

According to Reports, the Iraqi Border Crossing Office Announced the Reopening of the Soomar-Mandeli Border in the Presence of Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi on Saturday

Vatican Ambassador to Iran Leo Boccardi Said That Iran Has Always Been Steadfast in Pursuing Peace for Centuries and Has the First Charter of Peace and Human Rights

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Assassination of Gen. Soleimani Clear Example Of U.S. State Terrorism

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's ambassador to the United Nations has dismissed the US assassination of top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in Iraq as a flagrant example of the United States' state terrorism.

Majid Takht Ravanchi said the crime makes the US government internationally responsible for it.

"The United States' killing of General Soleimani and his companions is seen as a criminal terrorist act by any standard," said the Iranian envoy in a letter to UN Secretary General António Guterres and the chairperson of the UN Security Council.

"In recent years and in line with the commitments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and UN Security Council resolutions on fighting terrorism, martyr Soleimani had a key role in helping the people and governments of some regional countries, at their own request, in defeating the most dangerous terror groups such as ISIS and other groups designated as terror groups by the UN Security Council," he said.

"The officials of the said countries had also overwhelmingly and repeatedly admitted that martyr Soleimani had taken action [in fighting terrorists]," said Iran's ambassador to the UN.

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Iran Oil Industry Not to Give Up



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Oil Minister Bijan Zangeneh said the message sent by today's contract between the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and a local oil company for developing Yaran Joint Oilfield is Iran will not give up under the US sanctions.

Speaking to reporters following a ceremony to sign the deal on Saturday, Zangeneh said: "The message of the agreement is that we stand up firm and do not give up."

Regarding the Iran-Turkmenistan gas dispute, Zangeneh said according to the ruling the by international arbitration, the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) was not subject to payment of any damages to the Turkmen side.

Elaborating on the gas dispute between National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) and Turkmen Gaz, he said the case concerned a trade contract between the two companies in which a dispute was created as the Turkmen side had failed to fulfill its commitments claiming that NIGC was in arrears with payment for the gas.

Zangeneh said, "We were unable to transfer the money due to the sanctions; Even the National Iranian Gas Company accepted had agreed to undergo interests that accrued on the basis of the contract due to non-payment of debt, and even part of this debt was paid in the form of goods and services, but Turkmen Gaz insisted on receiving the money in full. And in this regard, they did not show flexibility to negotiate. The National Iranian Gas Company raise the issue of arbitration and announced that if the case went to arbitration, the price of Turkmen gas should also be considered in the arbitration, because according to the National Iranian Gas Company, the price of Turkmenistan due to the additions to the previous contract, was high and unfair. On the other hand, NIGC had agreed that Turkmen Gaz failures to fulfill its commitments in terms of quality and quantity of the gas needed to be considered as well. In the end, they did not accept the proposal to raise the issue in arbitration, but sometime later, they took the case to arbitration."

The oil minister stated that what was decided in the arbitration was not a far-fetched result: "The arbitration decided that the National Iranian Gas Company should pay its debt to Turkmen Gaz, but the arbitration order did not impose any fines or damages on NIGC. On the other hand, the arbitrator agreed with a significant part of the claim of the National Iranian Gas Company regarding the fine related to the quantity and quality of Turkmen gas, so that this amount of the fine is deducted from the debt of the National Iranian Gas Company."

Reminding that Iran has not been able to transfer money due to the sanctions, Zangeneh added: "Again, there must be a discussion and a solution on how to pay Iran's debt. The government and people of Turkmenistan are friends and we want to work with this neighboring country in the long run. Trade disputes are raised and resolved internationally, and it is not a matter of saying who won, who lost, or who was frustrated. As the National Iranian Gas Company and Turkey's Butas Company went to arbitration and at the same time continued their friendly relations."

He said, "Also, based on the arbitration ruling, the two existing contracts between the two companies, part of which was not in Iran's favor and were imposed on us by Turkmenistan due to a gas shortage, were considered terminated."

