

Iran's Ambassador to the UN Majid Takht Ravanchi, Referring to Mike Pompeo's Decision to End Sanctions Waiver on JCPOA-Related Projects Said the U.S. Has Pulled the Final Plug in Violating UNSCR 2231

Majlis Lawmaker Mojtaba Zonnour Said That Iran's Delivery of Gasoline Consignment To Venezuela Was a Strong and Crushing Response to U.S. Bullying and Coercive Policy

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Iran Never to Show Passivity Against Enemies

TEHRAN (MNA) – Chief Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami hailed Iran's considerable progress in the defense sector, underlining that the Islamic Republic will never show passivity against enemies' threats.

Addressing an unveiling ceremony of new offensive fast boats in the port city of Bandar Abbas on Thursday, Major General Salami warned that the Iranian armed forces are ready to give crushing response to any threats posed by the enemies.

"The Islamic Republic has the determination. We will not bow to enemies. We will not retreat," he added.

Stressing that progress is the nature of the Iranian armed forces' work, the top commander said, "Defense is our logic in war but not in the sense of passivity against the enemy. Our operations and tactics are offensive and we have shown it in the battlefield."

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Iran Promises Good Nuclear News

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran says its nuclear progress will not be hindered by recent US sanctions against two of its nuclear scientists.

In a series of tweets on Friday, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) condemned the White House decision makers' move to place the names of two Iranian nuclear scientists in the list of the new U.S. sanctions.

The decision depicts the "hostile approach" of the U.S. government, the AEOI said.

Such moves "will not interrupt the will and determination" of the Iranian nation to achieve the country's far-reaching objectives, it added.

It warned that such moves will result in further progress of Iranian researchers and further weakening of Iran's adversaries in the global arena.

"Good news regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear industry is on the way," the AEOI added.

The comments came in reaction to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's tweet about new sanctions against Iranian nuclear scientists.

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Qalibaf Elected as New Majlis Speaker



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, a former mayor of Tehran and President Hassan Rouhani's main rival in the 2017 presidential elections, was elected as new Speaker of Iran Parliament.

In the first open session of the new Parliament on Thursday, the conservative lawmaker was unanimously elected as the speaker with 231 votes.

Amir-Hossein Qazizadeh Hashemi and Ali Nikzad, both conservatives, were also elected as the first and second vice-speakers of the Parliament.

Qazizadeh secured 208 votes and Nikzad, a former minister in Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's cabinet, won 196 votes. Meanwhile President Hassan Rouhani congratulated Qalibaf on his election as Majlis Speaker.

In his congratulatory messages on Thursday, President Rouhani expressed hope that with joint efforts and constructive interaction between the government and Parliament, more synergy takes place in organizing the country's affairs to solve people's problems, increase hope in society and serve the great Iranian nation more.

Meanwhile yesterday, Qalibaf stressed the need for continuation of trilateral talks between Islamic Republic of Iran, Russia and Turkey within the framework of Astana Peace Process on Syria.

In a telephone conversation with Qalibaf, Turkish Parliament Speaker Mustafa Şentop congratulated Qalibaf on his election as Iranian Parliament Speaker.

The two sides discussed regional issues and developments.

He pointed to the commonalities between the two countries of Iran and Turkey and added, "the friendly relations between Iran and Turkey have always been established at the highest level."

He went on to say that the Iranian parliament welcomes and supports any kind of move for expanding and developing bilateral ties.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Qalibaf emphasized the significance of economic cooperation between the two countries and added, "given the significance of bilateral relations, Iran and Turkey Parliamentary Group will be set up soon."

He further stressed the need for continuation of trilateral talks between Iran, Turkey and Russia within the framework of Astana Peace Process on Syria.

For his part, Turkish Parliament Speaker Mustafa Şentop said that Turkey's Parliament is ready to strengthen bilateral friendly ties in various political, economic and cultural areas.

With containing coronavirus pandemic, he expressed hope that bilateral trade and economic exchanges between the two countries would normalize.

Turkish Parliament speaker strongly condemned unjust and cruel U.S. sanctions imposed against Iran and then invited his Iranian counterpart to visit Turkey.

U.S. Threatens to Sanction Tankers Carrying Fuel to Venezuela

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. has threatened to impose sanctions against two tankers carrying Iranian gasoline to fuel-starved Venezuela, a Wall Street Journal report says.

Four Iranian-flagged tankers have already arrived in Venezuela, and a fifth one is on its way to deliver much-needed gasoline to the sanctions-hit Latin American country.

The Thursday report, citing unnamed U.S. officials, claims that two other tankers -- owned by Greece, registered in Liberia, and loaded with Iranian oil products -- were heading to Venezuela before halting their deliveries over the U.S. sanctions threat.

According to the WSJ report, the two Liberian-flagged tankers -- the Bering and the Bella -- were expected to arrive in Venezuela after the Iranian-flagged vessels docked in the country.

The fourth tanker of a five-vessel Iranian flotilla carrying much-needed gasoline to Venezuela has entered the Caribbean, approaching its fuel-starved final destination.

However, the two Greek-owned tankers would have been unable to get insurance and access to international banking if they had carried on, the report quoted the U.S. officials as saying. The daily, quoting one U.S. official, said "currently, the ships are not headed to Venezuela," and are near Cape Verde off the coast of Senegal, heading southward.

Venezuelan and Iranian officials have not responded to requests for comment, it added.

The U.S. officials admitted that Washington did not see any political gain in spoiling a temporary reprieve for Venezuela's gasoline-starved population.

However, the U.S. wants to ensure the trade does not become permanent, the report further said.

The WSJ report comes as the U.S. has failed to carry out its previous threat to take "measures" against the Iranian fuel that has already been delivered to Venezuela.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

U.S. Scared of Iran's New Majlis

In the past two weeks, people in the world have seen important events regarding ineffectiveness of the U.S. sanctions against Iran and Venezuela. Five oil tankers from Iran headed towards Venezuela to deliver gasoline and fuel boosters while world media were monitoring the move of vessels from the Strait of Gibraltar towards Caribbean Sea every second and today all news and reports indicate that the U.S. did a wise calculation not to interfere and paved the ground for revealing this belief and thought globally that sanctions are getting ineffective.

The U.S. could target the first tanker heading towards Caribbean Sea with firing a laser missile and undoubtedly, Iran would have returned the remaining cargo but why did not the U.S. do it? Three calculations were effective in the U.S. decision. First, they could lose security of its shipping in the whole world and this issue regardless of its political disgrace could inflict heavy insurance costs on maritime and it could deteriorate the U.S. economy which is currently struggling because of the Coronavirus, and essentially today neither Donald Trump and the White House nor American people expected the U.S. to sink in a deeper quagmire than the Coronavirus and they do not expect, either, and it seems in the future they would not expect it, either.

Secondly, in Iran a Majlis has started its work for legislation which is totally different from all previous ones since the victory of the Islamic Revolution and if the U.S. government in the past and through secret lobbying used to pave the ground for secret deals with Iranian governments specially the tenth Majlis which closed its eyes on them, the condition today has changed and even the government has to answer for its acts in the past. So, if the U.S. had done any aggression on Iranian tankers, the new Majlis undoubtedly would have had a decisive response to it. Newly-elected Majlis deputies with overwhelming majority of 230 votes elected Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf as the new Speaker. Americans do not have Ali Larijani any longer to approve the JCPOA in just 20 minutes. So they had to act wisely and prudently. See Page 7

Highest One-Day COVID-19 Cases Recorded in Iran

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's Health Ministry spokesman has confirmed 2,819 new cases of COVID-19 infections, the highest number of increase in more than a month.

Kianoush Jahanpour announced on Friday the new cases of infection increase the total number of cases to 146,668. He said 50 people have died of the virus in the past 24 hours, bringing the total number of fatalities to 7,677.

Jahanpour said 15 provinces have reported zero case of fatality caused by the virus in the past 24 hours. Five provinces have also reported only one death.

The spokesman said 114,931 patients have so far recovered from the disease, and been discharged from hospital.

2,547 patients are also in severe conditions of the disease, he added.

Jahanpour noted that 896,571 COVID-19 tests have been taken across the country.

He said the condition in Khuzestan province is still red. He also warned that Khorasan Razavi, East and West Azarbaijan, Lorestan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Hormozgan, and Mazandaran provinces are in alarming conditions.

Meanwhile Head of Tehran Coronavirus Headquarters Alireza Zali says the trend of increase in number of COVID-19 infections and fatalities is promising.

Over 88 percent of coronavirus patients have recovered in Tehran, Zali said, adding that the virus is being eradicated in the country.

The figures show the virus is being eradicated as the number of infections is decreasing, he added.

He also noted that patients have recovered after 5.17 days on average, which is an unprecedented record.

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President Congratulates Azerbaijan On Republic Day

TEHRAN (MNA) – President Hassan Rouhani felicitated his Azeri counterpart Ilham Aliyev on the occasion of Azerbaijan's national holiday, the Republic Day.

In a congratulatory message to Aliyev on Thursday, Rouhani said, "I sincerely congratulate Your Excellency and the people of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the occasion of your national day."

