

A Senior Official Says Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei Will Deliver a Speech On Friday, May 22, on the Occasion Of the International Quds Day

IRAN NEWS

While Countrywide Demonstrations Marking the Int'l Quds Day Have Been Cancelled in Iran Due To the Coronavirus Outbreak, A Series of Exceptional Plans Has Been Formulated to Mark the Event

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DOMESTIC

Tehran Trade With Caracas Has Nothing To Do With Anyone Else

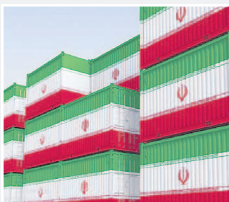


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DOMESTIC

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INTERNATIONAL

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SPORTS

Haaland Stars in Dortmund Romp as Bundesliga Makes Comeback



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U.S. Spreading Division, Violence Instead of Fighting COVID-19

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry has lashed out at the United States for pressing ahead with its acts of sabotage while the world is in need of a united fight against the deadly coronavirus outbreak, saying Washington is continues to encourage division and violence across the globe.

"From West Asia to Latin America and from UNSC to WHO, the US causes division, steers violence and spoils multilateral institutions," Abbas Mousavi said in a post on his official Twitter account on Saturday.

He added that the "U.S. continues to disrupt, distract and sabotage" at a time that all countries in the world need to "get united in solidarity and unified in action against #COVID19 pandemic."

The spokesperson included in his tweet some media reports showing Washington's acts of sabotage in different parts of the world.

According to a running count by worldometers.info, more than 4,677,000 people are now infected with the coronavirus, and over 310,000 have died.

The death toll from COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, in Europe has exceeded 160,000, while its total infections has passed 1.7 million, according to the website.

U.S. President Donald Trump has come under scrutiny for his scattershot approach toward the handling of the coronavirus outbreak, which puts the United States on the top of the list of the worst-affected nations across the globe.

Trump has also been under fire for resorting to a blame game strategy to take the spotlight off the deteriorating situation inside the country.

51 More Iranians Die Because of Coronavirus

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iranian Health Ministry's Public Relations Office Kianoush Jahanpour said on Sunday that some 51 more Iranians died because of coronavirus over the past 24 hours and 94,464 people out of a total of 120,198 infected with the coronavirus have survived and recovered, but, unfortunately, the total number of deaths reached 6,988.

Jahanpour said that 1,806 new infected cases have been detected since yesterday.

Over the last 24 hours, 51 people died due to the deadly virus, he added.

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Tehran Ready for Strategic Partnership With Baghdad



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami has voiced Iran's willingness to forge a strategic partnership with neighboring Iraq and turn bilateral ties into a "successful model for cooperation."

Hatami made the comments on Sunday during a video call with his Iraqi counterpart, Lieutenant General Juma Anad Saadoun Khattab, who was recently appointed to the post by new Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi.

Hatamai underlined the need for defense cooperation between Baghdad and Tehran to restore security and stability in the region.

"We are willing to offer all our potential to Iraq and become strategic partners and turn our bonds into a successful model of cooperation," he said.

Iran has maintained close ties with Iraq since the ouster of former dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003.

In 2014, when Daesh unleashed its campaign of terror in Iraq, Iranian military advisers rushed to the aid of Iraqi armed forces on Baghdad's request, helping them reverse Daesh's gains and ultimately liberate their entire homeland from the Takfiri terrorist group some three years later.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Hatami congratulated the Iraqi defense minister on his appointment and wished him success in his career.

He also expressed his satisfaction with the formation of the new Iraqi administration, saying, "A united, independent and powerful Iraq, with the participation of all ethnic and religious groups, is our principled policy."

"Therefore, we hope that the Iraqi government will be successful in fulfilling its inherent responsibilities and duties, especially in materializing national demands, improving economic conditions and fighting the coronavirus disease."

Hatami also touched on the common history, culture and religion of the two neighbors, and extended an invitation to his Iraqi counterpart for an official visit to the Islamic Republic.

Iraq swore in al-Kadhimi as the new prime minister earlier this month after months of political deadlock that had hampered the country's fight against the coronavirus pandemic and stepped-up Daesh operations.

The United States is strongly opposed to close relations between Iran and Iraq, pressuring Baghdad to keep Tehran at an arm's length.

Afghan President, Rival Close in on Power-Sharing Deal

KABUL (Reuters) - Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, his rival in a disputed presidential election, are close to completing a power-sharing deal to end a political stalemate that has hampered progress towards peace, three people familiar with the matter told Reuters.

The draft agreement envisages Abdullah leading the peace process with the insurgent Taliban while Ghani leads the country as president, senior sources within both camps said.

Discussions over some key posts were still underway but if an agreement was struck, the deal could be signed as early as Sunday afternoon, the sources said.

"Overall both teams have reached an agreement based on which they will have 50% share in the government. The thing that is still under debate right now is about which ministry should go to whom," said one of the sources.

Abdullah wants to control a major portfolio such as finance or foreign affairs and while Ghani has not agreed to this, he could offer control of the interior ministry, sources said.

Abdullah had disputed the results of the September election and announced the formation of a parallel government earlier this year, undermining Ghani's administration at a time when the United States was trying to advance a peace process with the Taliban to end the 19-year Afghan war.

Washington, frustrated by the growing impasse between the two men, even after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo travelled to Kabul to mediate, threatened a \$1 billion aid cut if the men could not agree.

It was not immediately clear whether the agreement, if reached, would result in aid being reinstated, but it comes as Afghanistan faces growing fiscal pressures, with tax revenues falling and foreign aid pledges due this year expected to shrink. Officials say that a deal between the Ghani and Abdullah is crucial to launching peace talks, as Abdullah's camp represents much of the country's north-west.

But the talks face a number of stark challenges, as violence in the country increases and a harrowing attack on a Kabul maternity ward this week prompted Ghani to switch the military to an "offensive" stance against insurgent groups.

The Taliban deny involvement in the attack, but the government has remained sceptical and angry at ongoing Taliban attacks against the Afghan military, fraying the momentum for peace talks, which were due to start in March.

U.S. Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad said on Friday that a new date for intra-Afghan peace talks was under discussion and he would soon travel to the region and try to encourage a reduction in violence.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



U.S., China Preparing for Divorce

U.S. President Donald Trump has recently launched an interesting threat when he warned China of cutting off the whole relationship. China's success in making the U.S. economy more dependent and taking the current dollar as hostage has created unmatched anger in the U.S. The U.S. is getting more and more in debt day by day and China has created forex reserves in any part of the world and bought bonds and shares. It means all countries because of the amount of their debts to China, due to the sold bonds, have to open their markets to China and give concessions. Of course China has not been the only country which has achieved brilliant successes in their smart challenge with the U.S.

Japan, South Korea, Europe, Russia, India, Brazil and Muslim countries like Malaysia, Turkey, the UAE and Qatar have not only chosen this way to secure themselves from the sting and damage of dollar, they have also been able to continue their interests wisely by penetrating into the U.S. economy and politics.

The U.S. once controlled 40 percent of the world economy but today it has slumped to almost 20 percent and this decline in the hegemony of the U.S. economy still goes on. An informed person with an infrastructural knowledge had claimed in the virtual space that China is like a pain in the arse of the U.S. economy because when the U.S. plants and dollars fly to China, it is natural the amount of capital in the U.S. to decrease. Hence, the U.S. earns lower tax revenues, and as the result, its military budget would decrease and the U.S. Army would recruit small number of troops. It is as if China has killed thousands of U.S. troops and nobody has heard gunfire.

When the U.S. budget is cut, the number of its military planes, warships and tanks also shrink. It is as if China has destroyed them without firing a bullet. With such an analysis, one can stipulate that in the past 40 years, tens of U.S. troops have been killed by the Chinese every day, and every year tens of U.S. warships, hundreds of planes, thousands of tanks and hundreds of factories have been targeted and destroyed by the Chinese. How? China has done all these through economy and without firing a bullet.

China with a wise policy has expanded its economic infrastructure by taking advantage of cheap labor force and could take out billions of dollars of capital from the U.S. and bring it to China and attracted major big international companies.

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MP: Nothing Left of JCPOA

TEHRAN (MNA) - Chairman of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission says that Iran was the only side adhering to its commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"There is nothing left of the JCPOA to discuss in the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission," Mojtaba Zonnour said yesterday.

According to the deal, continued the lawmaker, both Iran and other parties had some commitments and it was agreed to remove anti-Iran sanctions. "Sanctions are still in place despite the fact that Iran stuck to all its commitments."

"We reduced our commitments to the deal because other parties do not do their part," he said.

The JCPOA was signed in 2015 between Iran and the so-called 5+1. Iran accepted to limit its nuclear program in return for the removal of UN sanctions. Despite all the reports of the IAEA which approved Iran's adherence to its commitments, U.S. President Donald Trump pulled his country out of the deal in May 2018 and unilaterally imposed harshest sanctions against Iran in defiance of the international law.

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Iran Outshining Europe, U.S. in Coronavirus Fight

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Despite facing tough foreign sanctions, the Islamic Republic is outperforming Europe and the US in handling the fight against the novel coronavirus, Iranian Health Minister Saeed Namaki said.

In comments on the sidelines of a ceremony held on Saturday to unveil new homegrown hospital gowns, Namaki said Iran is outdoing European and American countries in tackling COVID-19 although it is under severe sanctions and international pressures and also struggles with economic problems remaining from the past.