In response to a question about the possibility of signing a new contract between the two companies, Zangeneh said, "This issue is considered in the context of long-term relations between the two countries."

The minister added, "Capacity building for the oil industry is a strategic matter. We have seen such problems before and God willing, we will overcome them and we need to build enough capacity for the day when we re-enter the market. As after the previous embargo, the world was surprised that Iran's oil industry returned to its maximum production capacity in less than four months."

Underlining the need to rely on Iran's capabilities and capacity to advance oil industry projects, the Oil Minister said, "For the Iranian Oil Ministry, the principle is to make maximum use of domestic manufacturing equipment and we have also notified contractors of this requirement."

Coronavirus Kills 188 More Iranians

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Health Ministry spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari said on Saturday that some 188 more Iranians have died from coronavirus disease (COVID-19) over the past 24 hours bringing the total deaths to 12,635.

Sadat Lari said that, with the 188 new victims, the country's total COVID-19 deaths mounted to 12,635.

Some 2,397 new cases of infection with the COVID-19 were found over the past 24 hours, some 1,739 of whom have been hospitalized, she added.

Sadat Lari noted that a total of 255,117 Iranians have been confirmed infected with the COVID-19, some 217,666 of whom have recovered and were discharged from hospital.

Some 3,338 other COVID-19 patients are in critical condition and being treated in intensive care units, the spokeswoman said.

She added that 1,947,114 tests have so far been carried out in Iran.

According to the spokeswoman, the provinces of Khuzestan, East Azerbaijan, Hormozgan, Khorasan Razavi, and North Khorasan Province are in the red.

The provinces of Tehran, Isfahan, Mazandaran, Golestan, Alborz, Lorestan, South Khorasan, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Zanjan, and Ilam are on alert.

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Russian Exports to Iran Continue to Grow

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - According to the latest figures released by Russia's Federal Customs Service (FTS) it exported \$692 million worth of goods to Iran from January to May, which indicates a 31 percent growth in comparison with the same period last year.

In the first five months of 2019 Russia's exports to Iran amounted to \$528 million showing another 31 percent growth compared with the same period in 2018. Russian exports to Iran have grown despite the drop in trade between Iran and its major partners such as China, India, Korea, Japan, Turkey and the European Union in 2019 and in the first five months of 2020.

During the same period, according to FTS figures, Iran exported goods worth \$275 million to Russia from January to May which has remained the same in comparison with the same period in 2019 but 15 percent less than in 2018.

The figures released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) show a drop of 44 percent in Iran's overall exports in the first three months of the current Iranian calendar year (beginning March 31) in comparison with the same period last year.

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Gov't Orders Ban on Public Gatherings Amid Surge in COVID-19 Cases

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian president has ordered a ban on all public gatherings in a bid to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus.

President Hassan Rouhani said on Saturday if there is a need for certain gatherings to be held, they must be held on a very limited scale. "Now it is not a time to hold festivals and seminars," he stressed in a meeting of the Headquarters of Fight against Coronavirus.

The president urged all businesses to conform to health directives issued with regards to the coronavirus outbreak. "Businesses and economic activities may continue only with full compliance with health protocols; there is no second way," he said.

The president underlined that Iranian researchers keep working to develop a vaccine for the virus. "Our scientists are trying to produce the necessary medicines and a vaccine for the disease caused by coronavirus," said the president.

He asked people infected with COVID-19 not to hide their disease. "Hiding the disease is a violation of others' rights," he noted. He urged all to work together closely as before to contain the disease.

The president noted there is no way to stop the spread of the virus other than abiding by health protocols.

He further expressed his gratitude to all government institutions and the Armed Forces as well as all others involved in the campaign against coronavirus.

Iran Rejects Any Effort To Destabilize Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Iran's Ambassador to Pakistan Mohammad Ali Hosseini said on Friday that the friendly and brotherly relations between two countries implied that Iran interpreted the security of Pakistan as its own security and strongly condemned and rejected any effort to destabilise this country.

