officially recorded in 196 countries and territories, with the United States recording the most deaths at 85,906.

To stem the economic losses, governments have announced a range of stimulus measures such as payroll support to keep jobs, cash transfers and tax breaks.

"These helped counteract some of the adverse economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic," ADB said. The bank noted the United States stands to lose up to \$2.2 trillion or a tenth of its GDP while losses in China, where the virus first surfaced, could top \$1.6 trillion or 11 percent of its economy.

Among industries, tourism and aviation were hit hard as countries closed borders and enforced lockdowns to contain the spread of the virus. Many airlines have either retrenched staff or told their employees to take unpaid leave.

"The impact on employment was severe. Unskilled workers normally working on a casual or 'per piece' basis were hardest hit," ADB said.

Travel restrictions will cut global trade by up to \$2.6 trillion, which is already reeling from trade tensions between the United States and China, a global growth slowdown and weaker business confidence.

Dutch Economy Contracts 1.7% in First Quarter

AMSTERDAM (Reuters) - The Dutch economy contracted by 1.7% in the first quarter of 2020 as the coronavirus outbreak began to bite, led by the largest drop in consumer spending on record, Statistics Netherlands said on Friday.

Preliminary figures showed gross domestic product falling sharply from 1.6% growth in the last quarter of 2019 and dipping 0.5% year-on-year, the CBS said. The drop was largely recorded in the second half of March, when the Dutch government imposed lockdown measures to curb the pandemic, it said.

"This was the largest contraction since the first quarter of 2009" during the global financial crisis, the CBS said in a statement. It ended 23 consecutive quarters of growth in the European Union's fifth largest economy.

Household spending plunged 2.7% in the first three months of the year, the largest fall on record since measurements began in 1987. Imports and exports of goods and services fell 3% and 3.5% respectively, the CBS said.

ING, the largest Dutch bank, noted that while the contraction appeared steep at face value, the "economic impact of the coronavirus was mild, at least in international comparison".

It said the "intelligent lockdown" under Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte "has paid off economically thus far, although the second quarter is likely to be much worse." A series of other economic indicators released in the Netherlands on Friday also pointed to an unprecedented slump in business activity and a weak second half of 2020. A leading indicator of business confidence in the non-financial sector, measured by the Chamber of Commerce and several industry groups, fell at the fastest pace on record in a poll taken in April.



Petrobras Books Steep Loss Amid Worst Crisis in 100 Years

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - Brazil's state-run oil company Petrobras reported a steep net loss for the first quarter of the year Thursday and warned more heavy losses were on the horizon because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The company posted a net loss of 48.5 billion reais (\$8.35 billion at the current exchange rate) for the first three months of the year, its worst quarter since it was hit by a huge corruption scandal in 2014-2017.

The loss was mainly because of a 65.3-billion-real impairment charge the firm took when it wrote down the value of some of its oil fields, saying the "challenging environment" now meant they were overvalued.

"The global oil and gas industry has been hit hard and is facing its worst crisis in the last 100 years," chief executive Roberto Castello Branco said in a statement.

Petrobras' first-quarter earnings were down more than 1,300 percent from the first quarter of last year, when it booked a net profit of 4.03 billion reais, and down nearly 700 percent from the fourth quarter, when it booked a net profit of 8.15 billion reais.

The loss came despite the fact that oil prices only started their downward spiral toward the end of the quarter.

The pandemic, plus a price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia, drove oil prices to more than 20-year lows last month, as stay-at-home measures caused a collapse in travel worldwide.

At one point the U.S. benchmark price even plunged deep into negative numbers.

Branco warned worse quarters likely lie ahead for Petrobras.

"The global recession did not significantly affect the company's performance in 1Q20, which is expected to happen in the following quarters," he said. Petrobras only emerged in 2018 from four years of heavy losses brought on by revelations that top politicians and executives stole billions from the company in a massive corruption scheme.

Indonesia to Impose VAT on Streaming, Other Digital Services

JAKARTA (Reuters) - Indonesia will require big internet companies to pay value-added taxes (VAT) on sales of digital products and services from July as part of efforts to boost revenue amid the coronavirus pandemic, a tax official said on Friday.