Unlike in the U.S. and Europe, there was not a single nurse or doctor in Iran to go on strike because of a shortage of medical supplies in the early days of the outbreak, he added.

The minister noted that Iran began to store the medical items and banned their exports immediately after the coronavirus broke out in China, and that despite some shortage of gowns and gloves at the beginning, Iran managed to turn from an importer of health products to a powerful exporter within only 50 days.

Tehran Trade With Caracas Has Nothing To Do With Anyone Else

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Government spokesman Ali Rabiei says the country's trade ties with Venezuela have nothing to do with any other country.

In comments on Saturday, Rabiei said “Venezuela and Iran are both independent states that have had and will continue to have trade relations with each other.”

“We sell goods and buy goods in return. This trade has nothing to do with anyone else,” he noted.

“We have to sell our oil, and we have ways to do it,” Rabiei said.

He made the remarks in reaction to reports that five Iranian tankers are shipping tons of gasoline to Venezuela in defiance of U.S. sanctions on both countries.

There are unconfirmed reports that the U.S. Navy has deployed its USS Detroit (LCS-7), USS Lassen (DDG-82), USS Preble (DDG-88), and USS Farragut (DDG-99) to the Caribbean along with its patrol aircraft Boeing P8-Poseidon for possible encounter with the Iranian vessels.

However, analysts say it is very unlikely that the US makes such a mistake, as it would have serious repercussions for the Trump administration ahead of the November elections.



Meanwhile based on tanker tracking data, a tanker carrying Iranian fuel has passed through Gibraltar heading towards Latin America, according to media.

The tanker ‘FAXON’ sailed through Gibraltar on Sunday, which is claimed by some western media to be headed towards Venezuela.

According to the same reports, five tankers, namely Clavel, Faxon, Forest, Petunia and Fortune, are carrying Iranian fuel are traversing toward Venezuela.

While the first four have passed Gibraltar, the medium tanker Clavel passed the Suez Canal on Wednesday and is headed toward Gibraltar, the reports add.

The vessel-tracking data from analyst Refinitiv Eikon suggests the Clavel tanker loaded fuel at Bandar Abbas port in Iran at the end of March, and sailed through the Suez Canal and entered the Atlantic on Wednesday.

Iranian and Venezuelan officials have not reacted to these claims yet.

The oil sectors of Iran and Venezuela, members of OPEC, are both under U.S. sanctions. However, the tankers are said to have kept their satellite-tracking transponders on.

Iran Reiterates Support to al-Assad

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Parliament Speaker’s Special Aide for International Affairs Hossein Amir-Abdollahian reiterated on Sunday the Islamic Republic’s support to Bashar al-Assad as the legitimate leader of Syria.

Amir-Abdollahian posted a photo of a meeting between al-Assad and martyred Iranian anti-terror commander, Major General Qassem Soleimani, and wrote, “Dr. Bashar Assad is the legitimate president of Syria and the great leader of fighting Takfiri terrorism in the Arab World.”

He further dismissed the baseless rumors over Iran-Russia consensus for removing the Syrian top leader, terming such claim as “a big lie and American-Zionist media game.”

Amir-Abdollahian further reiterated that “Iran strongly supports Syria’s sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity.”

Rumors circulating in some media claimed that Iran, Russia and Turkey were working to reach a consensus to remove the Syrian president and set up a ceasefire in alternate for forming a transitional authority that features the opposition.

In the meantime, Russia’s Ambassador to Tehran Levan Dzagharyan dismissed such rumors on Saturday and elaborated on the matter in an interview with the Mehr News.

Afghanistan Lauds COVID-19 Medical Care for Nationals in Iran

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan has expressed gratitude to the Islamic Republic for providing humanitarian support and medical services for the Afghan nationals residing in Iran amid the outbreak of coronavirus epidemic, says an Iranian official.

Director-General of the Iranian Interior Ministry’s Department of Foreign Nationals and Migrants, Mahdi Mahmoudi, says the Islamic Republic’s effective humanitarian measures in the treatment of foreigners infected with the novel coronavirus have drawn appreciation from Kabul.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan has commended the Islamic Republic and the governors of Iran’s border provinces several times for treating the Afghan patients and offering humanitarian supports for the migrants after the outbreak of COVID-19, he noted.

The consulates of Afghanistan in Iran’s provinces of

Khorasan Razavi and Sistan and Baluchestan have sent messages of gratitude to the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Mahmoudi said.

The official emphasized that Iran pursues the policy of offering medical services and healthcare support for all people without discrimination, noting that the whole foreign citizens infected with coronavirus in Iran receive free treatment at the hospitals across the country.

Since the outbreak of coronavirus in Iran in February, the Afghan migrants and residents in the country have received free medical supplies such as disinfectants, masks and gloves, he noted.

According to Mahmoudi, around 6,000 foreign families in Iran have received financial assistance and personal protective kits from the Iranian government, including masks, eyewear, gloves, disinfectants, sanitary gel, and medicines.

review of global navy incidents confirms even worse incidents,” he added.

“No country reveals its defense secrets and we must not reveal military information and secrets to the enemy on our own,” he emphasized.

As many as 19 people were martyred and 15 others injured in an incident involving the Iranian Navy’s Konarak logistical vessel on Sunday, during a naval exercise near the waters lying close to Jask and Chabahar ports.

Iran Outshining Europe, U.S. in Coronavirus Fight



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Despite facing tough foreign sanctions, the Islamic Republic is outperforming Europe and the US in handling the fight against the novel coronavirus, Iranian Health Minister Saeed Namaki said.

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Unlike in the U.S. and Europe, there was not a single nurse or doctor in Iran to go on strike because of a shortage of medical supplies in the early days of the outbreak, he added.

The minister noted that Iran began to store the medical items and banned their exports immediately after the coronavirus broke out in China, and that despite some shortage of gowns and gloves at the beginning, Iran managed to turn from an importer of health products to a powerful exporter within only 50 days.

On Saturday, Iran recorded its lowest daily death toll from the novel coronavirus in 70 days.

Military Secrets Must Not Be Revealed to Enemies

TEHRAN (MNA) – Deputy Coordinator of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Army Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari said that no country reveals its defense secrets and Iran must not divulge any military information to the enemies.

Deputy Coordinator of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Army Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari noted on Saturday that the enemy is always struggling to weaken the defense power of the Islamic Republic, however, Iranians and Armed forces are vigilant and will not succumb to them.

He further maintained that the Iranian Navy will continue its missions with authority and power.

He made the remarks on Saturday while paying a visit to the remaining three Army personnel hospitalized due to the recent incident in the south of the country.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran holds a military exercise on average every week on land, air, sea, and underwater in which real ammunition, missile, and equipment are utilized. These mishaps are common in military and navy exercises around the world and a

Two Batches of Antibody Kits Exported to Germany, Turkey

TEHRAN (ILNA) - Iran has exported two batches of antibody kits to Turkey and Germany, said Hassan Safouri, director-general for medical equipment in Iran’s Health Ministry.

However, PCR kits are still needed in the country, so they will not be exported for now, he said.

“I am not aware of the precise volume of exports, but there were two batches. The domestic producer of antibody kits has requested for export of 9,000 kits from the Health Ministry,” he said.

Safouri went on to add that there are currently three knowledge-based companies that are producing testing kits in Iran and they are expected to provide 1.5 million kits to the Health Ministry in the next one and a half months.

There is one Serologic testing kits producer that can both export its products and meet the domestic demand, he said.

“The production of N95 and three-layered masks, shield and other items have been developed. The production of three-layered masks has increased four times now to 2.5 million per day, while N95 mask production is 150,000 masks per day that can be used in health care centers and exported,” he said.

Safouri noted that Iran imported testing kits from China and Europe at the early stages of coronavirus spread.

“Importing medical equipment has been slowed down due to the problem in obtaining an assigned official foreign currency rate. Hopefully, the Central Bank of Iran will resolve the issue,” he added.

Foreign Nationals Infected With COVID-19 Treated for Free of Charge

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The director-general of the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs said on Saturday that foreign citizens residing in Iran are treated free of charge in case they become infected with coronavirus.

Mehdi Mahmoudi said that the policy of Iran is preventing any kind of discrimination toward foreign nationals residing in Iran. Mahmoudi said the policy of free treatment for foreigners is the result of the National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus and orders by President Hassan Rouhani.

He said that free masks and equipment have been handed out to Afghan nationals free of charge since mid-February when the coronavirus epidemic started.

Mahmoudi said in this period 6,000 foreign families have been provided with free masks, protective goggles, gloves, special gowns, medical equipment, soap, hand gel, and even cash as a help to their livelihood.

Effective humanitarian helps of Iran to Afghan people have several times been appreciated by Foreign Ministry of Afghanistan and Afghan governors of the provinces that share common border with Iran.

96 Iranian Inventions Granted International Patents

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian government says it is helping local inventors to apply for and obtain international patents and has so far supported 96 domestic inventions in registering patents in credible foreign offices.

The Iranian Vice-residency for Science and Technology’s Patent Centre said on Saturday it has supported 96 Iranian inventions in registering patents in the international offices so far.

The center says it provides the support to commercialize the Iranian inventions on the basis of homegrown technologies and to assist the local inventors in the “complicated” process of applying and obtaining an international patent.