Responding to a media query about ganglord Uzair Baluch and his dubious assertion on Iranian intelligence request, Hosseini clarified that the background of Iran's regional activities indicated that Tehran had always played a positive role in producing, protecting and assuring regional security.

"This role has also been applied for countering with destabilizing and insinuating elements through suppressing terrorist groups," the ambassador said in a statement. "Iran has defined and arranged its relationship with Pakistan in accordance with mutual respect and mutual benefits," he added.

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Serbia's President To Visit Tehran

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic will pay a visit to Iran after the normalization of situation caused by the coronavirus outbreak, Iran's envoy to Belgrade said.

Rashid Hassanpour said in an interview with IRNA that Vucic is going to visit Iran. Highlighting the history of more than 80 years of diplomatic ties between Iran and Serbia, the ambassador said Vucic' planned visit is proof that the bilateral relations are on the "friendship" track and are growing.

The presidential visit to Iran will take place immediately after the resolution of problems caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the envoy said, adding that at least 10 cooperation agreements will be signed during the visit. In a telephone conversation with Vucic in June, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani called for the expansion of relations with Serbia in all fields, stressing that the US' cruel sanctions should not be allowed to ruin the bilateral ties between Tehran and Belgrade, particularly their economic interaction.

Rouhani also hailed Iran and Serbia's common stances against unilateralism, called for closer interaction in the international organizations, and said, "The two Iranian and Serbian nations have always stood against foreign intervention to protect their independence, and have not allowed the aliens to interfere in their internal affairs."

President Congratulates Mongolian Counterpart on National Day

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Hassan Rouhani, in a message on Saturday congratulated his Mongolian President Khaltmaagiin Battulga on National Day.

President Rouhani expressed hope that bilateral relations will further promote in the light of joint efforts of both governments.

He wished health and success for President Battulga and prosperity for the Mongolian nation.

Zam Discloses More Details of Activities Against Iran

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Ruhollah Zam, the head of an anti-Iran website and Telegram channel who was arrested in 2019, provided more details of his activities against the Islamic Republic, including cooperation with French intelligence agencies.



In an interview with IRIB, Zam, the founder and supervisor of Amadnews channel, confessed that his Telegram channel had played a role in anti-government unrest in Iran.

He said when he lived in France, he had contacts with representatives of foreign espionage services that operated under the guise of university professors or doctors.

Zam said the French Police had undertaken to protect his life and French organizations had offered to provide financial support for him and his cyber activities in order to create chaos in Iran.

Highlighting the anti-Iran activities of hostile media such as the BBC, Radio Farda, Voice of America, and Deutsche Welle, Zam said they are directly funded by their respective governments to act against the Islamic Republic.

He said while the BBC was in charge of fueling the 2009 protests in Iran and caused

many damages to the Iranian people and the country, the British channel was not greatly involved in anti-Iranian activities in 2017 and was replaced by Amadnews.

Zam also said that during his residence in Malaysia, he was contacted by a go-between from former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia Adel al-Jubeir, who had plans to establish a new anti-Iranian network similar to Iran International.

Amadnews was known for disseminating incriminating content against the Islamic Establishment, insulting the sanctities of Iranian Muslims, and publishing fake news in order to drive a wedge between the Iranian people and government.

Iran arrested Zam in 2019 following a complicated intelligence operation by the IRGC's Intelligence Organization, which involved deceiving intelligence services of some Western countries especially France, under whose guidance and protection Zam was operating.

Oman Renders Medical Aid to Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian Ambassador to Muscat Mohammad Reza Nouri Shahroudi said Oman has sent medical and health aid to Iran.

Referring to the outbreak of coronavirus and efforts to fight pandemic, Nouri Shahroudi said historic and long-standing relations between Iranian and Omani people and governments made two countries establish cooperation in fighting coronavirus.