It will impose 10% VAT on digital products sold by non-resident internet companies with significant presence in the Indonesian market, including streaming services, applications and digital games, beginning July 1, according

to a finance ministry regulation published on the ministry's website.

The government has previously said services by streaming platforms like Spotify and Netflix would be subject to the new tax. Neither company responded to requests for comment.

Products and services bought via Alphabet Inc's Google Play among others would also fall into the category, although the government has not named any companies other than Spotify and Netflix. Google could not be immediately reached for comment.

Indonesia currently charges a 10% value-added tax on sales of most products and services.

The country has aimed to get internet companies to pay their fair share of taxes for years and the decision to impose VAT was announced in March when President Joko Widodo outlined emergency measures to help the country weather the coronavirus crisis.

The package was passed by parliament earlier this week.

Indonesia's internet economy is the biggest and fastest growing in Southeast Asia and is expected to reach \$130 billion by 2025, according to a research by Google, Temasek Holdings and Bain & Company.

Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati has said that imposing VAT on internet goods was to make sure the government captures the shift in people's consumption patterns as they stay at home during a lockdown to curb the spread of the virus.

Consumers have been buying fewer physical goods, but demand for digital items have risen, Indrawati has said.

The ministry's tax department has been in contact with representatives of affected companies, but declined to name them, tax office spokesman Hestu Yoga Saksama said.

The government expects a 10% drop in state revenue this year due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and weak commodity prices, forecasting that economic growth will more than halve to 2.3%, from 5% in 2019. It expects a fiscal deficit of 5.07% of GDP for 2020, the biggest in more than a decade.

Virus-Hit German Economy Plunges Into Recession

BERLIN (Reuters) - The German economy plunged into a recession after suffering its steepest quarterly contraction since the 2009 financial crisis as shops and factories were shut down in mid-March to fight the spread of the coronavirus, preliminary data showed on Friday.

The 2.2% first-quarter contraction was a foretaste of worse to come. Economists expect a deeper slump in the second quarter as the lockdown extended well into April and early May and sectors like tourism and in-door gastronomy remain shut.

Still, Germany appears to be fairing better than neighbouring France and Italy, whose economies contracted by 5.8% and 4.7% respectively in the first quarter.

This is partly due to a decision by Germany's 16 states to allow factories and construction sites to stay open and an unprecedented rescue package by Chancellor Angela Merkel's government, including state aid that allows employers to switch employees to shorter working hours to avoid mass layoffs.

Output data for the fourth quarter was revised to a contraction of 0.1% from a previously reported stagnation, which meant Germany was technically in a recession after two successive quarterly output slumps, the data showed.

"Things will get worse before they get better," Carsten Brzeski of ING said. "To be more precise, incoming data will be worse, even though the worst might already be behind us."

He added: "If today's data are the result of two weeks of lockdown, three more weeks of lockdown and a very gradual lifting of some measures do not bode well for the second quarter."

On the year, gross domestic product in Europe's largest economy fell by 2.3% from January to March after a 0.4% expansion in the previous three months, seasonally adjusted figures from the Federal Statistics Office showed.

Analysts polled by Reuters had expected national output to shrink by 2.2% quarter-on-quarter and a 2% contraction year-on-year in seasonally adjusted terms.

Euro Zone First-Quarter Growth Plunge Deepest on Record



BRUSSELS (Reuters) - The euro zone economy saw its deepest contraction on record in the first three months of the year against the previous quarter, as expected by markets, data showed on Friday, as a result of lockdowns introduced in March to slow the coronavirus pandemic.

The European Union's statistics office Eurostat said in a flash estimate that the gross domestic product of the 19 countries sharing the euro contracted 3.8% quarter-on-quarter for a 3.2% year-on-year fall, as expected by economists.

Eurostat said this was the sharpest quarterly decline since time series started in 1995. Year-on-year, the fall was the sharpest since the third quarter of 2009 when euro zone output shrank 4.5%.