"The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan, having common historical, cultural and religious values, enjoy ample opportunities for cooperation and investment. Based on the political will of our countries and thanks to the joint efforts and mutual support, important steps can be taken for the well-being and in the interests of our peoples," he added.

Gov't Unveils Four Mega Projects to Boost Digital Economy

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's president has unveiled four new infrastructural projects, launched by the information and communications technology ministry, to boost the country's digital economy.

A data center in Tehran, the infrastructural project of the National Information Network in the provinces of East Azarbaijan, Tehran, Khorasan Razavi and Fars, a plan to support digital businesses damaged by the coronavirus, and "Every Iranian, an Internet TV" were the four projects launched by President Hassan Rouhani on Thursday.

At the unveiling ceremony, Iran's Information and Communications Technology Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi said the new projects will boost digital economy, emphasizing that the digital economy can replace the oil-dependent economy and can be realized with the leap of Iran's smart economic economy.

He said in a country with a creative young workforce the core of the digital economy has grown. He added that Iran is under international pressure, and there is no choice but to be productive, and one of the most important tools for productivity is information technology.

Therefore, the minister said, the digital economy can be a good replacement for oil-dependent economy.

Azari Jahromi said currently digital economy accounts for 6.5 percent of the country's GDP.



"On average, the global share of the digital economy is 15.5 percent of the total economy, and this shows that Iran has a huge growth potential in the field of digital economics. This is an area that needs to be attended. The digital services are among the most important areas for growth while a lot of jobs are created in this sector."

Talking about the new projects, Jahromi underlined the data center of the National Information Network will be launched with the creation of 407 new capacity racks and a 25% increase in the storage of the national network data.

Also, in order to develop the cloud infrastructure of the National Information Network, the private cloud infrastructure project of the National Information Network will be inaugurated, which is one of the most important pillars of the country's information infrastructure, he went on to say.

Jahromi said the next project is "Every Iranian, an Internet TV" in which the private sector provides free VOD services.

He further pointed out that 10 other information technology projects are in the making and will be unveiled gradually on different occasions.

Iran Slams Unilateral Sanctions on Syria

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – A senior Iranian diplomat denounced the illegal and inhumane sanctions that have been unilaterally imposed on Syria, calling for efforts to help the Syrian people amid the coronavirus outbreak.

In a telephone conversation, Senior Assistant to Iran's Foreign Minister in Special Political Affairs Ali-Asghar Khaji and the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen discussed the latest political and on-the-ground developments in Syria, humanitarian issues, the Syrian people's problems, and holding the next meeting of Syria's Constitutional Committee.

They also stressed the necessity of providing humanitarian assistance for the people of Syria, particularly amid the outbreak of the coronavirus, helping the return of the displaced persons and refugees, and the continuation of the political process for the peaceful settlement of the Syrian issue.

In the conversation, the senior assistant to Iran's foreign minister highlighted the illegality and inhumanity of the unilateral sanctions against Syria, calling for the removal of the sanctions.

Khaji also stressed the need for the restoration of stability and security to Syria and the fight against terrorism.

Since the outbreak of war and foreign militancy in Syria in 2011, Iran has stood by the Syrian government and supported its people against terrorist groups, including Daesh (ISIL).

Leader Appoints Larijani as His Advisor, EC Member

TEHRAN (IFP) – The leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has appointed the former Iranian parliament speaker Ali Larijani as his advisor and a member of the Expediency Council.

In a decree on Thursday, the Iranian leader appointed the veteran politician, who served for 12 years as the parliament speaker, as his new advisor. "Considering your useful experiences during your tenure in various departments, especially your three terms of serving as the parliament speaker, I would like to appoint you as the Leader's advisor and a member of Iran's Expediency Council," reads the decree.

Ali Larijani served as the Speaker of the Parliament of Iran since 2008 and his tenure ended in May 2020. He was the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council from 2005 to 2007.

In 1994, he was appointed as head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, replacing Mohammad Hashemi Rafsanjani in the post. He was in office until 2004.

Iran to Tighten Persian Gulf Security Belt

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami says the Islamic Republic will boost its security measures in the strategic waters of the Persian Gulf, especially the Strait of Hormuz, with the help of its domestically-built vessels and equipment.

Speaking at the unveiling ceremony of new offensive speedy boats in the southern port city of Bandar Abbas on Thursday, Brigadier General Hatami said, "Today, with the delivery of the domestically-built offensive boats to IRGC's naval fleet, the security belt of the Persian Gulf, especially the strategic Strait of Hormuz, will be more tightened than before."

IRGC naval fleet received 112 new-generation missile-launching speed boats of different classes today in the southern waters.

Brigadier General Hatami noted that "over 80% of the equipment, including telecommunications, radars, and control and monitoring systems, used in the vessels delivered to the IRGC today, is domestically manufactured, and all their weapons systems have been localized under the supervision of the Defense Ministry."

Referring to the instructions of Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on "production surge" in the current year, the Defense Minister, said, "Certainly, following the orders of the Leader over boosting the power and capabilities of the Islamic Republic's navy, we will increase the depth of our presence in free waters through the design and manufacture of different surface and sub-surface vessels."

He ensured that the country's defense capabilities will also observe a considerable leap on the ground, sea and air as well as the electronics and aerospace this year.

The top General referred to the delivery of Damavand destroyer, Separ (Shield) warship, and light and semi-heavy submarines, including Ghadir and Fateh to the armed forces, as well as other patrols, search and rescue vessels to the police as measures of the Ministry of Defense in equipping the armed forces fleet in the Persian Gulf and along the Sea of Oman.

French FM's Comments on Adelkhah to Further Complicate Her Case

TEHRAN (IFP) – Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman has reacted to meddlesome remarks made by French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian about Iranian prisoner Fariba Adelkhah.

In a statement, Seyed Abbas Mousavi said only Iranian courts have jurisdiction over Iranian nationals.

"Only Iranian courts are judicially competent to look into crimes committed by Iranian nationals," said Mousavi.

"This case has been examined by the court in accordance with regulations, and Ms. Adelkhah has enjoyed her citizenship rights [during the legal procedure]," the spokesman added.

"The ruling issued is a verdict of first instance and Ms. Adelkhah can appeal the ruling through legal channels," he added.

Mousavi underlined that the Judiciary of the Islamic Republic of Iran has full independence as stipulated in the Constitution.

He said unilateral interpretations of independent judicial verdicts will be "unconstructive" for relations between the two countries.

"Any threatening and meddlesome tone will further complicate this case, and the Islamic Republic of Iran brooks no disrespect of its sovereign principles, including the independence of the Judiciary," he added.

14 People Affiliated to Takfiri Separatist Groups Arrested

TEHRAN (PressTV) – Iran has arrested 14 people affiliated to Takfiri separatist groups in the southern port city of Mahshahr in Khuzestan province.

The police chief of Khuzestan province, Brigadier General Heydar Abbas-Zadeh, said that the detainees had opened fire at police posts and centers of the Basij volunteer forces, hoisted the flag of the al-Ahwazia terrorist group across the city and carried banners in support of the group, adding that they had sent videoclips of their activities abroad.

Abbas-Zadeh said police forces in coordination with judicial officials carried out four separate operations and arrested the elements, eight of whom were involved in shootings while the remaining six were engaged in raising the flags of the terrorist group across the city.

Five motorcycles and 12 cellphones were also confiscated from them, according to the police official, who said the detainees had confessed to the offenses and their cases were sent to judicial authorities.

Nine of them were sent to prison while an investigation was still underway for the remaining detainees, he added.

The IRGC says the mastermind behind the September 22 terrorist attack in the southwestern Iranian city of Ahvaz has been killed in Iraq's eastern province of Diyala.

Back in September 2018, four gunmen attacked a military parade in the southern Iranian city of Ahvaz, killing at least 25 people and wounding 69 others. A four-year-old boy was among the fallen victims.

Gunmen opened fire on people from behind a viewing stand during a parade held to mark Iran's eight-year defense against the invasion of the country by former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in the 1980s. The al-Ahwazia separatist group claimed responsibility for the September 22 terrorist attack in Ahvaz.

U.S. Urged to Show Respect for Iranian Nation

TEHRAN (MNA) – Foreign Ministry Spokesman Seyed Abbas Mousavi said on Thu. that the United States must show respect for the Iranian nation instead of further humiliating itself.

In a reaction to the claim of a US official, he wrote in a tweet on Thu. night, "we do shatter your max pressure campaign with maximum resistance, stiffening resolve and reliance on the national capabilities."

Earlier in an interview, U.S. Special Representative for Iran's Affairs Brian Hook had claimed that Islamic Republic of Iran should choose either negotiating with the United States or managing a collapsing economy.

"It is you who face a choice: either admit defeat and start respecting the Iranian Nation or further keep being hated, humiliating and isolating yourselves," Mousavi tweeted.

In May 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally pulled his country out of the multilateral Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in defiance of global criticism.

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT



PERMIT NO : 1399.1007

NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY - AHVAZ-IRAN

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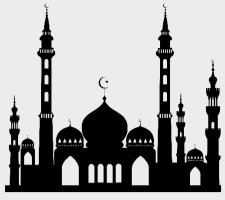
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PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:02
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:34
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:06
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:50

46. Then We draw it in towards Ourselves,- a contraction by easy stages.
47. And He it is Who makes the Night as a Robe for you, and Sleep as Repose,
and makes the Day (as it were) a Resurrection.