An inventor usually has to bear the heavy costs of applying for an international patent, but the Iranian Vice Presidency for Science and Technology’s Patent Centre reduces the burdens with special methods of interaction with the foreign patent offices and also covers more than 90 percent of the costs once an Iranian invention is qualified, a report by the government’s website said.

In the current Iranian year, which began on March 20, the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology’s Patent Centre says it has broadened the patent registration market in order to expedite the process of fulfillment of goals of the Iranian businesses, and is offering services for patent applications in the US, Canada, China, and the European Union (EU).

Pakistan Extends Condolence on Loss of Lives in Iranian Navy Ship Incident

TEHRAN (Pakistan Embassy) - Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abbasi NI (M), Chief of the Naval Staff, Pakistan Navy sent a message of heartfelt condolences on behalf of all ranks of Pakistan Navy to Rear Admiral Hussein Khanzadi, Commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy on the tragic incident at sea resulting in the loss of precious lives of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy.

While stating that it was indeed a great tragedy and Pakistan Navy stands shoulder to shoulder with Iranian brethren in this hour of grief, Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abbasi, Pakistan Navy Chief prayed to Almighty Allah to rest the departed souls in peace, grant fortitude to the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy and the bereaved families to bear this irreparable loss.

Iran Underlines Military, Defense Cooperation With Iraq

BAGHDAD (IRNA) - Iran’s military attaché in Iraq called for broadening of military-defense collaboration with Baghdad at a meeting with Iraqi Defense Minister Jom’eh Enad late on Saturday.

He also congratulated Enad on his appointment as Iraq’s new defense minister, voicing Iran’s readiness for promoting relations with the friendly and brotherly Iraq, especially in the field of military-defense.

Iraqi defense minister, for his part, highlighted Iran’s role in fighting terrorism and appreciated its efforts in fighting Daesh.

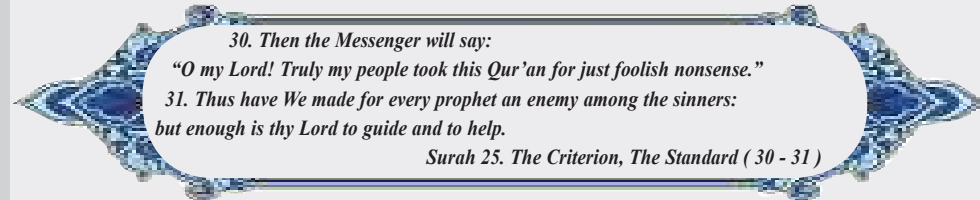
During the meeting, both officials also discussed ways of strengthening the Russia-Syria-Iran-Iraq Quadrilateral Center for Exchanging Information and Security Cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

It was formed following an agreement reached at the end of September 2015 between Russia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq and Syria to “help and cooperate in collecting information about the terrorist Daesh group” with a view to combating the advances of the group.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:00
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:25
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:16
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:56



Pandemic Almost Zeroed Iran's Exports Revenues in UAE

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Vice-Chairman of Iran and United Arab Emirates Joint Chamber of Commerce says Iran's exports to the UAE have faced more restrictions in the past two months and there has been no export forex to return to the country.

Erfan Shakeri said yesterday that the outbreak of Coronavirus has crippled the bilateral trade between Iran and the UAE and closure of trade centers of the UAE has been effective in the fall of Iran's exports to this country.

He further said most of goods which are imported to Iran from other countries are re-exported via Dubai but the outbreak of virus has restricted transportation in the UAE.

Shakeri added that currently trade activities have resumed in Dubai by observance of sanitary protocols but some problem which still exists inside Iran is that provision of forex is very difficult and allocation of the forex is done with restrictions and this will definitely affect the trend of Iran's trade.

He admitted that sanctions have doubled the problem of the pandemic and in the past



two months, Iran's exports have been more under restrictions because of the virus and as the result, there is no forex resulted from exports to be used for imports of goods.

Shakeri further said that the problem for transfer of money and banking transaction is another issue which created woes for Iran's trade, adding that the UAE accounts for ten percent of Iran's non-oil exports as foods like oil derivatives, fruits, vegetables, carpet, pistachio and saffron are major goods which are exported to the UAE but the lockdown in the country for the COVID-19 pandemic, has deprived Iran from its forex revenues in the UAE.

Earlier this month, Chairman of Iran-UAE Joint Chamber of Commerce Farshid Farzanegan said that trade volume exchanged between Islamic Republic of Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the first month of the current Iranian calendar year [from March 21 to April 19, 2020] has decreased at least 35 percent due to the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic.

He went on to say that spread of coronavirus, COVID-19, has played an important role in reducing direct consumption and disorder in supply chain of the United Arab Emirates especially Dubai.

He pointed to the way of transportation of cargo and added, "currently, UAE imports and exports products using wooden, metal ships as well as landing-craft vessels."

Iran Plans to Indigenize 10b Euros Worth of Goods Next Year



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The policy of developing domestic products amid cruel sanctions is considered as an opportunity for Iranian producers and the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade is now following up indigenizing over 10b euros of products and equipment over the next Iranian calendar year.

Accordingly in line with the policy of promoting Iranian products, the Industry, Mine, and Trade Ministry has signed MoU with the office of Vice President for Science and Technology Affairs and Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, as well as Iran National Innovation Fund.

Based on the latest report of Industry, Mine, and Trade Ministry, upon an agreement with the Central Bank of Iran, raw materials imports will be done without transferring currency.

Caretaker of Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade Hossein Modares Khiabani said enemies have targeted people's livelihood and employment to damage the country.

This is while, the outbreak of coronavirus also as an unpredicted factor added more limitations to the country, he added. But in these difficult conditions, Iran has experience in the production of medical equipment, he noted.

Earlier, Modares Khiabani said over 15 millions of coronavirus protection face-masks have been produced so far by Iranian production units.

Based on Supreme Leader recommendations, the ministry has put on the agenda utilizing the existing capacities in the country to facilitate and accelerate importing required items for the Health Ministry, he added.

The ministry could increase the production of face-masks to 15,266,372 by activating production units.

Border Markets Gradually Reopening

TEHRAN (ILNA)- The Iran-Pakistan border crossing at Mirjaveh has been open for about two days and other border markets are gradually reopening," the Vice President of the Iran-Pakistan Joint Chamber Amanullah Shahnavazi said.

He said that now our main problem at the Mirjaveh border is failure to issue a visa due to the closure of the country's consulate.

He said "Currently only basic goods and food are allowed to be exported the Mirjaveh border", adding that of course, other goods can be exported this week."

At present a maximum of 10 trucks are allowed to



pass through every day, which has caused heavy traffic on this border.

Mirjaveh border crossing is the most important land border between Iran and Pakistan, which had been previously closed due to the outbreak of COVID-19.

Following the coronavirus outbreak, Pakistan first closed its eastern and western borders with Iran, Afghanistan, and India on March 15 to contain the spread of the new coronavirus.

According to official sources, the border with Iran operates on three days per week to import dates and other commodities, but no decision has been made regarding exports to Iran.

Gov't Allocates \$75m to Jobless Benefits for Coronavirus

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian authorities say a new rescue scheme is available to the main pension fund in the country to pay for its unemployment benefits amid a coronavirus pandemic that has left many jobless.

Head of Iran's Plan and Budget Organization (PBO) said that the government had allocated 12.860 billion rials (more than \$75 million) to an unemployment scheme run by the Social Security Organization of Iran.

Mohammad Bagher Nobakht, a deputy president, said the lifeline had been made available after the government tapped into the country's sovereign wealth fund to pay for the costs of the national campaign against the new coronavirus pandemic.

Iran has funded various schemes to help the economy recover from nearly two months of closures over the pandemic. Workers have been a special focus of those programs.

Iran's minister of labor Mohammad Shariatmadari said on Saturday that around one million firms and enterprises with over 3.2 million workers and staff members had been covered by a government's cheap loan scheme which is meant to offset the economic impacts of the pandemic.

Shariatmadari said that the rescue package, which is worth 500 trillion rials (nearly \$3 billion), would be allocated to firms and enterprises who have avoided laying off workers since March when the pandemic started in Iran.

He said firms which have been directly affected by the government lockdown over the disease would receive nearly \$1,000 per worker they have preserved while the sum would be reduced to more than \$700 for others indirectly affected by the closures.

The minister said banks in Iran will start granting the cheap loans to businesses as of May 23.



Tehran, Ankara to Cooperate In Making Turbine Blades

KARAJ (IRNA) - The head of Iran's Materials and Energy Research Center (MERC) said that the Iranian and Turkish researchers are to cooperate in making and testing new blades for wind turbines.



Ali-Reza Khavandi said that the Iranian and Turkish researchers are conducting some 22 projects under an agreement signed between Iran's Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, and Iran-Turkey Scientific and Technological Research Council.

Khavandi said that following the call for joint projects in early summer 2019, during a five-month period, 164 research plans were sent in the framework of TUBIAK-MSRT Joint Call.

He said one of the projects have been assigned to the MERC to be conducted in two years with the participation of Turkish researchers.

Each project was judged by two scientists in winter and 22 projects were confirmed to receive 100,000 Turkish liras and 400 million Iranian rials.

MERC has patented many inventions, including a kind of the desalination machine and solar water heater, some of which have been monetized.