The benevolent Omani people and Iranian nationals in Oman have sent some medical and health equipment, including 10 ventilators and over 300,000 face-masks, to Iran.

Appreciating Omani government for its cooperation, Iranian envoy said over the last few months, Oman has rendered significant amount of medical and health equipment to Iran.

North Yaran Developed at Lower Cost Than Contract Capex

TEHRAN (Shana) -- The chairman of the board of directors of Tadbir Energy Development Group said that the contract for the development of North Yaran Field was signed with a capital expenditure of \$700 million, but it was put into operation with \$580 million investment.

Addressing a ceremony to sign a contract by the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and Persia Oil and Gas Industry Development Company in Tehran on Saturday, Gholamhossein Nozari said Azadegan field, as a future pole of oil production and the main support of the economy, can be the drivers of the country's economy, and Yaran field is a part of the same field (Azadegan)."

He pointed out that by digging descriptive wells, the connection between North and South Yaran fields will be determined, adding: "Implementation of phase one of Yaran (North) field development project, for reasons such as identifying and equipping appropriate manpower, project management, use of domestic manufacturing, which accounted for about 80 percent of the equipment installed in Yaran, major use of indigenous forces and the like was a huge achievement."

The chairman of the Tadbir Energy Development Group noted that the North Yaran field development contract was one of the few buyback contracts that was implemented at a lower cost than the contract capex.

According to Nozari, in the negotiations with Russia's Rosneft Company, an estimated \$700 million was proposed for the second phase of the Yaran project, but in the negotiations with the Petroleum Engineering and Development Company and the savings considered, the cost of the contract was considered less than that figure.

He said his company had so far drilled over 57 wells, expressing hope that construction of downhole pumps would be maximized domestically in order to enhance oil recovery.

"Carrot Cake" to Take Part In 29th Nevada Film Festival

TEHRAN (MNA) --The Iranian screenplay, "Carrot Cake" by Iman Davari will take part in the 20th Nevada Festival Film in California, United States.

The screenplay, "Carrot Cake" by Iranian writer has entered the competition section of the 29th edition of the Nevada Film Festival.

The Nevada International Film Festival has been running in Nevada, California since 2011 and is known as the 'Sundance of the Sierra' in California for its emphasis on supporting independent cinema and showing creative films and screenplays.

This festival is one of the top 50 festivals in the world according to MovieMaker magazine for the last 2 years and also the third festival from the top 10 American festivals according to the 'USA TODAY' newspaper.

The festival will take place from August 28 to September 4 in Nevada, United States.

It is worth mentioning that earlier the "Carrot Cake" has already entered the judging section of the American Screenwriting Conference.

UN's Condemnation of U.S. Assassination Too Late



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Although too late to announce, the UN confessed the U.S.' assassination of Lt. Gen. Qasem Soleimani was a violation of international law, the Spokesman for Iran's Guardian Council said.

In his press conference on Saturday, Abbas Ali Kadkhodaei said in response to a question of Iran Press on the latest follow-ups over General Soleimani's assassination case and said the relevant authorities in Iran's foreign ministry are pursuing the case.

Kadkhodaei made the remarks that the UN official's confession on the US' assassination of Iran's General Soleimani is worthwhile to consider, given that the US act was against international law and international body.

The late Commander of Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani, who had traveled to Iraq on the official invitation of the Iraqi officials, was assassinated by the US drone attack in Baghdad on January 3, 2020, along with the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis as well as eight companions.

Majlis Investigating Natanz Site Incident

QOM (IRNA) - Head of National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of the Iranian Parliament Mojtaba Zolnouri said various dimensions of incident in Natanz nuclear site is under investigation and the cause of incident has been identified.

Speaking to reporters, Zolnouri said there are different scenarios with regard to the incident in Natanz site.

He also referred to Iran-China 25-year-old cooperation agreement, saying Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif will also attend Sunday meeting of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission.