France recorded the deepest quarterly contraction of 5.8%, followed by Slovakia with 5.4% and Spain with 5.2%. Italy's output shrank 4.7% quarter-on-quarter, putting it officially in recession after a 0.1% contraction in the last quarter of 2019.

The euro zone's biggest economy Germany weathered the lockdown better with a 2.2% contraction while Finland was the only euro zone country that still managed to grow 0.1%.

Eurostat said euro zone exports fell 6.2% in March as a result of the pandemic, but imports dropped even more — 10.1% year-on-year — boosting the euro zone's external trade surplus to 28.2 billion euros from 22.7 billion a year earlier.

Still, trade between euro zone countries tumbled 12.1% in March compared to a year earlier to 153.3 billion euros as a result of the lockdowns introduced against COVID-19.

Employment in the euro zone fell 0.2% quarter-on-quarter in the January-March period, the first quarterly decline since Eurostat started the series in the second quarter of 2013, bringing the year-on-year employment growth rate sharply down to 0.3% from 1.1% in the previous three months.

Iran Gradually Resuming Flights to European Countries

TEHRAN (MNA) – Secretary of the Iranian Association of Airlines Maghsoud Asadi-Samani revealed the resumption of activity of a new airline and also increase of scheduled flight programs to the three European countries after the outbreak of the coronavirus global pandemic.

Samani added, “Islamic Republic of Iran has launched its weekly flight to Amsterdam after the coronavirus, COVID-19. In addition, routine and

scheduled flights of Iran Air to London and Paris have been resumed.”

The Dutch have announced some health protocols for launching Amsterdam scheduled flights, he said, adding, “They have announced that health protocols should be strictly observed on passengers. These health protocols include passengers who have a Schengen visa or a European residence permit and similar cases.”



ECB to Scale Up Bond Buying Next Month

BENGALURU (Reuters) - The euro zone economy’s worst recession on record will be even deeper than forecast less than a month ago, according to a Reuters poll of economists who said the European Central Bank will ramp up its bond-buying again next month.

An economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed nearly 300,000 people globally, will largely depend on the effectiveness of individual governments in preventing a second wave of infections despite easing of lockdown restrictions.

“The biggest uncertainty now is around the pace of the reopening of the economy. There is a series of risks that are still to the downside...We may have a more prolonged period of confinement measures imposed by law or just behaviourally,” Giada Giani, European economist at Citi, said.

Fears about that risk meant a broad measure of European stocks was set to end the week 3% lower - the biggest weekly fall since the mid-March rout in global shares - while euro zone government bond yields have tumbled.

The May 11-14 Reuters poll of nearly 80 economists marks the third downgrade to the economic outlook in a little over a month, despite the ECB adding hundreds of billions of euros to its balance sheet and governments announcing stimulus worth trillions of euros.

The euro zone economy is expected to contract 7.5% in 2020, more than the 5.4% predicted three weeks ago, with the worst of the blow expected this quarter.

After contracting 3.8% in January-March, its sharpest quarter-on-quarter decline since 1995, the economy was shown in the latest poll shrinking by 11.3% in April-June, more than the 9.6% predicted last month.

The economy is not expected to make up for that in the second half of this year or next, growing 7.2% and 2.8% in the third and final quarters of 2020, respectively.

But the worst-case scenario has the economy contracting in Q3 as well as Q2, while stagnating in Q4, showing powerful downside risks to forecasts.

Indeed, the euro zone’s biggest economy, Germany, has sunk into a deep recession after the steepest quarterly contraction since the 2009 financial crisis at the start of the year, official preliminary data showed on Friday.

Despite the substantial fall in GDP, the unemployment rate is expected to rise only about two percentage points to 9.3% in 2020 from recent lows of 7.4%. That compares with forecasts of a much sharper rise in unemployment in the United States.

“While the lion’s share of this year’s U.S. fiscal stimulus is geared toward smoothing household income through labor market dislocations, European governments have provided firms with wage guarantees and expanded short-time work incentives to reduce labor market dislocations,” economists at JP Morgan said.

The ECB will ramp up the asset purchase program it launched in response to the pandemic by 375 billion euros at its June 4 meeting, taking the total of assets under this specific program to roughly 1.13 trillion euros.