Insurance Companies Urged to Prepare E-Services for Insurers

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Central Insurance of Iran (Bimeh Markazi) in a notification asked all insurance companies to prepare the infrastructure for e-services for third party insurance insurers as of May 27.



According to the public relations of Central Insurance of Iran, head of the CII Mr. Gholamreza Soleimani in a notification urged all insurance companies to facilitate e-services for their clients of third party insurance services by preparing necessary infrastructure for getting the necessary information from the insurers by securing their personal information.

He also said the insurance companies have to issue insurance policy after getting Yekta code from the CII and verification of it.

Soleimani added that companies should remove physical presence of clients for the third party insurance services by electronization of their services.

The companies were also assigned to inform all these issues to their clients and other involved parties.

Bazargan Customs' Exports Up by 56%

ORUMIYEH (IRNA) - Managing Director of Bazaran Customs Sadeq Namdar said \$609,610,000 products have been exported through Bazargan Customs during the first month of the Iranian calendar year (started on March 20), adding that the figure experienced 56% rise compared with the same period last year.

Namdar said the volume of the exported goods, including agricultural, petrochemical products, steel, and stone artifacts was 26,120 tons.

He added that the figure was \$215,541,000 last year meaning that it had 28% growth.

About ¼ of all Iranian border terminals are located in West Azarbaijan, including Bazargan, Maku, Razi, Khoy, Sarv, Sanam Bolaghi, and Tamarchin.

Bazargan Customs House is the most important Iranian ground border for importing and exporting to and from Turkey.

Turkmenistan Can Take Advantage of Chabahar Capacity for Transit

CHABAHAH (IRNA) - Governor of Sistan-Balouchestan Province said Turkmenistan can use the capacity of Chabahar port and its trade-industrial free zone for transiting goods.

Speaking in a video conference with Iranian ambassador to Turkmenistan Gholam Abbas Arbab Khales, Ahmad Ali Mouhebati said Sistan-Balouchestan Province, especially Chabahar, enjoys many capacities in trade, economic and commercial fields.

Chabahar is connected to the open waters and plays a major role in developing trade, he added.

Sistan-Balouchestan is considered an important opportunity for domestic and foreign investors, he said, adding that executive systems will make all their efforts for starting economic activities.

Elaborating on investment opportunities in the Sistan-Balouchestan Province and Chabahar, Mouhebati called for Turkmen economic activists' investment and participation.

Arbab Khales, meantime, expressed his readiness for maintaining coordination for Turkmen officials' visit to Chabahar.

He noted that investment delegations will visit the capacities of Chabahar Port.

In the meantime, Head of Iranian Foreign Ministry in Chabahar Free Zone Hamid Reza Toosi said Chabahar with its important trade capacities and also Shahid Beheshti Port enjoying 8.5m tons capacity of loading and unloading per year can play important role in promoting trade.

Chabahar, as Iran's only ocean port, plays an

important role in developing trade, exports, and imports and in fishing as well.

Western Province Exports \$35m Worth of Handicrafts

HAMEDAN (IRNA) - Deputy Head of Hamedan cultural heritage, handicrafts and tourism office said some 3,700,000 tons of handicrafts worth \$35m were exported during the last Iranian calendar year (ended on March 21).

Hashem Mazaheri said Hamedan handicrafts included earthenware, hand-made glass, plaster and polyester sculptures, furniture, wood carving, frames, and wooden decorations.

He added that Qom technique, straw hat, mirror and candlestick, wooden vase, leather products, wood wall clocks, wooden basket, table, and chair are also among Hamedan handicrafts.

Mazaheri noted that over 80 percent of Hamedan handicraft exports is related to Lalejin pottery.

He went on to say that traditional arts, which are a symbol of a nation's culture and art, the most exquisite domestic products and one of the important factors in the development of tourism, need to be commercialized.

Portugal Suspends Foreign Trash Imports

LISBON (Reuters) - Portugal, which usually attracts huge mounds of rubbish from other European states because of its low waste management fees, has suspended imports of trash until the end of 2020 to protect domestic landfill capacity, the government said on Saturday.

"This decision is intended to ensure we have sufficient national capacity in waste processing facilities," the government said in a statement. The country has already blocked 246,000 tons of trash from entering since the start of the year, the statement said, and no new imports will be accepted.

The country charges 11 euros to process a ton of trash, considerably below the European average of 80 euros.



Chile Capital Silenced Amid Lockdown

SANTIAGO (AFP) - With near-deserted streets and police checks, the seven million people of Chile's capital, Santiago, began a strict quarantine Saturday after a sharp resurgence of coronavirus cases.

Normal activity in the capital was down 85 percent, the government said, as people were only allowed to leave their homes for essential food and medicine and a short period of exercise. "Blocks and blocks of the city are completely empty and we can take it that this is a good start," Health Minister Jaime Manalich told reporters at Santiago airport after a fly-over of the city.

Long lines of cars caused gridlock Friday evening as people streamed out of capital for the coast, 100 kilometers (60 miles) away, hours before the lockdown came into force at 10:00 pm (0200 GMT).



14 Dead in Sixth Day of Fighting in South Yemen



ADEN (AFP) - Fourteen combatants died in Yemen on Saturday, as fighting between pro-government troops and separatist forces entered a sixth day in the southern province of Abyan, according to sources on both sides.

Separatist forces of the Southern Transitional Council (STC) are resisting an offensive by pro-government troops launched on the outskirts of Zinjibar, some 60 kilometres (35 miles) from the main southern city of Aden.

"Fourteen fighters, including ten pro-government soldiers, were killed on Saturday," a government military official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The toll was confirmed by a separatist military source, who also claimed the capture of "40 pro-government soldiers and the seizure of military equipment".

"They (pro-government soldiers) were unable to advance toward Zinjibar and they will only get there over our dead bodies," a separatist commander on the front line told AFP. The offensive was being carried out by the military wing of the Islamist party Al-Islah -- allied to the government -- according to several sources.

The fighting is the first major confrontation since the separatists declared self-rule in southern Yemen on 26 April, accusing the government of failing to carry out its duties and of "conspiring" against their cause.

At least ten fighters were killed and many were wounded on both sides in fighting on Monday.

The clashes complicate Yemen's war between the government -- backed by a Saudi-led military coalition -- and Huthi rebels who control much of the north, including the capital Sanaa. The government and the STC have technically been allies in the long war against the Huthis.

But the separatists in the south, which used to be an independent country, have agitated to break away again -- a campaign that was temporarily put to rest with a power-sharing deal signed in Riyadh last November.

Over the past six years, the Yemen conflict has killed tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, and triggered what the United Nations considers to be the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Top Fugitive in Rwanda's Genocide Arrested Outside Paris

KIGALI (AP) — One of the most wanted fugitives in Rwanda's 1994 genocide, a wealthy businessman accused of supplying machetes to killers and broadcasting propaganda urging mass slaughter, has been arrested outside Paris, authorities said Saturday.

Felicien Kabuga, who had a \$5 million bounty on his head, had been accused of equipping militias in the genocide that killed more than 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus who tried to protect them.

The 84-year-old Kabuga was arrested as a result of a joint investigation with the U.N.'s International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals office of the prosecutor, French authorities said.

He had been living in a town north of Paris, Asnieres-Sur-Seine, under an assumed name, the appeals court's prosecutor's office said.

The U.N.'s International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda indicted Kabuga in 1997 on charges related to conspiracy to commit genocide, persecution and extermination.

Brazil Passes Italy, Spain in Confirmed Coronavirus Cases

BRASILIA (Reuters) - Brazil's confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus rose on Saturday past those of Spain and Italy, which was once the epicenter of the pandemic, making Brazil's outbreak the fourth largest in the world, according to official figures.

Brazil's Health Ministry registered 14,919 new confirmed cases in the prior 24 hours, taking the total to 233,142, behind the United States, Russia and the United Kingdom. Brazil has done just a fraction of the testing seen in those three countries.

The global distinction is likely to pile pressure on President Jair Bolsonaro, who lost his second health minister in a month on Friday as he defies public health experts and calls for widespread use of unproven drugs.

Bolsonaro has been fiercely critical of the orders by many of Brazil's state governors for strict social isolation and quarantine to combat the spread of the virus, including the closure of schools, shops and restaurants.

Bolsonaro argues that the toll on the economy is becoming unbearable and businesses must be allowed to

reopen as soon as possible. The government now expects Brazil will post its biggest annual economic contraction this year since records began over a century ago.

Brazil's vice president, Hamilton Mourao, underwent a COVID-19 test and was placed in isolation at his official residence on Saturday, after a public servant who had been near him last week tested positive.

Mourao, 66, will not fulfill official duties on Monday, when the results are expected. Bolsonaro has undergone several coronavirus tests after ministers and other close aides tested positive.

Nationwide testing in Brazil still lags far behind European nations. Brazil had processed nearly 338,000 novel coronavirus tests in official labs by the beginning of the week, according to the Health Ministry. Another 145,000 tests were under analysis or waiting in line.

By contrast, Italy and Spain have each run some 1.9 million official diagnostic tests for the virus.

Brazil's Health Ministry on Saturday also reported 816 new deaths related to the virus, bringing the total to 15,633.