During the meeting, IAEA BoG resolution, US attempts for taking Iran's case to UNSC and Iran-China agreement will be discussed, he added.

Earlier, Spokesman of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Behrouz Kamalvandi said that reconstruction of the damaged building will get underway at Shahid Ahmadi Roshan Natanz Complex with bigger plot of land for advanced equipment are supposed to be built there.

IRGC Improves Accuracy of Homegrown Rocket

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Ground Force has turned a 122mm homegrown rocket into a guided weapon by increasing its accuracy, a commander said.

Speaking to Tasnim, Director of the Research and Self-Sufficiency Jihad Organization of the IRGC Ground Force General Ali Koohestani said the 'Arash' 122mm rocket has become a weapon with pinpoint accuracy following the recent tests.

The commander said the IRGC experts have managed to transform Arash into a guided rocket, saying the homegrown rocket has hit the targets with pinpoint accuracy in a series of recent tests on the field.

The Arash 122mm rockets can now hit the targets with an accuracy of 7 meters, he noted, saying the weapon would be mass produced for delivery to the Defense Ministry.

Weighing 64 kilograms, Arash has a range of 22 kilometers and is equipped with a 19 kg warhead with great destructive power that detonates targets within a range of 25 meters.

Before being upgraded, the 122mm rocket was fired with launchers with a pack of 40 rockets to compensate for low accuracy, but the pinpoint accuracy would allow the artillery units to launch a limited number of rockets to destroy a target.

Smuggled Iranian Antiquities to Return Home from Austria

TEHRAN (IFP) - Ancient artefacts belonging to Iran have been handed over to the Iranian representative in Austria via legal formalities.

The antique objects had been illegally taken out of Iran by profiteers and smuggled into Austria.

The antiquities were delivered to the Iranian representative in Austria on July 9, 2020 under a judicial cooperation agreement between the two countries with the cooperation of Iran and Austria's Interpol offices.



Present at the ceremony were top Vienna police officials as well as the Iranian representative, who expressed gratitude to Austria's police and prosecutor's office for their cooperation in discovering and returning the antique items.

He said the cooperation was a sign of deep-rooted historical and cultural relations between the two countries, calling for expansion of those ties.

The artifacts will be returned to Iran as soon as possible.

Commander Highlights U.S. Footprints in Anti-Iran Threats

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian Border Guards Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Ali Goudarzi said on Saturday that Iran is facing with complicated threats posed by the US and foreign saboteurs just like Iraqi-imposed war.

Goudarzi said that the main mission of border guards is discovering the roots of contraband and fighting cross-border smuggling of fuel and weapons.

He hailed good coordination between border guards units in defensive and security fields.

Iranian border guards could safeguard borders by taking advantage of experienced forces, he noted

Stressing the presence of anti-Iran elements in social media, Goudarzi said that Iran must be pioneer in cyber space.

Iran, Pakistan Discuss Developing Bilateral Ties

BEIJING (IRNA) - Iranian Ambassador to China Mohammad Keshavarzadeh in a meeting with his Pakistani counterpart Naghmana Hashmi reviewed expansion of mutual cooperation.

"Deeply honored to meet today once again H.E. Ms. Hashmi, Ambassador of #Pakistan to China," Keshavarzadeh wrote on his Twitter account on Friday.

"In an atmosphere of true friendship, which marks two countries' historically outstanding connectedness," he added. "I wish Amb Hashmi all the success at the end of her tenure in Beijing," Iranian envoy noted.

During the meeting both sides conferred on developing cooperation and also regional issues.

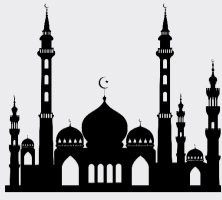
Commander Stresses Importance of Non-Oil Exports in Sanction Era

GOLESTAN (IP) - The Commander of Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Headquarters stressed non-oil exports as one of the measures that can increase the country's resilience to sanctions.