That does not include the 20 billion euros per month of purchases already announced in response to a slowdown that had taken hold well before the coronavirus hit Europe. The poll forecast the ECB’s balance sheet, currently at around 5 trillion euros, would expand to 6.5 trillion euros by year-end.

“Monetary policy will be almost maxed out before this recession ends,” Citi’s Giani said.

“At the moment, it has the objective of making the usage of fiscal policy easier. The ECB can do this by increasing the size of purchases and extending it beyond this year.”

More than two-thirds of 28 economists said the ECB was likely to follow the U.S. Federal Reserve’s example by adding to its shopping list corporate bonds that have lost investment grade status during the crisis, referred to by some as “fallen angels”.

“By buying fallen angels, the ECB can limit the fall-out of the pandemic,” Spyros Andreopoulos, senior European economist at BNP Paribas, said.

“It is a way to reach a broader segment of corporates – a segment that may increase in size now that the ECB recognises the impact of the pandemic will stretch into the medium-term.”

But this could expose the ECB to even more criticism when it is already dealing with a German Constitutional Court ruling that the central bank would have to prove its bond-buying programme was necessary and proportional.

Over 75% of respondents who answered an additional question - 22 of 29 - said that ruling would not have a long-term impact on the way the ECB sets policy.

Iran to Remain Key...

FROM PAGE 1

Kadhimi asked Al-Khatteeb why Iraq is flaring so much of its natural gas. According to the IEI itself, more than half of the country’s raw gas production of 2,875 million standard cubic feet per day (scf/d) is being torched, representing a potential loss of \$3.5 billion annually.

“It makes no sense for observers like [me] to see a country that burns billions of dollars over the years, then buys gas from elsewhere,” said Kadhimi, who is also a resident senior fellow for Middle East programs at the Atlantic Council. “The Washington, D.C. rumor mill has it that Iraq is purchasing gas from Iran at many times the market rate. Is that true?”

Al-Khatteeb replied that his country’s capabilities at the moment are severely limited.

“We are not 100 percent flaring everything, but yes, there is a lot of flaring,” he conceded. “The only available option we have at the moment right now is Iran—and let’s be frank. I couldn’t care less as a client from the receiving end about whether this molecule of gas comes from Iran or Saudi Arabia. What really matters to me is that this gas is competitive pricewise, can be delivered as soon as possible, and meets my volume demands.”

The only other alternative is liquefied natural gas (LNG), but it is far more expensive than gas piped into Iraq—which in any case would need to develop its LNG facilities, a process that could take years.

In September 2019, Iraq signed an agreement with the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) to receive 1,000 megawatts via a transmission line from Kuwait to Basra.

“But this project needs to be implemented by the GCCIA itself. We’ve done our part in signing the deal,” he said. “We need that supply now. We have a huge deficit, and when it comes to peak demand under boiling temperatures, we cannot afford to wait four years.”

In fact, the IEI estimates that Iraq needs \$18 billion worth of infrastructure by 2025 in order to keep up with a rapidly growing population and reach domestic gas production capacity of 3,200 million scf/d. Demand is projected to reach 37,000 megawatts by then.

“We’ve made it clear to the U.S. that we need three or four years to achieve self-sufficiency in gas; this includes field development, pipelines, processing facilities, compressors, and other infrastructure,” he said, insisting that Iraq must “have a full executive government with zero interference [from] politicians trying to hinder the process of moving forward.”

Despite its ongoing sanctions against Tehran, the U.S. government has repeatedly granted waivers allowing Iraq to continue importing Iranian gas and electricity. Yet previous 120-day waivers have been shortened, with the most recent thirty-day exemption—issued in late April—widely seen in Iraq as a concerted effort by Washington to turn up economic pressure on Iran.

Al-Khatteeb deflected a viewer’s question about whether the shortened waivers issued by the White House have helped or hurt Iraq’s relations with the United States.

“The U.S. wanted to test our capabilities, and we did well,” he said without elaborating. “Every time the waiver is about to expire, it’s like a checklist, a procedure. They keep asking the same question, and we keep repeating the same answer.”