Surah 25. The Criterion, The Standard (46-47)

200 Industrial, Mineral Projects Worth 170,000b Tomans to Come on Stream by Yearend

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Acting Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade says developmental projects in different sectors of industries and mines are underway despite all international sanctions and restrictions, and 200 industrial and mineral projects worth 170,000b tomans will come on stream by the yearend.

Hossein Modarres Khiabani said that several developmental projects in mining and industrial sectors are underway and it conveys a clear message that the country has not been negligent of its development and this is a good news for the people.

He also emphasized the necessity of informing the people of the latest production achievements of the country in different mining and industrial sectors, reiterating that the country has not fallen behind in development and implementing projects comparing to other states while the Coronavirus pandemic has affected the world and the Islamic Republic of Iran has a satisfactory record.

Modarres Khiabani noted that Iran is currently fighting with different viruses like sanctions, slump in oil price and COVID-19 but even in this tough condition, it signals a clear message that development in the country is underway and developmental affairs have not been halted.

He added that 200 projects will be launched and inaugurated under the campaign of "National Production, Sustainable Job and Constant Exports" and all will be inaugurated by the president. He noted that those projects with investments worth



170,000b tomans are to come on stream by the yearend.

Modarres Khiabani also said today the country needs exports and forex revenues more than ever and since the country has been administered by the non-oil exports revenue since the second half of last year, the ministry's policy is to focus on providing the country with forex resulted from the non-oil exports, and steel and copper production chains can play a key role in materializing the target of the ministry.

He also pointed to \$9b forex revenues from mineral and mining exports last year, adding that the ministry's job is to protect mineral exports in the international market as well as monitoring the needs of the domestic market especially this year that the policy of the ministry is to strengthen exports.

Modarres Khiabani further said that one of the challenges ahead of national economy in the current condition is to create job, adding that exports, production and control of imports should lead to job creation and for this reason, attracting investors from the private sector in the developmental project is important and it should be pursued.

KSC Sets New Record For Pellet Production

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The biggest steel-making company in eastern Iran set a new record for monthly production of pellet amid sanctions and 23-day closure of the company in Ordibehesht (the second month of Iranian calendar year).

The CEO of Khorasan Steel Company Mr. Kasra Ghafoori announced the new achievement of the company and said despite 23 days of holidays for New Year and the outbreak of the Coronavirus, the company produced 180,668 tons of pellet in Ordibehesht to set a new record for monthly production of pellet.

He emphasized exerting all capabilities of the company to materialize the slogan of Surge in Production, adding that despite problems in way of providing raw material and outbreak of the virus, the tireless staff of Khorasan Steel Company could have set a new record of monthly production of pellet since the launch of the plant and they took a solid and valuable step towards materializing the objectives of the company.

Ghafoori added that the new record was set by the pelletizing unit of the company as the previous record of the company for monthly production of pellet was 166,902 tons which had been set in last December and it could improve the record for 13,766 tons in five months.

He also called for importance of reaching the nominal capacity for annual pellet production, adding that the current success is a very important action which will be led to constant production and acceleration in the production cycle till the marginal product and also reducing the production cost and economic production.

Meanwhile head of exploitation department of the company Mr. Hamid Reza Zare said that company's record for daily production of pelletizing unit of the company is 8488 tons which was set in last September, adding that the company's pellet production stood at 1,452,774 tons last year.

He also hailed the tireless efforts of staff in the company both in protecting the equipment, observing the HSE principles and boosting production.



S. Korea to Send \$500,000 Worth Medical Cargo to Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - South Korea will this week send \$500,000 worth of medicine to Iran used to treat a hereditary disease, the South Korean foreign ministry said Thursday.

In the first such humanitarian exports to Iran since the United States imposed unilateral sanctions on Tehran in 2018, the cargo, consisting of medicine to treat Gaucher's disease, will be sent by air on Friday, Korea Times reported.

The South Korean ministry also expects another batch of exports, such as medicine and medical equipment, worth \$2 million in total to be shipped to Iran country next month.

Calls for the resumption of humanitarian trade with Iran have been rising as Tehran has faced challenges securing medical items and other supplies critical to fighting the COVID-19 pandemic due to the US economic terrorism.

The report said Korea is also exploring ways to use the Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement, a payment method designed to facilitate Swiss companies' sales of food and medicine to Iran, to carry out its transactions with Iran.

Tehran, Yerevan Mull Bolstering Trade Cooperation

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Chairman of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran Hamid Zadboum in a videoconference conferred with Armenia's deputy Finance minister over expanding trade ties.

During the videoconference, Zadboum expressed hope that both countries by pursuing the agreements would expand cooperation on customs affairs, trade and regional issues.

In the meeting, both sides called for forming a workgroup on industry, mine and trade for reaching a mechanism for bartering goods between Iran and Armenia.

Zadboum said Iran is to join Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) free trade this year and Armenia as the only Eurasian Union state which has border with Iran and it is the only gateway for Iran to have access to the Eurasia through four other countries, and as the result, Iran and Armenia can take advantage of this opportunity.

On how to carry out bartering goods and preparing the list of goods for bartering, the Iranian official said that the primary list of goods has been sent to the Armenian side and in the future, the list will be completed based on the demands of both sides.

Meanwhile in the meeting, both sides emphasized formation of a workgroup on industry, mine and trade to work on several issues like border trade, transit of trucks as well as facilitating the commute of trucks and drivers.

Armenian Deputy Economy Minister Avak Avanesian, for his part, said that Armenian economy ministry will follow the issues stipulated in the meeting for forming the workgroup, adding that he urges all Armenian



private companies to join the workgroup.

On the bartering goods, he said both sides can start bartering goods with the list proposed by the Iranian side and in the future, Armenia can complete the list based on its or other Eurasian states' needs.

He further said both sides need to have weekly meetings in order to reach a mechanism for implementing the bartering agreement electronically. Avanesian also called for a meeting in upcoming days on resolving the transportation woes in the borders which was welcomed by Zadboum.

Armenian Ambassador to Tehran Artashes Toumanian who was also present in the videoconference pointed to the videoconference held between presidents of both countries last month and called for finalizing the mechanism for bartering goods or bartering goods needed by Iran in exchange for Armenia's gas debts.

Kabul-Mashhad Flight Resumes in Post-COVID19 Era

MASHHAD (IRNA) - Managing director of Razavi Khorasan airports said first Afghan flight from Kabul to Mashhad landed in Mashhad airport on Wednesday for the first time after the outbreak of coronavirus.

Mahmoud Amani Bani said thanks to the outbreak of coronavirus, foreign flights, including those to Afghanistan were canceled about three months ago.

He added that Afghan flight carrying 146 passengers landed in Mashhad.

The deadly coronavirus radiating from Wuhan, China, in December 2019 has affected millions of people across the world. Iran has taken numerous steps to stop the spread of the disease, ranging from closing down schools and universities to cancellation of cultural and religious gatherings. It is also constantly disinfecting and sanitizing public places.

Iran Exports N95 Masks, Mask Production Machines

TEHRAN (IRNA) - An Iranian official in the office of Vice-President for Science and Technology said on Wednesday that Iran exports both N95 masks and the machines for making mask.

Parviz Karami said in the ceremony to unveil Iranian robot doctor Keyvan LifeBot in Tehran that in the coronavirus outbreak, knowledge enterprises produced a large amount of the necessary equipment needed to fight the epidemic. Karami said Iran's ranking in knowledge production was 54 in 2002 and 15 in 2018, which no one believed, adding the epidemic had many tragedies for the country but it had an upside too; it put Iranian technology in display.

He said the permit for export of N95 masks has been issued, and Iranian knowledge enterprises are now exporting the masks and the necessary equipment and machinery for producing them.

Keyan LifeBot is the first robot made for interaction between the patients and the medical staff.

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT



PERMIT NO : 1399.1012

NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY - AHVAZ-IRAN

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ITEMS	MATERIAL DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY
02	PORTABLE HIGH PRESSURE PUMP UNIT API 674, DRIVER: DIESEL, SKID MOUNTED	01 + 1 SET SPARE PART

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tender are requested to send their "INTENTION TO PARTICIPATE" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to qualitative assessment Form no.1, available at www.nisoc.ir not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for Participation in the tender will be disregarded.
The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 7,789.14 EURO or 1,250,000,000 RIAI in favor of NISOC.

Tender documents including the materials through technical specifications and Qualitative Assessment Forms can be accessed via:

www.nisoc.ir-material-procurement-management-tab

ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS D.D.P., NISOC'S WAREHOUSE, AGHAJARI IRAN.
PAYMENT TERM IS C.O.D., SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC'S MATERIAL APPROVAL.

NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID

FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT

Bldg, No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex, kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran
Tel / NO.: +98-61-34123455 Fax No.: +98-61-34457437

Public Relations: WWW.SHANA.IR | WWW.NISOC.IR | <http://IETS.MPORG.IR>

In the name of God

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT



Notice of International General Two-stage

Tender No. 9801728R1

It is hereby respectfully notified that Esfahan Steel Company intends to purchase 34 items Fireclay Bricks in accordance with the required technical specifications and conditions through international general two-stage tender No.9801728R1. Accordingly, the prospective bidders specialized and experienced in the said area may visit Esfahan Steel Co.'s website at www.esfahansteel.ir to get tender documents not later than 23.05.2020 and submit their bids to the following address not later than Saturday, 06.06.2020

Confidential Secretariat of ESCO's Security Department, at the main entrance gate next to Melli Bank, Esfahan Steel Company, 45th km of Zobahan-Shahrekord Highway, Isfahan, Iran, Telephone No. 0098-31-5257-2017.

It is evident that this letter is only for notification purpose.

Public Relation of Esfahan Steel Co.

U.N. Warns of Possible War Crimes in Northeastern Congo



KINSHASA (Reuters) - Widespread and systematic killings, beatings, rape and other barbaric acts by militia mostly from the ethnic Lendu community in northeastern Congo may constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes, the United Nations said on Wednesday.

In the six months to April 2020, at least 296 people were killed, 151 wounded and 38 raped, including women and children, mostly by fighters linked to the CODECO rebel group, said a report by the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO).

CODECO's fighters are drawn from the Lendu ethnic group.

Maduro Vows to Raise Gasoline Price



CARACAS (Reuters) - Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro on Wednesday pledged to begin charging citizens for gasoline, as the fourth cargo of a five-tanker flotilla bringing fuel from Iran approached the South American nation's exclusive economic zone.

Iran is providing the country with up to 1.53 million barrels of gasoline and components to help it ease an acute scarcity that has forced Venezuelans to wait in hours-long lines at service stations or pay steep prices on the black market.

Minnesota Calls in National Guard to Quell Unrest Over Black Man's Death



MINNEAPOLIS (Reuters) - Minnesota's governor activated the National Guard on Thursday to help police restore order following two days of violent protests in Minneapolis city over the death of a black man seen in graphic video footage gasping for breath as a white officer knelt on his neck.

Governor Tim Walz ordered Guard troops to assist police as local, state and federal law enforcement officials sought to ease racial tensions sparked by Monday night's fatal arrest of George Floyd, 46, by vowing to achieve justice in the case.

Four city police officers involved in the incident, including the one shown pressing his knee into Floyd's neck as he lay on the ground, moaning, "please, I can't breathe," were fired from their jobs the next day.

The Floyd case was reminiscent of the 2014 killing of Eric Garner, an unarmed black man in New York City who died after being put in a banned police chokehold as he, too, was heard to mutter, "I can't breathe."

His dying words became a rallying cry for the Black Lives Matter movement that formed amid a wave of killings of African-Americans by police.

Protesters thronged Minneapolis streets for a third day on Thursday chanting "I can't breathe," as they rallied peacefully at the Hennepin County Government Center and marched through downtown, demanding the four officers be swiftly arrested.

"There is probable cause right now" to make those arrests, civil rights activist the Rev. Al Sharpton said as he addressed the crowd. "We're not asking for a favor. We're asking for what is right."

Garner's mother, Gwen Carr, said Floyd's case had renewed the trauma she suffered six years ago. "This is just opening up an old wound, and pouring salt into it," she said.

Separately, hundreds of demonstrators milled around a police station and Target discount store that were the center of running clashes Wednesday night between rock-throwing protesters and riot police firing tear gas and rubber bullets.

A car in the Target parking lot was set ablaze, and looters periodically ducked inside the vacant Target store to make off with whatever was left inside.

Both gatherings began with little police presence and no immediate sign of National Guard troops.

At a morning news briefing, Police Chief Medaria Arradondo apologized to Floyd's family, conceding his department had contributed to a "deficit of hope" in Minnesota's largest city.

Hours later, officials overseeing investigations from the U.S. Justice Department, FBI, Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension and local prosecutors appealed for calm at a joint news conference, as they gathered evidence.

"Give us the time to do this right, and we will bring you justice," County Attorney Mike Freeman told reporters. He acknowledged the policeman's conduct depicted in the video was "horrible," but said, "My job is to prove that he has violated a criminal statute."

Minnesota's U.S. attorney, Erica McDonald, pledged a "robust and meticulous investigation into the circumstances surrounding" Floyd's arrest and death. The federal investigation, which Attorney General William Barr had designated a "top priority," will focus on whether the arresting officers used the "color of law" to deprive Floyd of his civil rights, a crime under U.S. law, she said.

Floyd, a Houston native known affectionately to friends as "Big Floyd" and who had worked as a nightclub security staffer, was reportedly suspected of trying to pass counterfeit money when police took him into custody.

Venezuela Reaches Deal With U.N. To Buy Food, Medicine With Gold



CARACAS (Reuters) - Venezuela has reached a deal with the U.N. Development Program (UNDP) to destine part of its gold in Bank of England accounts toward the purchase of food and medicine during the coronavirus pandemic, its central bank governor said on Wednesday.

The deal comes after Venezuela's central bank made a legal claim earlier this month to try to force the Bank of England to hand over part of the 31 tons of gold in accounts belonging to the government of President Nicolas Maduro, whom Britain does not recognize as Venezuela's legitimate leader due to allegations he rigged his 2018 re-election.

Central bank Governor Calixto Ortega told Reuters that under the arrangement, the UNDP would receive the funds directly, a move meant to assuage concerns about potential corruption.

"It's not my word, it's not me saying that I am going to buy food, medicine and medical equipment," Ortega said in an interview in his downtown Caracas office. "It's the United Nations who is saying that. They are not going to be involved in anything dark that is not neutral and independent."

Any program would still require the Bank of England to release the gold. The Bank of England declined to comment.

In a statement, the UNDP said it was "approached recently to explore mechanisms to use existing resources held by the Central Bank of Venezuela in financial institutions outside the country to fund the ongoing efforts to address the urgent humanitarian, health, and socioeconomic needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic."

Ortega said he was optimistic the legal case in Britain would be resolved in the coming weeks.

A six-year economic collapse in Venezuela has resulted in hyperinflation and shortages of basic goods, including food and medicines. Maduro blames U.S. sanctions on the OPEC nation's oil industry for its woes.

While those sanctions have slashed cash flow to the government, critics say corruption and misguided economic policies are the root causes of the collapse.

Afghan Forces Killed in First Taliban Attack Since Ceasefire End

KABUL (AFP) - Seven members of the Afghan security forces were killed Thursday in an attack officials blamed on the Taliban, the first deadly assault since a three-day ceasefire ended.

The militants attacked a checkpoint in Parwan, north of the capital, said Waheeda Shahkar, spokeswoman to the provincial governor.

"The Taliban have also suffered casualties," Shahkar added.

District police chief Hussain Shah said Taliban fighters set fire to the checkpoint, killing five security force personnel. Two more were shot dead.

The Taliban have not commented.

It is the first attack that Afghan officials have blamed on the Taliban since the ceasefire -- held over the Eid al-Fitr festival -- ended on Tuesday night.

According to Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission, civilian casualties fell by 80 percent during the temporary truce.

A drop in violence has largely held since it ended on Tuesday night, although Afghan security forces carried out air strikes in the south on Wednesday that killed 18 "militants," police said.

The surprise truce offer from the Taliban and the lull in fighting has raised hopes that stalled peace negotiations between the insurgents and the Afghan government could begin soon.

Afghan authorities have responded to the ceasefire by releasing some 1,000 insurgent prisoners this week, and plan to further free an equal number of inmates in the coming days.

The Taliban have also said they plan to free a group of government prisoners.

The exchange is part of a US-Taliban deal signed in February, which excluded the Afghan government, that stipulates Kabul would release up to 5,000 Taliban prisoners and the militants would free about 1,000 national security personnel.

Kabul had already freed about 1,000 Taliban inmates before the ceasefire, while the insurgents had released about 300 government captives.

China Parliament Approves Hong Kong Security Bill

BEIJING (Reuters) - China's parliament approved a decision on Thursday to go forward with national security legislation for Hong Kong that democracy activists in the city and Western countries fear could erode its freedoms and jeopardize its role as a global financial hub.

China says the legislation will aim to tackle secession, subversion, terrorism and foreign interference in the city but the plan, unveiled in Beijing last week, triggered the first big protests in Hong Kong for months.

Riot police were out in force in Hong Kong as its lawmakers debated another piece of legislation, a bill to criminalize disrespect of China's national anthem, while the United States piled on pressure aimed at preserving the city's autonomy.

Dozens of protesters gathered in a shopping mall to chant slogans but there was no repeat of disturbances the previous day when police made 360 arrests as thousands took to the streets in anger over the anthem bill and the national security legislation proposed by China.

Last year, the city was rocked for months by often violent pro-democracy demonstrations over an unsuccessful bid to introduce a law governing extradition to China.

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT



PERMIT NO : 1399.1015

NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY - AHVAZ-IRAN

TENDER NO: 31-32-88308-44-016

NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY (NISOC) INTENDS TO PURCHASE THE FOLLOWING GOODS:

ITEMS	MATERIAL DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY
03	PLUNGER PUMP WITH ELECTROMOTOR ACC. TO STANDARD NO. API 674 CAPACITY (Kg/hr): 4400 & 2200	10 + 10 ST SPARE PARTS

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tender are requested to send their "INTENTION TO PARTICIPATE" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to qualitative assessment Form no.1, available at www.nisoc.ir not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for Participation in the tender will be disregarded. The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 9,658.53 EURO or 1,550,000,000 RIAL in favor of NISOC.