Obama Renews His Attack on Trump's Covid-19 Response

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Former U.S. President Barack Obama on Saturday criticized the response to the COVID-19 pandemic ravaging America, in what was widely regarded as a rare public rebuke of his successor Donald Trump.

His remarks came as he spoke at two virtual commencements for high school and university students locked down instead of celebrating their graduations, a rite of passage every spring in the United States.

"More than anything, this pandemic has fully, finally torn back the curtain on the idea that so many of the folks in charge know what they're doing," Obama told graduates from several dozen historically black colleges and universities at the first ceremony. "A lot of them aren't even pretending to be in charge," he said as he discussed the implications of the pandemic during the online event, without naming any specific leaders.

That celebration was followed by a second, star-studded prime-time ceremony for high school students in which Obama



Germans Stage Protests Against Lockdown Measures

BERLIN (Reuters) - Thousands of Germans across the country took to the streets on Saturday to protest against restrictions imposed by the government to contain the coronavirus pandemic, police and organisers said.

Germany's death toll from the virus has been lower than most of its European neighbours and some lockdown measures have already been relaxed.

However, protests against the measures Chancellor Angela Merkel insists are needed to slow down the coronavirus outbreak have become more vocal and demonstrators have filled the streets for the second weekend in a row.

Derided on social media as "covidiot" who risk causing a second wave of infections that could lead to a tightening of restrictions, protesters staged demonstrations at several locations across the capital Berlin and the surrounding state of Brandenburg.

In Stuttgart, where some protesters last weekend had been flouting social distancing rules and not wearing face masks, police expected another rally of up to 5,000 people.

In Munich, organizers asked authorities to give the green light for a rally of up to 10,000 people on the Thersienwiese, a large square in the city center on which Munich normally stages its world famous Oktoberfest beer festival.

But city officials pointed to the need to respect social distancing rules and allowed a demonstration of up to 1,000 people. The hard core of protesters is being led by several new groups. One group is Resistance 2020, led by a lawyer from eastern Leipzig and a doctor from south-western Germany who question official corona statistics and view the main political parties as constructs of an elitist rule.

Another group called COMPACT describes itself as the "sharp sword against imperial propaganda". It declares on its website that it is helping the "information offensive" for the growing protest movement.

"Why aren't you telling us the truth, Mrs Merkel? How we are losing our freedom, jobs and health?" says COMPACT.

German media have suggested Russia could be behind a misinformation campaign that is spurring on protesters.

Democrats Launch Probe of Trump's Firing of State Department Watchdog

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Democrats in Congress on Saturday launched an investigation into President Donald Trump's move to oust the State Department's internal watchdog, accusing the president of escalating his fight against any oversight of his administration.

Trump announced the planned removal of Inspector General Steve Linick in a letter to House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi late Friday night, making Linick the latest government inspector general to be ousted in recent weeks under the Republican president.

The top Democrats on the House and Senate Foreign Relations Committees questioned the timing and motivation of what they called an "unprecedented removal."

"We unalterably oppose the politically-motivated firing of inspectors general and the President's gutting of these critical positions," House panel chairman Eliot Engel and Senator Bob Menendez, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations panel, said in a statement announcing the probe.

The two Democrats said it was their understanding that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo personally recommended Linick's firing because the inspector general "had opened an investigation into wrongdoing by Secretary Pompeo himself."

Asked about the investigation, a White House official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said: "Secretary Pompeo recommended the move and President Trump agreed."

The State Department did not respond to a request for comment on the probe. It earlier said that Stephen Akard, director of the Office of Foreign Missions, would take over the watchdog job.

Linick, who was appointed to the role in 2013 under the Obama administration, is the fourth inspector general fired by Trump since early April following the president's February acquittal by the Republican-led Senate in an impeachment trial.

Pelosi called the ousting an acceleration of a "dangerous pattern of retaliation."



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S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
pkg, yard
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Zafar Villa (\$4000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
marble floor
Fully Furn

Parsian

Zaferanieh (\$2400) 230sq.m, 4bdrs, S/p, F.F
Farmanieh (\$1800) 170sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, F.F
Gheitarieh (\$2000) 200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, F.F
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China Asks U.S. to Stop Unreasonable Suppression of Huawei

BEIJING (Reuters) - China's foreign ministry said on Saturday the United States needed to stop the "unreasonable suppression" of Chinese companies like Huawei.

The Trump administration on Friday moved to block global chip supplies to blacklisted telecoms equipment giant Huawei Technologies, spurring fears of Chinese retaliation and hammering shares of U.S. producers of chipmaking equipment.

China will firmly defend its companies' legal rights, the foreign ministry said in a statement in response to Reuters' questions on whether Beijing would take retaliatory measures against the United States.



IMF Chief Predicts Three-Year Economic Hit From Coronavirus

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The head of the International Monetary Fund predicts it could take until 2023 for the global economy to return to its pre-coronavirus levels.

"The most severe shock has already occurred," IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said at a POLITICO virtual event on Friday, noting that 170 countries have entered negative economic growth since March. Georgieva said she expects the global economy to shrink further beyond the current IMF estimate of -3 percent GDP in 2020, before a "partial recovery" in 2021.

The economic rupture is causing the IMF to throw out some of its old advice and adopt the posture of global social justice warrior, instead. Struggling and bankrupt government have long-dreaded IMF conditions on lending, including strict limits on government outlays and privatizing assets, but while Georgieva still urges governments to "spend wisely," the emphasis is now very much on the spending.

"Spend as much as you can, and then spend a bit more for your doctors, for your nurses, for the vulnerable people in your society," she said. The IMF is also attaching green conditions to its financial assistance and Georgieva pushes gender equality at every opportunity. "We are richer when women are equal," she said.

While Georgieva has more leverage than any IMF leader before her — lending capacity at the D.C.-based NGO has quadrupled to \$1 trillion since 2008 — she still operates within strict constraints largely determined by the United States, the IMF's largest shareholder.

Organizations as diverse as Goldman Sachs, Oxfam and AFL-CIO are now urging governments to authorize the IMF to deliver \$3 trillion in support to low- and middle-income countries, via a special asset class known as Special Drawing Rights. But Georgieva needs U.S. support before the IMF can come to the rescue.

"Everything has to be on the table" when it comes to responding to the coronavirus pandemic, Georgieva said, but "my focus is and will continue to be to keep the membership together." That's code for keeping the Trump administration at the table, something other international bodies such as the World Health Organization and World Trade Organization have increasingly failed to do.

Georgieva offered some advice for any nation or global institution grappling with the "America First" instincts of President Donald Trump's team, based on the relative success she and the IMF are having. First, entities need to be transparent and come armed with "a credible strategy," she said.

And their leaders need to hit the phones, and (when social distancing restrictions ease) pound the pavement. "I talk to everybody. I go to the Hill," she said, referring to Capitol Hill, home of the U.S. Congress. And "what I present is where we are, what the projections are for the future, what needs to be done, how the U.S. can help us," Georgieva said.

Georgieva likes to highlight her "track record," as she called it, during follow-up meetings, to maintain traction.

Her go-to contacts in the Trump administration include Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin and Ivanka Trump. She credited Mnuchin for getting resources for the IMF into the \$2 trillion package known as the CARES Act that Congress passed last month, while juggling "very serious domestic problems."

UK's Lowest Earners Bear the Brunt of COVID Job Hit

LONDON (Reuters) - Britain's lowest-earning workers have suffered the biggest jobs hit since the coronavirus crisis engulfed the country, a survey showed on Saturday.

Of the lowest-paid fifth of employees, 25% had been temporarily laid off and 5% had lost their jobs altogether, the survey by the Resolution Foundation think-tank showed.

But fewer than one in ten of the top fifth of earners had been affected, with only 6% furloughed and 3% losing their jobs.

Under the government's emergency coronavirus wage subsidy scheme, workers who are temporarily laid off continue to receive 80% of their pay, up to 2,500 pounds a month.

Saturday's survey showed 21% of private sector workers had been furloughed from their main job in early May.

"The majority are having their earnings protected by the government's retention scheme. Nonetheless, their job prospects over the coming months are highly uncertain," Hannah Slaughter, an economist at the Resolution Foundation, said.

One in eight workers thought they would lose their jobs in the coming three months while nearly a quarter believed their hours would be reduced, according to the survey.

The government should increase its wider labour market support - such as training provision - as it dials down its job retention scheme over the coming months, the Resolution Foundation said.

The survey showed low take-up of the government's income support scheme for self-employed people: 45% of self-employed workers did not plan take up the grants scheme believing they were ineligible or because their work was not hit by the crisis.

The survey of 6,005 people was conducted by polling firm YouGov between May 6 and May 11.



Awful Data Show U.S. Economy Is In Deep Trouble

PARIS (AFP) - Newly released economic data showed the U.S. economy is in a terrible state and may not rebound quickly even when the devastating lockdowns imposed to stop the coronavirus pandemic are lifted.

Data tracking industrial production and the vital retail sector released Friday showed record declines in April, the first full month of lockdowns to stop the spread of COVID-19 virus that has killed nearly 86,000 people and caused around 36.5 million people to lose their jobs in the world's largest economy.

With millions of people filing new claims for unemployment benefits every week since the lockdowns began in mid-March, analysts fear the U.S. faces a months-long slog out of the downturn, with no shortage of possible setbacks.

The consumer pullback was "truly staggering," Oxford Economics said in an analysis of the retail sales data. "The combination of elevated unemployment, depressed income, frail consumer confidence will continue to weigh on consumer's appetite for spending."