Saeed Mohammad on Friday said that the export of non-oil goods is of strategic importance.

Mohammad referred to the diversification of non-oil exports and said that there are good capacities for exports in the agricultural, industrial and mining sectors, to bring currency for the country. Still, pointing to the inadequate level of traded exchange with the neighboring countries, he noted that border provinces with the cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can increase Iran's share in the export of non-oil goods to neighboring countries.

The Commander of Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Headquarters told the IP correspondent that the headquarter has entered different areas including mining because Iran is one of the top 10 mining countries in the world, yet Iran's explorations from mines are one-tenth of the world's total.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:10
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:42
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:16
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:59

33. It is He Who created the Night and the Day, and the sun and the moon: all (the celestial bodies) swim along, each in its rounded course.
34. We granted not to any man before thee permanent life (here): if then thou shouldst die, would they live permanently?
Surah 21. The Prophets (33 - 34)

Iran's Share of Qatar Imports "Only 3%"

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran-Qatar Joint Chamber of Commerce Mr. Adnan Mousapour says Qatar has opened its doors to the world and the country imports goods worth \$30b per year and Iran only accounts for 3 percent of its imports.

Speaking to ILNA, Mousapour said that although Qatar's doors are open to the world for imports of goods and the country's imports are around \$30b annually, Iran's share of exports to Qatar is insignificant and is around 3 percent of the total figure, expressing hope Iranian trade officials would take the issue seriously for boosting share of Qatar's market.

He noted that Iran's trade with Qatar after the Coronavirus pandemic and closure of borders are underway, adding that Iran's exports to Qatar are limited to few agro products and foodstuff but it has not been halted. He added that exports of other goods usually do not happen or they are done under certain condition.

On the effects of Coronavirus on Iran's exports to Qatar, he said he has no exact statistics and it should be announced by Iran's Custom Administration but agro products and foodstuff have not faced any considerable fall.

He urged all Iranian traders not to enter Qatar market without signing official contracts, and before taking action, they should think about repatriation of the forex from their



exports because in recent weeks, some traders have been struggling in returning their forex.

Mousapour added that in trade with Qatar, different foreign currencies like dollar and toman are used but dollar is the dominating currency in Qatar.

He also criticized the government about its rhetoric towards the exporters on repatriating the forex, saying that currently it is only Iranian government which has taken such a punitive rhetoric against exporters in the current condition.

He noted that Iran's major exports are in two big, and small and medium parts, and small and medium part earns the country some \$10b and it is earned in countries like Iraq, UAE and the Central Asia and repatriation of forex is crucial for exporters to run their businesses and it leads to boost in occupation in the country.

Mousapour added that the government blames exporters for recent forex problem is a wrong address to the economic activists and decision-makers, and recent challenges have nothing to do with exporters because in some cases, it takes one year to repatriate the forex resulted from the exports.

Exporting Iranian Gas To China Is Not Practical

TEHRAN (ILNA) - The former Iranian Ambassador to China and Switzerland, Seyed Mohammad-Hossein Malaek believes that Iranian gas exports to China via Pakistan are only possible on paper.

He said that the fact is that Islamabad still does not want to receive the gas from Iran which its pipeline has been built to its border for many years.

"In practice, Iran has a long way from sending gas to China and it is not possible to connect to China from Pakistan."

Malaek added "It was logical that Iranian gas will flow to India via Pakistan, but this project has stalled completely."

The Iran-Pakistan pipeline project - also called Peace Pipeline - is a 1,957-kilometer pipeline that will deliver natural gas from Iran's South Pars fields to Pakistan's two major cities -- Karachi and Multan.

The political analyst reiterated "The best route to export gas to the big Chinese market was through Turkmenistan; that means we deliver gas to Turkmen customers in the Persian Gulf and in return, they will send Iranian gas to China, which for some reason it hasn't happened yet."

Last year, Iranian first Vice-President Es'hagh Jahangiri said that the country is ready to export gas to China through the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline.