The long-term answer, Al-Khatteeb suggested, is for Iraq to develop energy self-sufficiency and security as quickly as possible.

He also expressed disappointment with the stalled Ratawi gas hub due to disagreements between Bechtel and Honeywell, the two US companies whose joint consortium had been awarded a contract to build the megaproject. In its initial stage, Ratawi was to process up to 300 million scf/d of associated gas generated as a byproduct of crude oil production. That would have cut Iraq’s current level of gas flaring by nearly 20 percent.

“I don’t want to assign blame, but so many factors play into materializing projects on the ground,” he said. “One cannot hold a whole government accountable for every single delay.”

Intelsat Files for Bankruptcy, Seeks To Restructure



LONDON (Dispatches) - Global satellite operator Intelsat filed for bankruptcy protection on Thursday, citing disruption from to its business from the virus pandemic, in a move aimed at restructuring its operations.

The filing in U.S. bankruptcy court in Virginia listed more than \$16 billion in debt.

The company said in a statement it was “managing the economic slowdown impacting several of its end markets caused by the COVID-19 global health crisis.”

It said bankruptcy protection would help it restructure its balance sheet as it reorganizes operations, and that business would continue during this process.

The company is scheduled to receive \$4.87 billion for exiting the C-band required by the US Federal Communications Commission for 5G, or fifth generation wireless networks in the United States.

But it needs to spend more than \$1 billion on “clearing activities” before receiving any payments.

“This is a transformational moment in the history of our company,” said chief executive Stephen Spengler.

“This will position us to invest and pursue our strategic growth objectives, build on our strengths, and serve the mission-critical needs of our customers with additional resources and wind in our sails.”

Intelsat, originally formed to promote global satellite communications in the 1960s and later privatized, operates more than 50 geostationary satellites as rival operators move to new space-based systems for internet communications.

Gov’t May Use...

FROM PAGE 1

“The military have promised to help fight the desert locusts, including by providing all-terrain vehicles for use in areas which are hard to access,” Mir told ILNA. “Last year the military provided personnel and vehicles, and that was a big help.”

Mir said anti-locust operations had so far prevented “any damage”, without giving details.

PPO’s head, Mohammad Reza Dargahi, said last month that locust swarms threatened 1,250 trillion rials (\$7.4 billion) worth of agricultural products across six provinces in southern Iran, the daily Financial Tribune reported.

The United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization estimates agricultural losses to neighboring Pakistan from locusts could be as high as \$2.2 billion for winter crops alone.

Iran Records Lowest...

FROM PAGE 1

The Director-General of Medical Supplies and Equipment Department of Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Seyyed Hossein Safavi held a live video presser on Saturday reporting on medical supplies.

He said in the past months there were shortages in medical supplies to counter coronavirus while there was also no definite medical, treatment, or curing method for it, and high demands on the medical supplies in the world such as diagnosing KITS, ventilators, and sanitizers soared.

In this regard, Iran’s knowledge-based companies and firms have increased their capacities remarkably, for example, Iran’s ventilators’ production was 10 per day but now it has reached 40 and distributed among the organizations and medical centers, Safavi said.

He added the diagnosing and molecule kits or three-layer N95 masks are sufficiently produced in the country even have got the license to be exported.

The mask production, which is fully mechanized, has reached 2 million a day by the coronavirus outbreak and high demands. They are stockpiled sufficiently to meet not only the country’s need but also other countries as well, he highlighted.

N95 masks were produced 15,000 daily but with the sudden outbreak and epidemic it has notably increased, he said.

Trump, Pompeo...

FROM PAGE 1

Pompeo and Hook have largely designed the Trump administration’s aggressive approach towards Iran, along with the hawkish former National Security Adviser John Bolton who was fired by Trump due to alleged policy disagreements last year.

The two officials have also been leading the US’ latest push to extend a UN arms embargo on Iran that will expire in October under UN Security Council resolution 2231, which endorsed the landmark Iran nuclear deal in 2015.

On Wednesday, Hook threatened that the US may seek to trigger a snapback of all UN sanctions on Iran if its 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.