Consumer spending has been a crucial part of the US economy, and the Commerce Department reported retail sales sunk by 16.4 percent in April, the largest one-month fall on record.

The decline reversed years of growth and brought the index back to approximately where it was in August 2012. The hardest-hit businesses were those that relied on shoppers at brick-and-mortar stores, like clothing, which collapsed 78.8 percent, electronics and appliances, which plunged 60.6 percent, and furniture, down 58.7 percent.

Non-store retailers, such as those doing business online, were one of the only bright spots, growing by 8.4 percent. "Overall this is a dire set of numbers," said Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData Retail. "May will not be a month of celebration. Nor will June. Nor July. Nor probably the rest of this year."

"Retail's recovery will be slow and, in our view, it won't be until 2021 before trade starts to return to more normal patterns," he said. On the other end of the supply chain, the Federal Reserve's industrial production index dropped a record 11.2 percent in April, the largest monthly fall in its 101-year history.

The auto sector took the biggest hit, plunging more than 70 percent, according to the report, while overall manufacturing output fell 13.8 percent in the month, putting it 18 percent below April of last year. Oil and gas well drilling fell 28 percent, its largest drop on record dating back

to 1972 as demand for energy collapsed, while decreases of around 20 percent were recorded in primary metal products, aerospace and miscellaneous transportation equipment, and furniture and related products.

A New York Federal Reserve Bank survey of manufacturers in the New York region, home to one of the worst outbreaks of COVID-19, showed the index recovered by 30 points in May compared to April, but was still deep underwater at -48.5 percent.

Meanwhile, a nationwide industry poll showed majority of US manufacturing and services firms expect revenues to decline sharply this year amid the lockdowns, pushing any recovery back to 2021.

Pakistan Seeks Economic Relief for Poor Nations



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) – Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi emphasized the need for urgent economic relief for poor countries dealing with this century's "gravest challenge to humanity".

Talking to Japanese Foreign Minister Toshi-mitsu Motegi over phone, Mr Qureshi said: "Without immediate, coordinated and comprehensive actions to create fiscal space, the developing world may have to contend with dire social, political and economic consequences."

Mr Qureshi had called Mr Motegi as part of Pakistan's diplomatic outreach to promote Prime Minister Imran Khan's global initiative on debt relief for mitigating the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economies of poor countries.

Pakistan is planning to convene a meeting at the United Nations of the countries interested in the initiative to generate support for a comprehensive solution of the debt problem of the poor countries.

A Foreign Office statement said the two ministers exchanged views about the socio-economic ramifications of the pandemic. Mr Qureshi apprised Mr Motegi about PM Khan's initiative.

He thanked Japan for its assistance to Pakistan to combat the pandemic as well as in dealing with the desert locust attack, the FO said.

Japan is providing \$7.41 million in assistance to Pakistan through an international organization for technical support and procurement of medical supplies and equipment.

Petrobras Looks to China's Teapots to Keep Oil Exports Flowing

RIO DE JANEIRO (Reuters) - Brazil's state-run Petrobras sees no need for cuts in oil production, executives say, as the market for its crude remains robust in China, while domestic demand for fuel picks up amid social distancing fatigue in Latin America's largest economy.

On a Friday earnings call with analysts, executives credited the company's strong relationship with independent refineries in China's Shandong Province, known as "teapots," for allowing Petrobras to export a record amount of crude in recent months, even as some economies are effectively shut. Storage capacity for crude oil and gasoline is not proving to be an issue, they added. Petroleo Brasileiro SA, as the firm is formally known, had throttled back oil production by 200,000 barrels per day in early April, or almost 10% of its output, on fears that weak global demand amid the coronavirus pandemic would leave the company without places to store crude.

Other major oil companies also scaled back production significantly, including Chevron Corp's (CVX.N) cutbacks in the Permian Basin. But within a month Petrobras had reversed its cuts, surprising many.

On Thursday night, the company posted margins that beat expectations, even as it took a \$11 billion impairment on its exploration and production assets. Executives said on Friday that crude sales to China have been particularly key to bringing Petrobras through the demand crisis caused by the novel coronavirus pandemic, while bunker fuels sales had also remained robust.

"Our commercial team has been developing a long-term relationship with Shandong refineries in China where our oil has strong demand even during the crisis," Chief Logistics Officer André Barreto Chiarini said, citing appetite for the output from four specific offshore oilfields in Brazil.

"Crude oil from the Lula, Iracema, Sapinhoa and Buzios fields have the same overall characteristics as specific Chinese oils ... that are experiencing declining production," he said.

He added that Petrobras has capacity to boost oil exports 10% above the April record of 1 million bpd. In a sign that adherence to social distancing measures is slipping from an already low baseline in Brazil, Petrobras downstream chief Anelise Lara told journalists that domestic demand for gasoline and diesel had rebounded significantly from lows in early April.

Fitch Lowers Outlook on France Debt Rating to Negative

PARIS (AFP) - The international ratings agency Fitch on Friday lowered the outlook on France's sovereign debt from "stable" to "negative" in view of the anticipated

deterioration in the country's public finances and economy this year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

But Fitch said in a statement that it was nevertheless maintaining France's long-term credit rating at "AA" for the time being.

"The revision of the outlook reflects the substantial worsening in public finances and economic activity expected this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic," Fitch said.

"The combination of much reduced economic activity due to containment measures introduced from March and government policies to support the economy in the period of enforced reduced activity will sharply increase government borrowing and indebtedness."

The deterioration of France's public finances comes at a time when its debt levels were already comparatively high and when it had made only "limited progress in fiscal consolidation since the global financial crisis" of 2008 and when real economic growth was only "moderate", the statement said.

Fitch now has two years during which it may possibly downgrade France's debt rating.

At the beginning of April, rival ratings agency S&P maintained France's credit rating at "AA" and the outlook at "stable".

“Yalda, A Night for Forgiveness” To Vie in PyeongChang Festival

TEHRAN (MNA) – The feature film ‘Yalda, A Night for Forgiveness’ by Iranian director Masoud Bakhshi, has been accepted into the competition program of the 2nd Pyeongchang International Peace Film Festival in South Korea.

‘Yalda, A Night for Forgiveness’ depicts the future of a

young woman facing retributive justice play out live on the country’s most popular reality show.

The film has won a top prize at the Sundance Film Festival in the US. The festival’s World Cinema dramatic section gave its grand jury award to ‘Yalda, a Night for Forgiveness’, a drama by Iranian filmmaker Masoud Bakhshi.



Modi’s Stimulus Package So Far Is All About Liquidity

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s \$266 billion economic stimulus program to deal with the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic has been all about liquidity measures, with negligible extra budget spending, according to government officials.

The government has announced a variety of steps for small businesses, street vendors, farmers and poor migrants, but they have largely been either credit guarantee schemes or new fund creations to be shouldered by banks and financial institutions.

A series of measures announced on Friday aimed at helping farmers weather the coronavirus storm, with the biggest being a \$13 billion agriculture infrastructure fund. That will be anchored by state-run National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), with no extra spending by the government.

The government will also amend the Essential Commodities Act to ease restrictions on the trade of farm products, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman told a news conference.

But of everything she announced on Friday, the government will spend only 10 billion rupees to 20 billion rupees (\$132 to \$264 million) in addition to what has already been budgeted, a government official, who did not want to be named, told Reuters.

Total expenditure from announcements made in the last three days would not be more than 920 billion rupees (\$12.13 billion), a second official said. The government is due to announce more measures over the weekend.

The government is limiting fiscal spending due to concerns that excess spending could trigger a sovereign rating downgrade, government officials said.

Fitch and Standard & Poor’s both have India pegged at an investment grade rating that is one notch above a junk rating, while Moody’s Investors Service is the only major rating agency that has India’s rating two notches above junk.

Modi had said on May 12 the government would spend 20 trillion rupees in fiscal and monetary measures to support an economy battered by a weeks-long coronavirus lockdown, and markets jumped the following day.

But markets have been subdued since Sitharaman detailed the relatively minimal sums being spent above what is already in the budget for this fiscal year.

“We do not foresee any major immediate benefits of the measures announced today ... The impact on equity markets of today’s announcements is likely to be limited,” B Gopkumar, CEO and managing director of Axis Securities, said of Friday’s measures.

According to Jefferies, the Reserve Bank of India has taken 8 trillion rupees of measures already, which is included as a part of the total package being announced.



Earlier this week, Sitharaman unveiled plans to provide new credit lines by offering bank guarantees on more than \$60 billion of loans to small businesses, so-called shadow banks and power companies.

Since April, the government has spent 100 billion rupees to offer work to almost 23 million unemployed people in rural areas under the ongoing rural job guarantee programme, Sitharaman added.

On Thursday, the government said farm loans amounting to 300 billion rupees would be provided as additional emergency working capital to the farmers through NABARD.

The government has also announced free food grain for about 80 million migrant workers for the next two months, and plans to extend an existing scheme for affordable housing to rented housing for migrant workers.

Under lockdown since late March, India has reported about 82,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among its 1.3 billion population, with more than 2,600 deaths.

Antimicrobial Surface Coating Kills Coronavirus for 90 Days



WASHINGTON (AFP) - A specially formulated antimicrobial coating can keep surfaces clear of a human coronavirus for up to 90 days with just one application, a preliminary study said Friday, suggesting a new line of defense against COVID-19.