Quarterly Aluminum Ingot Output Up 63%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN- Production of the aluminum ingot in Iran grew by 63% during the first quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-June 20) compared to the same period of time in the past year.

As reported by IRNA, Iran produced 101,195 tons of aluminum ingots in the three-month period of this year.

The country's aluminum ingot output stood at 36,025 tons in the third Iranian month Khordad (May 20-June 20), showing a 73% rise compared to the same month of the previous year.

Production of the aluminum ingot in the country is planned to increase 63 percent by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2021).

Iran's major aluminum producers produced 275,716 tons of aluminum ingots in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), according to the data released by the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry.

The country's aluminum ingot production in the past year fell eight percent in comparison to the figure for its preceding year.

PGSR, Symbol of Self-Sufficiency and Crystallization of Resistance Economy



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Governor General of Hormuzgan Province during his visit to Persian Gulf Star Refinery (PGSR) termed the refinery symbol of self-sufficiency and crystallization of resistance economy, and hailed the personnel and managers of the refinery for their endeavors.

Mr. Fereydoon Hemmati during his visit said due to the capabilities of engineers, the youths, scientists, managers and decision-makers in the country, Persian Gulf Star Refinery was not affected by the sanctions and it turned into being the biggest refinery of condensates in the world.

He visited oil storages of Shahid Rajaei Port and Shahid Bahonar of Bandar Abbas while he was being accompanied by some senior oil officials and officials of the refinery.

Hemmati further said today Iran has turned from a gasoline importing country into a gasoline exporting one which can meet its domestic market and also export its products, and all these are important measures to achieve goals of resistance economy.

He added that gasoline was one of the sanction tools of enemies that we fortunately became self-sufficient in its production and thwarted enemies' plot.

He said at first, foreigners were to construct a refinery and they considered Persian Gulf Star Refinery as a fist of machineries fit for turning into a museum of sanctions era.

Hemmati hailed Iranian experts and youths as well as managers and decision-makers in the country which did not let it happen and it now has become the biggest condensates refinery in the world.

He also pointed to the launch of Persian Gulf Star and improving the quality of its gasoline by producing euro 4 and 5 gasoline production which helped the environment and air-pollution.

Swedish Companies Committed to Their Deals



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Sweden Ambassador to Tehran says despite sanctions, Swedish companies continue fulfilling their obligations in Iran, and cooperation in medical, pharmaceutical, foodstuff, telecommunication and auto sectors are still underway.

Speaking to Iran Chamber of Commerce's news website after a meeting with Iranian economic activists, Mr. Mattias Lentz said that Sweden was once Iran's major trade partner and their trade reached a good level after signing the JCPOA but the reimposition of sanctions by the U.S. caused problems to re-appear one after the other.

He added that if there is a problem, there is definitely hope, too. He added that currently Iran's economic relation continues in medical, pharmaceutical, foodstuff, telecommunication and auto sectors.

He added that at the current condition, both sides may be unable to continue economic cooperation like before the return of sanctions but there is still a hope and anything can happen in the future and holding such meetings are aimed at keeping the hopes alive.

He admitted that the cooperation in the telecommunication field has become restricted due to sanctions but Sweden has always had active presence in Iran and many Swedish companies are seeing the possibility for expanding cooperation in Iran.

Lentz reiterated that some of Swedish companies which have agreements with Iran will keep them and try to safeguard their presence in Iran and they are currently fulfilling their obligations but signing and implementing new contracts in the current condition is difficult.

He reiterated that Swedish companies have not left Iran during the sanctions and have been committed to their agreements.

He expressed hope by lifting sanctions, Iran and Sweden would witness boom in their bilateral economic cooperation.

He added that the outbreak of Coronavirus has also affected economies but Sweden has tried to minimize the effects of the virus through taking proper measures.