Iran, along with other signatories to the deal such as China and Russia, have lambasted the purported measure, arguing that Washington now holds no authority over the matter after violating the nuclear deal and, subsequently, UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

South Korea...

FROM PAGE 1

In total, South Korea, the world’s fifth-largest crude oil importer, shipped in 11.02 million tons of crude oil in April, or 2.69 million bpd, down 13.6% from 12.76 million tons last year.

South Korean refiners such as SK Energy and Hyundai Oilbank have lowered their run rates as fuel demand has dented in the midst of the coronavirus outbreak worldwide. Hyundai Oilbank’s No.2 360,000-bpd crude distillation unit shut for maintenance from April 8 to May 21.

For the January-April period, South Korea imported 46.35 million tons of crude oil, or 2.81 million bpd, down 7.1% from 49.90 million tons over the same period a year earlier.

The country’s final crude oil imports data from state-run Korea National Oil Corp (KNOC) is due later this month.

McLaren Boss Expects Vettel to Leave F1

LONDON (Dispatches) - Daniel Ricciardo was McLaren's first choice to replace Ferrari-bound Spaniard Carlos Sainz and Sebastian Vettel was never in the frame, the Formula One team's chief executive Zak Brown said on Friday.

He expected Vettel, who is leaving Ferrari at the end of 2020, to retire.

"Obviously Seb's an awesome driver and a four-time champion," the American told Sky Sports television.

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LPGA Cancels Great Lakes Event in July

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The LPGA's Great Lakes Bay Invitational will not be staged in July, becoming the ninth women's golf tour event to be called off this season due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The LPGA announced Friday the cancellation of the planned July 15-18 event in Midland, Michigan, adding the tournament would return in 2021 and that sponsors have extended their contract with the tour.

ATP, WTA and ITF Extend Suspensions Due To Pandemic

LONDON (Reuters) - The ATP Tour and International Tennis Federation (ITF) have extended their suspensions of professional tennis until July 31 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they said on Friday.

The ATP and WTA announced in April that they were suspending all tournaments until July 13, with the WTA saying on Friday it had further suspended four events due to be held in July.

The WTA added that it will provide an update in June on the tournaments scheduled for the latter half of July.

The WTA Rogers Cup, which had been scheduled for Aug. 7-16 in Montreal, had already been postponed to 2021 after Quebec government prohibited holding events until Aug. 31, 2020.

ATP events in Hamburg, Bastad, Newport, Los Cabos, Gstaad, Umag, Atlanta and Kitzbuhel will not go ahead as scheduled, while WTA events in Bastad, Lausanne, Bucharest and Jurmala scheduled for July will not be held.

"Due to continued uncertainties surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, we regret to announce our decision to extend the suspension of the Tour," ATP Chairman Andrea Gaudenzi said in a statement here

"We continue to assess all of our options in an effort to resume the Tour as soon as it is safe to do so, including the feasibility of rescheduling events later in the season."

While for tournament owners it is a blow, the decision was hardly unexpected.

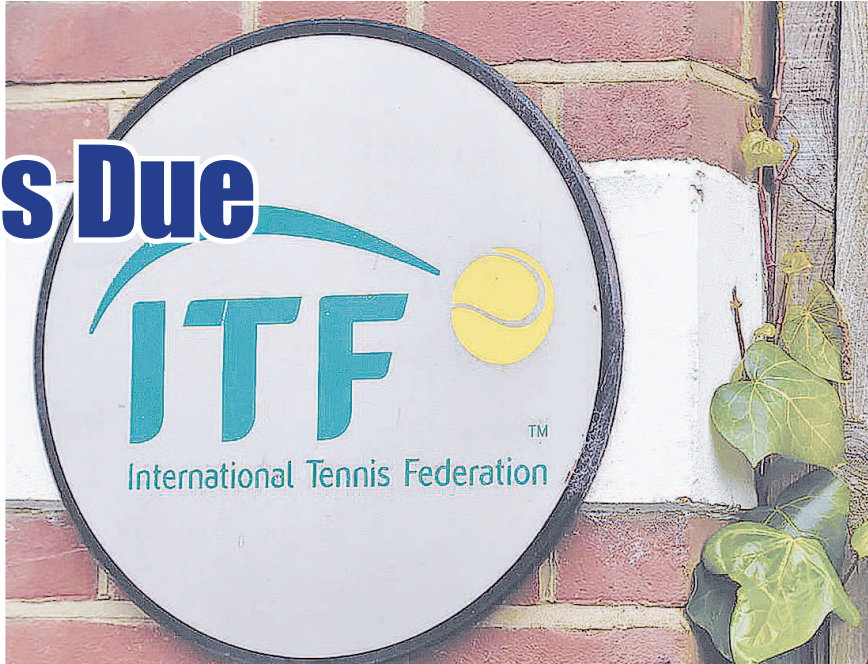
The Croatia Open in the picturesque setting of Umag on the Adriatic is one of the most popular ATP tournaments and is in the process of improving the showcourt named after former Wimbledon champion Goran Ivanisevic.