The paper by researchers at the University of Arizona (UA), which has not yet been peer-reviewed, found that the amount of virus on coated surfaces reduced by 90 percent in 10 minutes and by 99.9 percent in two hours.

Charles Gerba, a microbiologist at UA who was the study’s senior author, told AFP the technology was “the next advancement in infection control.”

“I think it’s mostly important for high-use surfaces like subways and buses, because you could disinfect them but then the next people that come in there will recontaminate the surfaces,” he said.

“It’s not a substitute for regular cleaning and disinfecting, but it covers you in between regular disinfecting and cleaning.”

The UA team tested a coating specifically designed to act against viruses that was developed by the company Allied BioScience, which also funded their study.

The researchers carried out their testing on human coronavirus 229E, which is similar in structure and genetics to SARS-CoV-2 but causes only mild cold symptoms and was therefore safer to use.

The coating works by “denaturing” the virus’ proteins -- effectively twisting them out of shape -- and attacking its protective layer of fat.

The colorless substance is sprayed on surfaces, and has to be reapplied every three to four months.

The technology behind so-called self-disinfecting coatings has been around for almost a decade, and has previously been used in hospitals to fight against the spread of infection, including against antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

A 2019 paper by UA researchers found that coatings reduced hospital-acquired infections by 36 percent.

Gerba said that as a university professor, he and colleagues had been discussing ways to make their environment safer for students when they return from lockdowns, and antimicrobial coatings on door handles and table tops would be useful.

“There’s a lot of them being developed right now, but hopefully when we start opening everything, they’ll be ready.”

LATAM Airlines Says Cutting 1,400 Jobs in South America

SANTIAGO (AFP) - LATAM Airlines said it would lay off 1,400 employees in South America, blaming a drastic slump in business due to the coronavirus pandemic.

“Despite all the efforts we have made to take care of jobs, we are forced to make this difficult decision,” said Roberto Alvo, executive director of the Chilean-Brazilian carrier.

“The effects of COVID-19 are profound and makes reducing the size of the LATAM group inevitable to protect its sustainability in the medium term,” Alvo said in a statement.

The jobs will be cut from operations in Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, it said.

A merger of Chile’s LAN and Brazil’s TAM, the airline announced last month it was scaling back its operations by 95 percent in response to the global health crisis.



LATAM normally flew to 145 destinations in 26 countries, with around 1,400 flights a day.

The global aviation industry has suffered a severe blow from the pandemic, directly affected by border closures and population lockdowns.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has forecast a \$15 billion loss

in revenue for Latin American airlines this year.

On Sunday, Latin America’s second largest airline, Colombia’s Avianca, filed for bankruptcy in the United States to reorganize its debt “due to the unpredictable impact” of the pandemic.

The global aviation industry has suffered a severe blow from coronavirus, directly affected by border closures and population lockdowns.

Latin America saw its coronavirus cases pass 300,000 this week, with the death toll at more than 16,000.

Malaysia and Japan to Enhance Bilateral Ties

PETALING JAYA (Dispatches) - Malaysia and Japan will continue their close bilateral ties through more government-to-government cooperation, says Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong.

The Transport Minister said Japanese investments and technical contributions had greatly helped Malaysia.

“Japanese investments and technical contributions have helped put Malaysia on the road to industrialisation with some 1,400 Japanese firms operating here, half of them in the manufacturing sector,” he said in an Instagram post after receiving a call from Japanese Ambassador to Malaysia Hiroshi Oka at his office in Putrajaya.

Dr Wee said Oka had informed him that the Japanese government would include allocations in its upcoming economic revival supplementary budget to expand government-to-government cooperation.

He said this was important as it was at a time when regional cooperation was crucial for economic recovery due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Dr Wee said Japan and Malaysia’s cooperation went way back and that both countries had helped each other through some tough times.

This would continue throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, he added.

Meanwhile, Dr Wee also received a courtesy call from Singapore High Commissioner Vanu Gopala Menon at his ministry yesterday.

Dr Wee said he discussed co-operation in the transport sector with the envoy, adding that Malaysia was committed to ensuring that joint projects such as the Johor Baru-Singapore Rapid Transit System were realised.

Dr Wee also said he had received Singapore’s acknowledgment that Malaysia had been committed to reducing port congestion and keeping the supply chain environment moving since the start of the movement control order.



MP...

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Tehran implemented a 1-year ‘strategic patience’ in face of sanctions, calling on other parties to the deal to safeguard its interests. One year after the U.S. withdrawal, Tehran announced that it would reduce commitments to the deal in 60-day intervals.

Tehran’s fifth and final step was taken in early January. Iran announced that it will observe no operational limitations on its nuclear industry, with regard to the capacity and level of uranium enrichment, the amount of enriched materials as well as research and development.

U.S., China...

FROM PAGE 1

But this is Iran’s government and nation who have innocently been targeted by the U.S. cruel sanctions, threats and wars, and suffer billions of dollars while Iranian governments instead of controlling the inflation have helped the monetary base to become bigger and bigger and they have not developed the gross domestic product (GDP) which can embed the volume of floating currency.

In this performance, one can see the economic system’s body in Iran has worn down and has been unable to follow footstep of China. High inflation has increased the wages and has reduced the power for competition in export quality products. Which current has caused the inflation in the country? It is the banks. Banks by creating money have made the country face challenges in pricing. People day by day have lost their purchasing power. Revenues have been limited and the prices have soared and poverty has been begotten.

China did not commit our mistakes or probably has not had some of our traitors, and by performing accurately the process of stabilizing the wages, it could enhance its power of competition in exports. China’s economic growth has made the U.S. become more dependent on Beijing so that if the U.S. cuts off its relations with China, the U.S. economy would cripple, and in absence of Chinese goods, inflation in the U.S. will rise sky-high.

So people in the U.S. will turn their back on the ruling government in Washington and the ruling president will concede defeat to his rival. In the past four decades all U.S. presidents (Ronald Reagan, George Bush father, Bill Clinton, George Bush jr., Barack Obama and Trump) in their presidential campaigns have vowed to stand firmly against China and have accused their rivals of nonfeasance and leniency towards China. But why have they come to terms with China after being elected? This exactly means that China plays the role of pricing in the U.S. economy. The U.S. governments have been forced to bow down to China in order that lest the U.S. people enter an economic crisis of failure in balancing cost and income.

Today, in any country where the volume of GDP is several times more than the currency in circulation, exports of products are economical and the nature of non-oil exports increases the credit power of the forex, and provides the ground for the flow of capital into the production.

Governments without having policies for creating the ground for economy are impossible to overcome effective political crises. The comprehensive path for poverty eradication in the capitalist countries is populist. Only in the populist capitalism, the country’s efforts are to improve the business environment, and it will be impossible to save people from poverty through limiting the economic growth with an eye on political party’s economic growth and increasing the Gini coefficient unconsciously. I will later in a separate article will review populist capitalism with its precise dimensions to know that the world will move exactly in which direction in the future.



51 More Iranians Die...

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The Iranian official noted that 2,705 cases are in critical condition.

He added that 686,935 tests have so far been carried out in Iran. Iran has taken numerous steps to stop the spread of the disease, ranging from closing down schools and universities to cancellation of cultural and religious gatherings. It is also constantly disinfecting and sanitizing public places.

Meanwhile the Deputy Minister of Health and Medical Education said that human beings will overcome the coronavirus in the long run, but we must change many of our social relations to control the virus.

Iraj Haririchi in a video press conference added, “It is not clear whether coronavirus will behave socially in the long run, such as the flu or a combination of viruses. We have known and vaccinated measles for decades, but many Western European countries have failed to eradicate it. As a result, one of the occasions that need to change is social behavior.”

He stated, “No country can close all jobs for 18 to 24 months. Usually, high-income groups view this as a holiday. The question is, which country can shut down 20 to 30 percent of its economy? Maximum reopening, which has an economic impact, can be done to protect people’s livelihoods and health.

“Human beings can overcome the coronavirus in the long run, but in the next 18 to 24 months, especially in countries grappling with the virus, most countries will be affected,” Haririchi said, noting that “in the northern hemisphere, we will see new waves in the fall, which may be less severe than in March or April, but will lead to quarantine or closure. The second wave of the corona is also expected to be more severe in the North hemisphere as the flu spreads. The third prediction is that we will have corona waves in the fall, but it will not lead to closure.”

“The important thing is that we change a lot of our behaviors,” he said. “The important thing is that in these 18 to 24 months, we should try to maximize everything that has an economic aspect and affects people’s livelihoods. Together we can succeed against the coronavirus,” he added.

Singapore F1 Promoters Say Closed-Doors Race Is Not Feasible

SINGAPORE (Reuters) - Singapore Grand Prix promoters have ruled out holding their Formula One race without spectators, casting further uncertainty over the likelihood of the September event going ahead.

Formula One plans to start its stalled season in July with races behind closed doors in Austria and Britain due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The sport has not given up on crowds returning later in the year, however.

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Montpellier Captain Signs Contract Extension at 42

PARIS (Dispatches) - Montpellier's veteran captain Vitorino Hilton has signed an extension to his contract which will keep him at the club for another season, the Ligue 1 outfit announced on Friday.