Tender documents including the materials through technical specifications and Qualitative Assessment Forms can be accessed via:

www.nisoc.ir-material-procurement-management-tab

ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS D.D.P. NISOC'S WAREHOUSE, AGHAJARI, IRAN.
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NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID

FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT

Bldg, No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex, kony-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran
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Trump Signs Order Targeting Social Media



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - President Donald Trump signed an order Thursday seeking to strip social media giants like Twitter of legal immunity for content on their platforms in a move slammed by his critics as a legally dubious act of political revenge.

The executive order calls on government regulators to evaluate if online platforms should be eligible for liability protection for content posted by their millions of users. If enforced, the action would upend decades of precedent and treat internet platforms as "publishers" potentially liable for user-generated content.

Trump told reporters at the White House he acted because big tech firms "have had unchecked power to censor, restrict, edit, shape, hide, alter any form of communication between private citizens or large public audiences."

"We can't let this continue to happen," Trump said. The move comes a day after an angry tirade from the U.S. leader against Twitter after the platform for the first time labelled two of his tweets, on the increasingly contentious topic of mail-in voting, with fact-check notices, calling them misleading. "In those moments, Twitter ceases to be a neutral public platform and they become an editor with a viewpoint," Trump said.

"And I think we can say that about others also, whether you're looking at Google, whether you're looking at Facebook, perhaps others."

Critics said however Trump has no authority to regulate private internet operators or change the law known as Section 230 which backers say has allowed online platforms like Facebook and Twitter to flourish.

The American Civil Liberties Union called Trump's order "a blatant and unconstitutional threat to punish social media companies that displease the president." Eric Goldman, director of the High-Tech Law Institute at Santa Clara University, said the order was "more about political theater than about changing the law." The order "is not legally supportable -- it flies in the face of more than 900 court decisions," Goldman said. The White House seeks to sidestep the provisions giving internet firms immunity by treating them as publishers operating in part of a "public square."

"Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube wield immense, if not unprecedented, power to shape the interpretation of public events; to censor, delete, or disappear information; and to control what people see or do not see," the executive order said.

Shanon
(adviser)

Parsian

Zaferanieh Apt (\$2500)
200sq.m, 3bdrs
S/pool, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

Gheitarieh Villa (\$4500)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
green yard
Fully Furn

Jordan (\$1900)
180sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg
Nicely Furn

Farmanieh (\$2300)
220sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony, & F.F

Velenjak bldg
5storey, 20bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg lots
Brand new, & F.F

Sa`adat abad (\$1600)
2bdrs, pkg, & F.F

Cell: +989121907875
Shanon_tari@yahoo.com
Tel : 88510081
Fax : 88506474

Vanak Office (\$30 per sq.m)
300sq.m, 4bdrs, pkg lots



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EasyJet to Axe Up to 30% of Staff

LONDON (Reuters) - British low cost airline easyJet said it planned to cut up to 30% of its staff, or 4,500 jobs, and shrink its fleet, to fit the smaller market that will emerge from the coronavirus pandemic. EasyJet, which employs over 15,000 people in eight countries across Europe, said it would launch a consultation process with its staff in the coming days, acting later than many of its airline peers to announce job cuts as a result of COVID-19. It is also making deeper cuts than its low-cost peers. Ryanair said it would lay off 15% of its staff, while smaller budget carrier Wizz is reducing its workforce by 19%.



EU Readies Trillion-Euro Aid Plan

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - A one-trillion-euro recovery plan to get Europe back on its feet after the devastation wreaked by the coronavirus pandemic was set to be unveiled Wednesday, as badly hit Spain started 10 days of national mourning for its thousands of dead.

The massive European proposal follows other unprecedented emergency measures introduced around the world to rescue economies shattered by the disease, which has claimed more than 350,000 lives with infections rapidly approaching 5.6 million.

While the virus continues to cause havoc in Latin America, Europe has slowly started reopening businesses as outbreaks on the continent slow, but Italy and Spain -- two of the hardest-hit countries -- lack the firepower of richer European nations to rebuild their economies.

European Union chief Ursula von der Leyen will deliver a one-trillion-euro proposal to the European Parliament on Wednesday, aiming to help the worst-affected countries using a mix of grants and loans.

That is expected to kick off tough negotiations, as backers try to win the support of some northern EU states that are opposed to paying out aid in grants to nations already under mountains of debt -- such as Italy and Spain.

The proposal comes as the continent -- which has lost at least 172,000 people to COVID-19 -- grapples with the human tragedy and economic destruction.

Spain on Wednesday will begin a 10-day official mourning for the more than 27,000 people who died of the disease in the country, with all flags on public buildings lowered to half-mast.

The Iberian nation and others hit particularly hard such as Italy, Germany, France and Britain have all started easing their lockdowns, as people head to shops, sunbathe at beaches and run in parks after months of confinement.

Russia, meanwhile, said it had passed its peak of infections, promising to hold postponed World War II victory celebrations next month. While desperate to kickstart their economies, especially the tourism sector, most governments in Europe are also trying to move cautiously towards a reopen, afraid of a second wave of infections.

That fear has meant some activities have been allowed again, while others must wait -- including singing.

After horror stories emerged from choirs around the world of mass infections among singers, the activity is now considered dangerous by German authorities. At the Church of the Twelve Apostles in Berlin's Schoeneberg district, there have been no choir rehearsals since early March.

"I do miss it," said soprano Heike Benda-Blanck. "You can still sing in the shower but it's not the same." But while many Western nations were inching back towards some form of normality, the virus was continued its march in Latin America, which has outpaced Europe and the United States in the number of daily infections.

"We are particularly concerned that the number of new cases reported last week in Brazil was the highest for a seven-day period, since the outbreak began," said Carissa Etienne, director of the Washington-based Pan American Health Organization. "Both Peru and Chile are also reporting a high incidence, a sign that transmission is still accelerating in these countries." Brazil reported the highest daily death toll in the world for the fifth straight day, pushing its total to 24,512 with infections soaring to more than 390,000.

The virus is also fuelling a political crisis in Brazil, where right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro has downplayed the COVID-19 threat and lashed out at state governors who have asked people to stay at home.

New Wave of U.S. Layoffs Feared As Coronavirus Pain Deepens

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Job cuts by U.S. state and local governments whose budgets have been crushed fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and more second-wave layoffs in the private sector likely contributed last week to a 10th straight week of more than 2 million Americans seeking unemployment benefits.

The Labor Department's weekly jobless claims report on Thursday, the most timely data on the economy's health, is also expected to show the number of people on jobless benefits hitting a new record high in mid-May.

The report is being watched to assess how quickly the economy rebounds after businesses shuttered in mid-March to control the spread of COVID-19 and almost ground the country to a halt. While non-essential businesses are starting to reopen, claims have stayed at astonishingly high levels. "I am concerned that we are seeing a second round of private sector layoffs that, coupled with a rising number of public sector cut backs is driving up the number of people unemployed," said Joel Naroff, chief economist at Naroff Economics in Holland, Pennsylvania.

"If that is the case, given the pace of reopening, we could be in for an extended period of extraordinary high unemployment. And that means the recovery will be slower and will take a lot longer."

The number of people filing new claims for state unemployment benefits likely totaled a seasonally adjusted 2.1 million for the week ended May 23, down from 2.438 million the prior week, according to a Reuters survey of economists.

The number has fallen steadily since hitting a record 6.867 million in late March, but have not registered below 2 million since mid-March. State governors have requested \$500 billion to help cover public health expenses and lost tax revenues, underscoring the devastating impact of COVID-19 on the economy.

The Commerce Department is expected to confirm in another report on Thursday that gross domestic product contracted at a 4.8% annualized rate in the first quarter, the deepest decline in output since the 2007-09 Great Recession.

The second wave of layoffs could grow bigger, with Boeing (BA.N) announcing on Wednesday it was eliminating more than 12,000 U.S. jobs and also disclosing it planned "several thousand remaining layoffs" in the next few months.

The Federal Reserve's Beige Book on Wednesday, comprising anecdotal information on business activity from contacts nationwide on or before May 18, was equally grim. Its depiction of the labor market said "employment continued to decrease in all districts" and "continued to fall sharply in retail and in leisure and hospitality sectors."

In addition to the spill over to segments of the economy not initially impacted by the closure of nonessential businesses, some economists said initial claims were staying elevated also because of backlogs from the flood of applications that overwhelmed state unemployment offices.

But this was dismissed by many who argued these backlogs should have been eliminated by now. There is also belief that state employment offices are combining filings for the federal government's Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program with regular jobless claims instead of separating them as required by the Labor Department.

The PUA program is for gig workers and many others who do not qualify for regular unemployment insurance. They, however, must first file for state benefits and be denied in order to get federal aid for coronavirus-related job and income losses.

Last week's filings would raise the number of people who filed claims for unemployment benefits to above 40 million since March 21. Economists cautioned this figure does not represent the number of jobs lost due to the pandemic, citing technical difficulties and procedures at state unemployment offices.