"I believe that all of us will feel a bit empty without Stella Maris (the name of the venue) and its July buzz," tournament director Lawrence Frankopan said.

"But the health and safety of our players and fans are the most important. This cancellation is an even bigger reason for all of us to feel excited about July 2021 and the 31st edition of the tournament."

Organisers of the Austrian Open in Kitzbuhel said they were looking at rescheduling the claycourt tournament for September while Hamburg organisers were "focussing on a possible postponement of the tournament."

"We have to closely monitor the rapidly evolving situation related to COVID-19 and we will wait for the next decisions of the ATP and the ITF regarding the



North American swing, in particular the U.S. Open," Hamburg tournament director Sandra Reichel said in a statement.

The Hall of Fame Open in Newport, Rhode Island has been cancelled and organisers said the Hall of Fame Class of 2020 induction ceremony will not take place. Spain's Conchita Martinez and Ivanisevic will now be inducted in 2021.

The WTA said in a statement that it would make a decision on tournaments in Palermo and Karlsruhe, which were to begin on July 20 and 28 respectively, when the announcements to its revised calendar are made in June.

The ITF said all events — including ITF Juniors, Seniors, UNIQLD Wheelchair Tennis Tour, Beach Tennis Tour and the men's and women's ITF World Tennis Tour — would be suspended.

However, the ITF suspensions will not affect any of the Grand Slams with Wimbledon having already been cancelled for the first time since World War II.

The U.S. Open is scheduled to begin on Aug. 24 while the postponed French Open is now due to start on Sept. 20.

Messi Accepts Risk of Possible La Liga Return

MADRID (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi says he is comfortable with footballers returning to play again as La Liga prepares to restart the season in Spain next month.

La Liga president Javier Tebas has circled June 12 as the ideal date for matches to resume.

Players in Spain have started working individually at training grounds as part of a strict and staggered programme, with five players already put into quarantine after testing positive for coronavirus.

"The risk of contagion is everywhere," Messi said in an interview with Mundo Deportivo, published on Friday. "When you leave the house the risk is already there, so I think you can't think about it too much because otherwise you'll not want to go out anywhere."

"But we also understand it is essential to comply with protocols and take all the possible measures of prevention. Going back to training is a first step but we shouldn't get complacent and we must continue taking all the necessary precautions and assume we have to start playing games but behind closed doors."

Messi also spoke about Inter Milan striker Lautaro Martinez, whom Barcelona are reportedly keen to sign this summer.

Klopp Pokes Fun At Neville Over Lockdown Rants

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp has joked that his biggest lesson from the coronavirus lockdown is just how outspoken former Manchester United defender Gary Neville can be.

In his role as a television pundit, Neville has vented on a range of issues related to the Premier League and the health crisis.

The former England international has criticised Premier League chiefs for being slow to give updates on their restart plans.

He also took issue with the government's call for players to take wage cuts during the pandemic and let rip on a host of other subjects.

Klopp could not resist a good-natured jibe at Neville when asked what his lockdown experience had been like.

"I didn't learn a lot in lockdown, other than Gary Neville has an opinion about absolutely everything. It is incredible," Klopp told the BBC's Football Focus programme.