The Brazilian centre-back, who turns 43 in September, was due to become a free agent in June and had talked of retiring but instead decided to continue. "Is this the end of the end? We'll see," said club president Laurent Nicollin. "We are delighted that he will continue the adventure with us for another year before we sell him to NASA so they can examine his body."

Haaland Stars in Dortmund Romp as Bundesliga Makes Comeback

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Norwegian sensation Erling Braut Haaland stole the limelight Saturday as the German Bundesliga became the first major European football league to return since the coronavirus lockdown, with teams playing in empty, echoing stadiums.

The 19-year-old striker claimed the first goal in Germany's top flight for over two months to set Borussia Dortmund on the way to a 4-0 win over local rivals Schalke.

Portuguese international Raphael Guerreiro then added two goals either side of a Thorgan Hazard strike.

Second-placed Dortmund moved to within a point of leaders Bayern Munich, who are chasing an eighth straight title and play Union Berlin away on Sunday.

Haaland steered a low Thorgan Hazard cross into the far corner on 29 minutes to claim his 10th goal in just nine Bundesliga matches.

It was his 41st goal this season in all competitions and his 13th for Dortmund in just 12 games since joining in January from Red Bull Salzburg.

Haaland celebrated by dancing alone -- making no contact with team-mates, who clapped him on -- to comply with the strict hygiene guidelines which allowed the league to return.

All matches are being played behind closed doors, with no more than 300 people permitted inside stadiums.



Normally Dortmund's Signal Iduna Park would be packed with over 81,000 fans for the Ruhr derby, one of the biggest fixtures in German football.

"There was no noise. You shoot at the goal, make a top pass, score a goal, and nothing happens," said Dortmund coach Lucien Favre.

"That's very, very strange. We really missed our fans.

"It's hard to judge how good the game was, but the players were very focused."

After Haaland's opener, an error by Schalke goalkeeper Markus Schubert led to Guerreiro making it 2-0 before half-time.

Haaland then played a role in the build-up to the third goal before Julian Brandt set up Hazard to fire home on 48 minutes.

Schalke looked short of match fitness while Dortmund were sharper, and Guerreiro grabbed his second in style after a one-two with Haaland in the 63rd minute.

Elsewhere, third-placed RB Leipzig were held to a 1-1 draw at home to Freiburg, leaving them four points off top spot.

Defender Manuel Gulde gave visitors Freiburg a shock lead and celebrated by elbow-bumping teammates, before Leipzig striker Yussuf Poulsen grabbed a late equaliser. Freiburg were then denied a stoppage-time winner when a VAR check spotted an offside.

Later, Borussia Muenchengladbach can leapfrog Leipzig if they win at Eintracht Frankfurt.

Bruno Labbadia, who was named as Jurgen Klinsmann's replacement during the lockdown, made a winning start as Hertha Berlin coach with a 3-0 success at Hoffenheim.

The goals came in quick succession with a Kevin Akpoguma own-goal being followed by Hertha captain Vedad Ibisevic grabbing a second. Brazilian Mathheus Cunha then made it 3-0.

In contrast to elsewhere, Hertha players celebrated their goals by hugging each other, flaunting the league's hygiene guidelines, but Labbadia defended his team.

"The fact is that this is part of football, he said. "We've been tested so many times that we can allow it. "If you can't celebrate anymore, the whole thing breaks down. I'm just glad that the team had reason to cheer today."

A German Football League (DFL) spokesman confirmed there will be no punishment, as it had only offered "guidelines" on how goals should be celebrated.

In order to get the political green light to resume this weekend, the DFL has tested players and coaches regularly for the virus and teams have been in quarantine for the past week.

Teams arrived at stadiums in several buses in order to meet social distancing requirements inside vehicles.

Higuain Final Juventus Player To Return to Italy



MILAN (Dispatches) - Argentina striker Gonzalo Higuain became the final Juventus player to return to Italy on Friday as Serie A prepares to return to action on June 13.

Higuain arrived in Turin by private jet on Friday afternoon after a stopover in Las Palmas and was driven away by a waiting car.

The former Real Madrid, Chelsea and Napoli player will now spend two weeks in quarantine, according to media reports.

The 32-year-old international left Italy on March 19 to be with his sick mother in Argentina after a test confirmed he was negative for coronavirus despite three of his teammates testing positive.

Star attacker Cristiano Ronaldo returned to Turin from Portugal on May 4, the day individual training resumed in Italy, and has been in quarantine since.

Higuain was the last player to return after French midfielder Adrien Rabiot on Wednesday night. Top-flight group training sessions will resume in Italy next Monday, with a return to competition slated for June 13.

Juventus were leading Serie A, one-point ahead of Lazio, when the championship was suspended on March 9 amid the virus pandemic which has killed almost 32,000.

Liverpool Can Win Title Without Being At Their Best

LONDON (Dispatches) - Jurgen Klopp has insisted Liverpool have no need to be at their "all-time best" in order to clinch a first English league title in 30 years.

Premier League officials are now aiming to restart the season in mid-June, with Liverpool just two wins away from the title when the campaign was postponed on March 13 because of the coronavirus outbreak.

For so long the dominant force in English football, the Merseysiders have not been crowned domestic champions in the Premier League era, with the last of their league titles coming when they won the old First Division crown in 1990.

But as teams start returning to training, Liverpool manager Klopp has tried to ease any mounting pressure on his runaway leaders who are 25 points clear at the top.

"Football is a game where everyone is pretty much in the same situation we play against another team and we don't have to be at our all-time best we have to be at our best possible and that's exactly the same for the other teams," he told the BBC's Football Focus programme.

"Whenever we will start we will have had the same time for preparation and our job was always, and always will be, to use the situation you are in. We will be in as good a shape as possible."

Meanwhile the German boss said he was desperate to return to "normal life" after an unexpected two-month break by getting back to Liverpool's Melwood training base, where players will initially train in small groups.

"Lockdown has been as good as possible it's not exactly what I want to do but it's what we all have to do so we try to make the best of it," said Klopp.

"We started eight weeks ago and now you feel everyone is desperate to get back to a 'new' normal life.

"I have missed the boys the most because we have created a group there not only the boys but all the people at Melwood because we have a really good relationship and we became friends over the last four-and-a-half years.

"We see each other pretty often with Zoom and those things but it's still not the same and going back to Melwood and doing all the things we usually do is something I really miss."

Player Divide Threatens Premier League's Restart Plan

LONDON (Dispatches) - The Premier League's bid to restart the season in June is in danger of being derailed by a heated debate between players about the risks of playing amid the coronavirus crisis.

While Premier League chiefs believe completing the campaign is essential to safeguard the financial and sporting future of the game, some stars are not so convinced.

Watford captain Troy Deeney has been one of the loudest voices against returning to the pitch so soon.

Although the Premier League has agreed to fund regular testing for players and staff, there is no guarantee of keeping the virus at bay while vaccine trials remain in the early stages.

Adding to Deeney's concern, black and ethnic minorities are statistically more at risk of dying from the virus, leaving him adamant he will not gamble with his family's life just to satisfy the desire for football to resume. "I'm not even talking about football at the moment. I'm talking about my family's health," Deeney said on Instagram.

"I'm not going to put my family at risk. What are they going to do, take money off me? I've been broke before so it doesn't bother me.

"They're talking about not playing in front of fans until 2021. So if it's not safe enough for fans to be inside a stadium, why should it be safe for players to be in there?"



Kane Wants Assurances Before Premier League Returns



LONDON (Dispatches) - England captain Harry Kane says players are waiting for safety guidance from the Premier League after the government said it was "opening the door" for the return of football next month.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said Thursday's meeting with the Football Association, Premier League and English Football League had "progressed plans for the resumption of the professional game in England".

The Premier League hopes for a return to action on June 12, with matches played behind closed doors.

Tottenham striker Kane is willing to take the next step, moving from individual training to small group sessions, but suggested more information was needed.

"I don't think anyone knows the right answer at the moment," he told ITV's Good Morning Britain program.

"I think the majority of players are looking forward to playing again as soon as possible but we know we want it to be as safe as possible too.

"From what I have heard -- obviously I haven't seen too much of my team-mates -- at the moment everyone is OK. We want to see how the Premier League gives us a plan and what that looks like."

Kyrgios Says Murray Is Better Than Djokovic



SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Nick Kyrgios told Andy Murray on Saturday the British tennis star was better than world number one Novak Djokovic, claiming the Serb "dodges" his serve while the Scot "is on it like a light".

By his own estimate Kyrgios had drunk six glasses of wine when he logged on from his Canberra home for an Instagram live chat with Murray that started after midnight for the Australian.

"My knowledge and interest in red wine has gone incredibly up during this quarantine," said Kyrgios, well known for his withering comments about leading tennis players, even though the undeniably talented world number 40 has never gone beyond the quarter-finals of a major championship.

Murray, however, appears to be one of his few rivals Kyrgios respects, with the Scot having defeated Djokovic in both the 2012 U.S. Open and 2013 Wimbledon finals.

Djokovic, however, leads their head-to-head record 25-11 and has won 17 Grand Slam singles titles to Murray's three.

That didn't stop Kyrgios telling Murray: "I think you should have one of the best careers ever. I think you are better than Djokovic.

"Djokovic was playing dodgeball on my serve and you were slapping it for a winner. He was trying to dodge it, you were on it like a light."