Russian Stocks to Recover After COVID-19 in 2020

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia's stock market is forecast to continue recovering in 2020 after a double-dip from a drop in oil prices and the novel coronavirus, reaching fresh record highs in 2021, a Reuters poll of market experts showed.

Russia's rouble-denominated MOEX index .IMOEX was among the best global performers in 2019 amid high dividend payments by Russian companies and hit an all-time high of 3,226.9 in January before a rapid slump in March.

While the eventual fallout from the coronavirus pandemic and related lockdowns is yet to be assessed, stocks are poised to shrug off the shock more quickly than the Russian economy, which is on track to contract 5% this year.

The worst for Russian stocks is over, showed a forecast of 12 analysts polled in the second half of May. The MOEX rouble-denominated index is seen recovering to 2,900 by the end of this year, up 5.3% from 2,754 on May 26. Year-end forecasts ranged from 2,430 to 3,050.

"The world now is much more adapted to the idea of the virus itself, which should limit potential sales bearing in mind that central banks and governments are actively supporting their economies, the summer is on the way and even if the second virus waves occur everyone should be more prepared to handle them," said Elena Kozhukhova from Veles Capital brokerage.

The Russian central bank slashed its key rate to 5.5% in April and promised more cuts later this year, eroding the attractiveness of bank deposits.

German Economy Likely to Shrink 6.6% This Year

BERLIN (Reuters) - The German economy is likely to shrink by 6.6% this year as a consequence of the coronavirus crisis before growing by 10.2% in 2021, the Ifo Institute said on Thursday in its latest update.

On average, businesses expected operations to return to normal in nine months after severe lockdowns in the second quarter, Ifo said. Under this scenario, the economy would shrink 12.4% in the second quarter of this year.

A slew of recent surveys suggests Europe's largest economy is slowly recovering after economic life was frozen in late March to contain the coronavirus pandemic, but the latest data underlines the unprecedented impact.

Under a worst-case scenario in which a return to normal took 16 months, the economy would shrink 9.3% this year and grow 9.5% the next. The most benign scenario had companies recovering in five months, with the economy shrinking by just 3.9% and growing 7.4% next year.

All three scenarios, based on business sentiment as well as production, turnover and foreign trade data, assumed a gradual relaxation of restrictions from the end of April.

Some businesses were braced for a longer, more painful recovery, however: in particular the aviation sector expected normalisation to take 16 months. The travel, hospitality and carmaking sectors also expected lengthier recovery periods.

UN Chief Calls for Women's Equal Representation in All Areas of Peace and Security

TEHRAN (UNIC) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in his message for the International Day of Peacekeepers, 29 May 2020, while referring to the theme of this year's observance, namely Women in Peacekeeping, called for women's equal representation in all areas of peace and security.

The full text of his message reads:

Today we honor more than one million men and women who have served as United Nations peacekeepers and the more than 3,900 who have lost their lives in the line of duty.

We also express our gratitude to the 95,000 civilian, police and military personnel currently deployed around the world.

They are facing one of the greatest challenges ever: delivering on their peace and security mandates while helping countries to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

The theme of this year's observance - Women in Peacekeeping - highlights their central role in our operations. Women often have greater access in the communities we serve, enabling us to improve the protection of civilians, promote human rights and enhance overall performance.

This is especially important today, as female peacekeepers are on the frontlines in supporting the response to COVID-19 in already fragile contexts - using local radio to spread public health messaging, delivering necessary supplies to communities for prevention, and supporting efforts of local peacebuilders. Yet, women continue to represent only 6 per cent of uniformed military, police, justice and corrections personnel in field missions.

As we commemorate the 20th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, we must do more to achieve women's equal representation in all areas of peace and security.

Together, let us continue to wage peace, defeat the pandemic and build a better future.



SECOND ANNOUNCEMENT



PERMIT NO : 1399.913

NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY - AHVAZ-IRAN

TENDER NO.: 08-21-89-9240008

NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY (NISOC) INTENDS TO PURCHASE THE FOLLOWING GOODS:

ITEMS	MATERIAL DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY
01	HEAVY WEIGHT CEMENT PREFLUSH	2000 BAG

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tender are requested to send their "INTENTION TO PARTICIPATE" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to qualitative assessment Form no.1, available at www.nisoc.ir not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for Participation in the tender will be disregarded.

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www.nisoc.ir-material-procurement-management-tab

ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS D.D.P., NISOC'S WAREHOUSE, AGHAJARI, IRAN

PAYMENT TERM IS C.O.D., SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC'S MATERIAL APPROVAL

NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID

FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT

Bldg, No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahwaz, Iran
Tel/NO.: +98-61-34123589 Fax No.: +98-61-34457437

Public Relations: WWW.NISOC.IR | WWW.SHANA.IR | <http://IETS.MPORG.IR>

Number of Knowledge-Based Firms to Grow by 2021

TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of Strategic Technology Development Center of Vice-Presidency for Science and Technology Esmail Ghaderifar revealed the growth in the number of knowledge-based companies up to twofold by 2021.

He made the remarks yesterday and added, "We intend to

develop business activity in the fields which have been put under US sanctions in cooperation with the knowledge-based companies." It is predicted that if the growth development trend of knowledge-based companies is continued, the number of knowledge-based companies will hit twofold by 2021, he reiterated.



Healthcare Officials Open 7th Science and Technology Exchange Program

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Officials from Argentina and Kazakhstan gave inaugural messages in the opening ceremony of the 7th Science and Technology Exchange Program (STEP) on Thursday.

According to reports, Jorge Chediek, UNOSSC Director and Envoy of the Secretary-General on South South Cooperation, in his inaugural message said, "We are putting together some of the best minds in the Islamic world to confront the challenges brought about by Coronavirus," he stated.

"In 2018 we launched a foundation to showcase the great technologies developed by scientists in Islamic countries and we really look forward to promote more STEP engagement in Islamic countries," he added.

He then commended the SETP event, stating "I look forward to success of this program and I hope this is a tool for all the countries of the world for a better future without this pandemic."

Further, Olzhas Abishov, Vice-Minister of Healthcare of the Republic of Kazakhstan in his inaugural speech on the Strategies and Experiences in Facing Coronavirus said, "Today, the fight is against COVID-19 pandemic and the elimination of it. Economic damage and irreparable loss of human life are the two major issues hitting all the countries around the world. We continue to take scientific measures to fight this pandemic," he said.

"In Kazakhstan, the intensity of the virus is significantly reduced due to timely diagnosis and treatment of patients. However, the government continues to enforce quarantine measures more than ever. Random testing among various populations is conducted to give a holistic view of the state of the infected population."

"This pandemic showed our strengths and weaknesses. It showed us where we need to make improvements," he added.

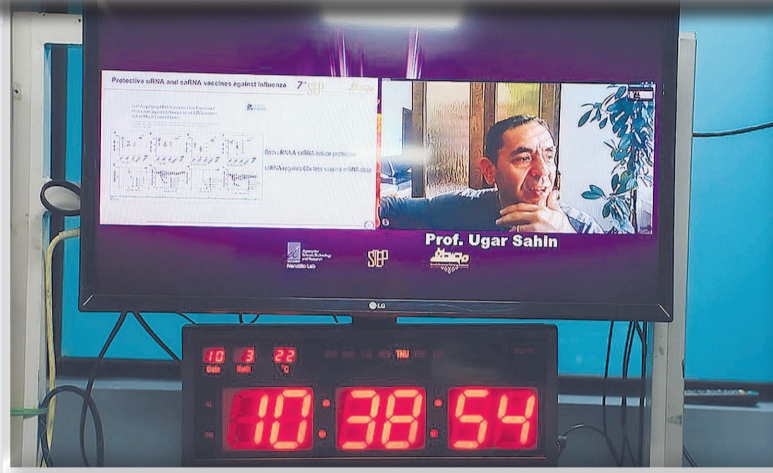
He suggested "integrating COVID-9 health care to fight it in 2020."

He also named "digitalization of public health surveillance as a COVID-19 response to take timely actions in a short time."

"We believe that consolidation and solidarity are required to overcome this disease. We should work together and openly share expertise."

"STEP is a perfect example of scientific community's endeavor to overcome the pandemic and establish a long-lasting network among Muslim scientists," he said.

"Only together we can win," he concluded. Meanwhile the 2019 Mustafa(PBHH) Prize laureate, immunologist Ugur Sahin, talked about an mRNA-based vaccine that he and his research team have developed which was recently tested on human beings.



"We are facing a pandemic the only solution to which is a vaccine. This pandemic will challenge us for the next two years." Explaining the concept of mRNA vaccines, he said that "they deliver mRNA-encoded genetic information of the vaccine antigen to the cells in the body of the subject. It is particularly used in pandemics."

"mRNA vaccines can be designed and manufactured fast within weeks; they have intrinsic immune-stimulatory properties and do not require addition of adjuvants; they are highly immunogenic and induce neutralizing antibodies as well as T-cell responses. They are also well-characterized biopharmaceuticals with a high purity and are free of animal material," he added.