Liverpool were two wins away from winning the English title for the first time in 30 years when the Premier League was postponed on March 13.

The league hopes to resume in mid-June and players are already returning to training while observing strict social-distancing rules.

Joshua Title Defens Not to Take Place Before October

LONDON (Dispatches) - Anthony Joshua's heavyweight title defence against Kubrat Pulev will be pushed back until at least October because of the coronavirus crisis, his promoter said.

Britain's Joshua was originally scheduled to fight the Bulgarian at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on June 20, with a second date in July also mooted after the pandemic took hold.

Promoter Eddie Hearn said the bout would not happen for several months but he hopes it can be fitted in before the end of the year.

"With everything going on and the fact we have no idea yet about when we will be allowed crowds, and what size crowds, it won't be the summer," Hearn told the Daily Mail on Thursday.

India Fine With Playing Entire Australia Series in Adelaide

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - India captain Virat Kohli and his team will be open to playing the entire test series against Australia in a 'bio-secure' Adelaide Oval if the situation demands, a top official of the Indian cricket board told Reuters.

India are scheduled to play four tests and three one-day internationals in December and January on a tour reportedly worth A\$300 million (\$193.77 million) in broadcast revenue for Cricket Australia (CA).

Australia vice captain Travis Head on Thursday backed the idea of playing the entire test series behind closed doors at Adelaide Oval, where an on-site hotel is under construction, to ensure it goes ahead amid restrictions forced by the COVID-19 pandemic. [nL4N2CW2YY]

"The boys would be very keen to go back to the field," Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) treasurer Arun Dhimal said in an interview. "If the situation allows only one venue for all the matches, so be it. Maybe when lockdown is lifted, it would be the new normal that everyone has to follow."

"There's talk of matches without spectators. Nobody would like that, but if it comes to that and there's no other way, one may have to do that."

"It's still six-seven months down the line. We'll take the right call in the best interest of the safety and health of our boys."



Djokovic Confident He Will Claim Grand Slam Record

LONDON (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic believes he will win the most Grand Slam titles and become the longest-reigning world number one by the time he retires, the 32-year-old Serb said in an interview.

The current world number one has 17 Grand Slam titles to his name - two behind Rafa Nadal and three fewer than Roger Federer - and said he has no doubt in his ability to overtake the other members of the so-called 'Big Three.'

"I'm always very confident in myself," he said in an interview on In Depth with Graham Bensinger. "I believe I can win the most slams and break the record for longest number one. Those are definitely my clear goals."

Djokovic was in imperious form before the novel coronavirus pandemic brought the circuit to a halt in early March.

He lifted the ATP Cup with Serbia, won an eighth Australian Open title and then completed a fifth triumph at the Dubai Tennis Championships, extending his unbeaten run to 21.

Swiss great Federer also owns the record for total number of weeks at number one, with 310, and consecutive weeks at the top position, with 237, compared with Djokovic's 282 and 122.

Federer turns 39 in August and Djokovic said he could envision himself still playing at 40.

"I don't believe in limits. I think limits are only illusions of your ego or your mind," he said.

McIlroy Slams Trump for Coronavirus Response

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Four-time major champion Rory McIlroy criticized U.S. President Donald Trump for his response to the coronavirus outbreak, and said it was unlikely the pair would meet for another round of golf.

"We're in the midst of something that's pretty serious right now," McIlroy told the McKellar Golf Podcast here "The fact that he's trying to politicize it and make it a campaign rally and say that we administer the most tests in the world, like it's a contest - there's some stuff that just is terrible."

"It's not the way a leader should act," said McIlroy, who has won the U.S. Open and British Open as well as two PGA Championship titles.

The world's top-ranked golfer faced fierce criticism for playing with Trump shortly after the Republican president's inauguration in 2017, but said the interaction was not an endorsement.

"The day that I did spend with him and others was very enjoyable," said McIlroy, who is from Northern Ireland. "That doesn't mean that I agree with everything or, in fact, anything that he says."

Trump has played with several current and former pro golfers, including Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus, 2016 U.S. Open winner Dustin Johnson and 2017 PGA Championship winner Justin Thomas.