According to Sahin, the clinical trial protocol in Germany started April 23rd, 2020, with a target population of 200 healthy subjects aged 18 to 55. The objective of this was safety, tolerability, immunogenicity, in addition to determining the optimal dose for further studies."

He also announced that the first results of this study are expected by end of June/early July. "We have started to increase our manufacturing. I'm confident this can be accomplished in the next three months and be distributed in large dose. Depending on the dose of the vaccine, we can serve larger populations of people," Sahin remarked.

He said: "we are trying to find a solution to allow free access of this vaccine to all with the cooperation of WHO."

U.S. Scared of...

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Thirdly, the Americans have learned that with the existing economic current in Iran, their sanctions are more ineffective than they expected to have serious and strategic impact on the resistance axis. So the best option for them was to invite Iran for better co-existence, détente and reducing tensions and animosities and this path may lead the U.S. to close its eyes on Iran's economic behavior in the world and gradually to change the route of sanctions for opening economic cooperation with Iran. Of course, one obvious dichotomy is seen between what is going on in the U.S. Department of State and in the White House and this dichotomy can be out of prudence.

The White House closes its eyes on fuel delivery of Iranian tankers to Venezuela and takes no action and at the same time in the U.S. Department of State, the Iran Action Group holds session of "storytelling" and in its meeting threatens Iran while they are fully aware that their threats are void. In the meeting, U.S. Secretary of State in a statement announces that the U.S. will end sanctions waiver for all countries in Iran nuclear deal and he announces slapping sanctions on two Iranians involved in Iran's nuclear program.

Regarding this issue, some puppet-like people like Brian Hook, Christopher Ashley Ford and Morgan Ortagus still claim that they are preventing Iran from making nuclear warheads. These people either are really unaware of how absurd is their remarks or they have mission to make people laugh.

Today with this authority that Iran has made way in any part of the world wisely and smartly, it does not need to any arsenals. When Iran decided to take revenge by mobilize its forces against the people of a country instead of targeting the goals of the arrogant governments?

How can we, in Iran, while thinking of sending food, medicine and humanitarian aids for the Coronavirus-hit American people, think of making A-bomb whose aim is destruction and massacre? In the U.S. Department of State, today wisdom is not to beat the drum of animosity and trumpeting the distrust. I wish they, in the department, could be after finding a peaceful way for restoring an economic relation with Iran which can help the ground for opening the way for arrival of the U.S. companies into Iran's market like the White House did in order not to fan the flame of enmity. I wish they could think more of the Coronavirus that today has involved all countries and the U.S. more than any one. Who knows he will be alive two months later? The Iran Action Group, necessarily and in line with the White House prudent strategy, should think of this issue more that there are more praised ways in human nature than hatred and animosity.

Iran Never to...

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Major General Salami added that the most important and dangerous part of this power is still "unknown"

"Our enemies will see this power the day when they pursue an evil intention against this land," he added, warning that "on that day, they will get to see the real firepower of our forces at the sea and in the sky, and the battlefield will turn into a hell for the enemies of Iran and Islam."

IRGC naval fleet received 112 new-generation missile-launching speed boats of different classes today, in a ceremony attended by top Iranian military chiefs, including Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami, IRGC Chief Major General Hossein Salami, and IRGC Navy Commander Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri.

Iran has made major breakthroughs in its defense sector and attained self-sufficiency in producing military equipment and hardware despite facing US sanctions and Western economic pressure.

The Islamic Republic says its military power is solely for defensive purposes against enemy threats.

NASA Chief "All In" For Tom Cruise to Film on Space Station

CAPE CANAVERA (AP) — NASA is rolling out the International Space Station's red carpet for Tom Cruise to make a movie in orbit.

The space agency's administrator, Jim Bridenstine, said before Wednesday's planned launch of two NASA astronauts aboard a SpaceX rocket that Elon Musk's company is already getting customers eager to blast off. Cruise is one of them.

Bridenstine said he'll leaving it to Cruise and SpaceX to provide the mission details.

"I will tell you this: NASA has been in talks with Tom Cruise and, of course, his team, and we will do everything we can to make it a successful mission, including opening up the International Space Station," he told The Associated Press.

Asked about Cruise filming on the space station, Musk told "CBS This Morning," "Actually, I think that remains to be seen. We are supportive and I think NASA is supportive of anything that captures the imagination of the public."

Bridenstine said the whole reason NASA created "this commercial marketplace" is so SpaceX, Boeing and other private companies can attract customers besides the U.S. government. That will drive down costs to American taxpayers, he said, and increase access to space for all types of people — celebrities included.

"I don't admit this very often ... but I was inspired to become a Navy pilot because when I was in elementary school, I watched the movie 'Top Gun,'" the 44-year-old Bridenstine said.

Cruise starred as Navy pilot Pete "Maverick" Mitchell in the 1986 film. A sequel is due out later this year.

"The question is, 'Can Tom Cruise make a new movie that inspires the next generation Elon Musk.' And if he can do that, then we're all for it. NASA is all in," Bridenstine said.

A message to Cruise's representative was not immediately returned.

China Will Strive for Positive Economic Growth This Year

BEIJING (Reuters) - China will strive for positive economic growth to recover from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic this year, despite not setting a growth target, Premier Li Keqiang said on Thursday, promising more support if the economy faced further disruption.

"We have reserved policy room. Be it fiscal, finance, or social security," Li said during his once-a-year news conference following the close of the annual meeting of parliament.

China does not need a massive stimulus but growth remains important, and liquidity will be increased because "exceptional situations call for exceptional measures", he said in response to a question from Reuters.

Investors have been expecting Beijing to roll out a large stimulus measures to pull the world's



second-largest economy out of an unprecedented downturn, and some were disappointed at the unusual decision not to set a growth target.

Li stressed the focus of policymaking had shifted towards ensuring stability in employment, financial operations, foreign trade, foreign investment, domestic investment, and market expectations.

"We can introduce new policies in a timely manner, and we will not hesitate to maintain the stable operation of the Chinese economy, which is paramount," the premier said.

The government has pledged more government spending and an fiscal deficit target of at least 3.6% of GDP. Based on fiscal measures announced so far, the stimulus the government plans to roll out is equivalent to about 4.1% of China's GDP, according to Reuters calculations.

India's GDP Growth May Rebound to 5% in FY22

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) — India's economy, which is likely to contract by 5 per cent in the current fiscal, may expand by around 5 per cent in the next financial year, former RBI governor Duvvuri Subbarao said. Rating agency Crisil had said the Indian economy may shrink by 5 per cent in fiscal 2021, adding this recession could be the country's fourth since Independence and perhaps the worst to date.

"I do believe that getting up to 5 per cent next year (FY22) is quite probable. The reason I say that is because this (COVID-19) is not a natural disaster. Our factories are still standing, our infrastructure and transport systems are still there," Subbarao said. He was speaking at a webinar on 'Indian Economy - Navigating through a Crisis', organised by the Centre for Financial Studies (CFS) at Bhavan's SPJIMR business school.

"Once the lockdown is lifted and the economy is given a green signal to restart, I am sure that we can ramp up pretty soon and reach at least 5 per cent (growth rate)," he said.

Speaking at the same webinar, former deputy chairman of the erstwhile Planning Commission, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, also said there is a possibility of 5-6 per cent growth in fiscal 2021-22. "But it would be mistake to treat that as recovery because if you are down 5 per cent this year (FY21) and you are up 6 per cent from that level then what it means is that during FY21-22 you will be at the same level as you were in 2019-20," Ahluwalia pointed out.

Economic Confidence in Turkey Jumps in May

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's economic confidence index improved sharply to 61.7 in May, the country's statistical authority said on May 28.

The May figure jumped 20.4% from 51.3 last month, amid Turkey's normalization from the waning coronavirus pandemic, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) data showed.

The month-on-month rise was driven by improvements in the consumer, real sector, services, retail trade, and construction confidence indices.

The construction confidence index surged the most from last month, at 31.1%. The service and consumer confidence indexes followed with 10.8% and 8.5% rises, respectively.

The retail trade confidence index also saw a 5% increase.

The economic confidence index is a composite index that encapsulates consumers' and producers' evaluations, expectations, and tendencies about the general economic situation, according to TÜİK.

It indicates an optimistic outlook about the general economic situation when the index is above 100, while it shows a pessimistic outlook when below 100.

Iran Promises...

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On Thursday night, the AEOI described the new sanctions as a "futile attempt" that would by no means undermine the Islamic Republic's nuclear progress and programs.

The Iranian hardworking researchers, especially those involved in the nuclear industry, consider such futile attempts as a sign of the enemy's failure, the AEOI said in a statement. The United States this week also ended sanctions waivers for nuclear cooperation between Iran and the signatories of the landmark nuclear deal, from which the US President Donald Trump withdrew in 2018.

Tehran said the desperate U.S. move to end the sanctions waivers pulled final plug on the nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Iran maintains that its nuclear program is merely peaceful as asserted by other signatories of the nuclear deal.

Russia, a signatory to the JCPOA, condemned the United States for undermining international security by ending waivers on the American sanctions that target Iran. Russia raps the U.S. for deciding to end Iran sanctions waivers and quitting an international treaty on unarmed surveillance flights.

Atletico Forward Correa Suffers Muscle Injury

MADRID (Reuters) - Atletico Madrid forward Angel Correa has undergone an MRI scan after injuring a leg muscle in training, the La Liga club said in a statement (here) on Wednesday. The Argentine, 25, is the second Atletico player to be injured in training this week after record signing Joao Felix sprained the medial ligament in his left knee on Monday. Atletico were sixth when play was halted in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic with 11 rounds of matches remaining and are due to visit Athletic Bilbao next when the season restarts.

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Roland Garros Planning For Fans Not Empty Seats

PARIS (Dispatches) - Roland Garros chiefs insisted on Wednesday the French Open, delayed until September due to the coronavirus pandemic, will have fans attending even if they still have to abide by social distancing rules. The claycourt Grand Slam, which should now have been into its first week under its traditional schedule, was pushed back by four months because of the outbreak. However, tickets bought for the event in its May-June slot were reimbursed rather than transferred, prompting fears the tournament, now due to start on September 20, would be played behind closed doors.

Premier League Clubs Vote to Resume Contact Training

LONDON (Dispatches) - Premier League clubs voted unanimously to resume contact training as the English top-flight took a significant step towards restarting in June. The Premier League was put on hold in March due to the coronavirus pandemic, with Liverpool just two wins away from sealing the title. Clubs returned to training in small and socially distanced groups last week but they have moved to stage two of the "return to training protocol". "Premier League shareholders today voted unanimously to resume contact training, marking another step towards restarting the Premier League season, when safe to do so," the league said in a statement. "Squads are now able to train as a group and engage in tackling while minimising any unnecessary close contact." The decision was made following consultation with clubs, players, managers and the government. Clubs that have already completed the necessary risk assessments are expected to move to the new phase as soon as today.



He fears he could spread the virus to his five-month-old son. French World Cup winner N'Golo Kante has also been given permission by Chelsea to train at home.

Germany's Bundesliga, the first of Europe's big five leagues to resume, will complete its third round of fixtures behind closed doors on Wednesday evening and there has been little player opposition to La Liga's plans to return in Spain from June 11.

Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson said playing at an empty Anfield and winning the Premier League title with no fans present would be "pretty strange".

Liverpool were 25 points clear of 2019 champions Manchester City when the league was shut down, on the verge of being crowned English champions for the first time in 30 years.

"Of course it would feel different because if you win any trophy and receive it without any fans there, it would be pretty strange," Henderson told the BBC.

"We still have work to do and we still need to perform at a high level right the way until the season finishes because we want to finish as strongly as we can to make sure it is a full season," he added.

Later on Wednesday, the Premier League announced four more positive findings from 1,008 tests of players and club staff.

That meant there had been just 12 cases detected from a total of 2,752 tests.

The small number of positive tests has raised hopes of a return next month.

In the second-tier Championship, just two positive tests were registered from 1,014 tests.

A series of issues including the restart date and plans in the event of a curtailment will be discussed when the 20 Premier League clubs gather again on Thursday.

A targeted return date of June 12 -- behind closed doors -- was described by Premier League chief executive Richard Masters last week as a "staging post".

Players and coaches have argued they will need more time to reduce the risk of injuries after such a long lay-off.

And some players have voiced fears over their safety and that of their families due to the virus.

Watford captain Troy Deeney has not returned to training after three positive cases were registered by the Hornets.

Kenin, Stephens To Play WTT Season Before Fans

LONDON (Dispatches) - Reigning Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin and 2017 US Open winner Sloane Stephens will compete in a 2020 World TeamTennis season played at a mountain resort with spectators starting July 12.

The nine-team U.S. circuit will stage its 45th campaign at The Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, from July 12-August 2, the league announced Tuesday.

With the WTA and ATP tours shut down into August due to the coronavirus pandemic, the move makes the WTT the first pro tennis circuit to resume play after the global outbreak of the deadly virus shut down the sport.

"All of us are extremely grateful to be able to play the 45th World TeamTennis season and present professional tennis to our sports-starved and tennis-starved audiences," said WTT chief executive Carlos Silva.

"The overwhelming feedback from our players is that they want to play WTT and are comfortable in doing so in a safe environment, which is our number one priority. West Virginia has among the nation's fewest cases of COVID-19."

The WTT plans at least three matches a day at the resort's 2,500-seat outdoor stadium with an indoor court to be installed as a backup option. West Virginia health guidelines will allow up to 500 spectators, a 20% capacity, to attend the matches.

The WTT plans a 63-match regular season from July 19-30 with the semi-finals August 1 and the championship match the following day.

The WTT will follow local and state government rules and adhere to safety protocols from the Centers for Disease Control, including COVID-19 testing and screening and protective gear such as facemasks.

Kobe Bryant's Induction to Hall Of Fame Postponed

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The late Kobe Bryant's induction into America's basketball hall of fame has been postponed to 2021, U.S. media reported.

Bryant, who died along with eight others in a helicopter crash in January, was scheduled to be inducted into the Massachusetts-based Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame on August 29.

Former NBA stars Tim Duncan, Kevin Garnett and six others are also slated to be enshrined next year due to the ongoing global coronavirus pandemic.

"We're definitely canceling," Hall of Fame spokesman Jerry Colangelo told ESPN on Wednesday. "It's going to have to be the first quarter of next year. (The board will) meet in a couple of weeks and look at the options of how and when and where."

Bryant died January 26 at age 41 in a helicopter crash in Calabasas, California that also claimed the life of his 13-year-old daughter, Gianna, and seven others.

Bryant was an 18-time NBA all-star, five-time NBA champion and three-time NBA finals MVP in a two-decade career with the Los Angeles Lakers.



Auger-Aliassime Signs Up For New UTS League

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Canadian teenager Felix Auger-Aliassime is the latest player to sign up for the Ultimate Tennis Showdown taking place in Nice next month, joining the likes of David Goffin and Fabio Fognini.

The event, thought up by Patrick Mouratoglou, coach of Serena Williams, offers a chance for professionals to compete while the ATP Tour remains shut down by the coronavirus pandemic.

"In these trying times, I believe that the Ultimate Tennis Showdown will offer players and fans an exciting environment for our sport to thrive in these ongoing circumstances," the 19-year-old Auger-Aliassime said.

"I'm always up for a challenge and I am really counting down the days until I can share the court again with some of the best guys in the world."

The UTS league, which will have no fans on site and adhere to strict health protocols, will start on June 13-14 at the Mouratoglou Academy and be held over five consecutive weekends with a total of 50 matches broadcast live.

Mourinho Does Not Expect to See Crazy Transfers After Virus

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tottenham boss Jose Mourinho has warned that the transfer market will look drastically different due to the coronavirus fallout, saying football will not be ready for "crazy numbers".

Spurs bought Steven Bergwijn for £27 million (\$33 million) from PSV in January, while also breaking their club record to sign Tanguy Ndombele for a reported £54 million last year.

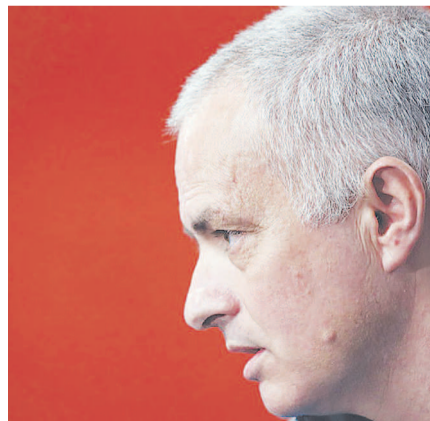
But Mourinho believes the Premier League and other leagues around the world will need a different approach to cope with the financial impact of COVID-19.

"It is normal you are going to have a different market," the 57-year-old told Sky Sports. "I don't see the world, and especially the football world, ready for some crazy numbers we are used to having and some crazy investments that sometimes some clubs and some leagues are used to doing."

"But my first question after that is: 'When will the transfer window be?' Because I don't think it will be July-August any more, it will obviously have to go further than that."

"If you ask me what I want in my club, I would like my club to be what I know it is going to be: sensible, balanced, not going to spend rivers of money, and we are trying to respect the situation, not just of football but of the world and society overall."

The Premier League is yet to set a date for a return and players have not resumed full-contact training.



Messi Looking Forward Eagerly to Weird La Liga Restart

MADRID (Dispatches)- Barcelona and Argentina captain Lionel Messi said he was eager to start playing again but thought La Liga games behind closed doors would feel "weird".

Messi, who after a few weeks confined like the rest of Spain by the coronavirus pandemic, is training with Barca again ahead of a planned resumption of La Liga behind closed doors on the weekend of June 12.

"We cannot think about what we are leaving behind this year. It is better to think about the future," said Messi on the website of sports brand Adidas.

"Like going back to day-to-day training, seeing your teammates, playing your first few games. No doubt it will be strange at first, but I am looking forward to competing again!"

He said playing without fans "implies a series of challenges. The preparation at squad level is the same as for any other match, but it is true that individually you have to train and get mentally prepared to play without people because it is very weird."

"It will be like starting over," he said. "Technically it will be the same season, but I think all teams and players will experience it differently."

Messi was due to lead Argentina this summer in the Copa America, where his country are joint hosts with Colombia, but in March, the competition was postponed to June and July next year.