NIOC Awards Joint Field Development to Local Firm

TEHRAN (Shana) - The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has signed a contract with Persia Oil and Gas Industry Development Company (POGIDC) for the development of Yaran joint oilfield.

The document was signed on Saturday morning in a ceremony held in Tehran in the presence of Iranian Minister of Petroleum Bijan Zangeneh, the CEO of the Petroleum Engineering and Development Company (PEDEC), Touraj Dehghan, representing NIOC, and Jafar Hejazi, CEO of PGOIDC.

The contract is aimed at development and integrated operation of the Yaran joint field pursuant to a heads of agreement (HoA) signed earlier for studying the field.

The agreement, which is signed with the aim of maximizing the potential of Iranian exploration and production companies, aims to achieve additional cumulative production of about 39.5 million barrels over 10 years in the field, with direct capital expenditures of \$227 million and operating costs of an estimated \$236 million. The developer of the project is required to provide all the necessary financial resources for implementation of the project.



the enhanced oil recovery (EOR) method.

Back in October 2016, an agreement was signed between the National Iranian Oil Company and Persia Oil and Gas Industry Company to study the field.

Development of Yaran joint field, which is located 130 km southwest of Ahvaz and west of South Azadegan field and is shared with Majnoon Field in Iraq, has been pursued in two sections: south and north.

North Yaran Development Project is the first 100% Iranian buyback project that was implemented by Persia Oil and Gas Industry Company with the aim of producing 30,000 barrels per day of crude oil. It was officially put into operation in November 2016 and about a year later, oil was extracted from the southern part of Yaran field by PEDEC.

Border Restrictions Only With Two Countries

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Border seal-off for the purpose of quarantine has remained only with two neighboring states, Iranian Customs Administration spokesman said on Saturday.

Trade exchange with all neighboring states, except for the two countries, is underway, Roohollah Latifi told IRNA.

With enforcing protective and health protocols in coordination with two neighboring states, the remaining borders will reopen, the spokesman said.

Since its outbreak in December, 2019, the coronavirus pandemic created obstacles to holding many world events, meetings, etc. It also led to closure of border crossings as pre-emptive measure to counter the deadly virus which has killed 562,000 up to now.

Four land border crossings of Sarakhs, Bajiran, Lotfabad and Incheboron with Turkmenistan in east of the Caspian Sea and northeastern Iran are still closed, but, Sarakhs and Incheboron cross-border terminals are open as they have railroad connections as well, Latifi noted.

About borders with southwestern neighboring country of Iraq, the spokesman said normal trade exchange will be resumed in Sumar border market with Iraq within next few days.

The official hoped that Khosravi and Chazabeh border markets with Iraq would soon reopen after agreement on enforcing satisfactory protective and health protocols. He further noted that the Iraqi government started reopening the border points stage by stage to meet its people's fundamental needs.

Iran Calls for Regional Cooperation to Deal With Locust Challenge

TEHRAN (MNA) - Criticizing problems in bilateral cooperation to cope with the challenge of desert locust attacks, the Iranian Embassy's representative in Pakistan called for strengthening regional cooperation to deal with desert locust.

Referring to the cooperation and timely coordination of the two countries in identifying the upcoming crisis, Somayeh Karimdoost said that the two countries have also prepared a charter to deal with locust issue, however, external interference is creating hurdles in the implementation of the bilateral mechanism.

Locust swarms have already devastated crops and it is feared that they can cause greater damage so regional cooperation in this regard must be taken seriously without any discrimination, she added.

She also called on the World Food Organization (WFO) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations to play a more effective role in assisting countries affected by desert locusts and facilitate cooperation between them.

Despite the problems in the availability of pesticide spraying aircraft due to a one-sided approach of some countries, Iran has made every effort to control locust attacks and help its neighbors to prevent the damage caused by this problem, said Karimdoost.

She added that if such coercive behavior continues against Iran in dealing with the locust challenge it will have a negative impact on the region especially the neighboring states of Iran.

WHO Team Heads China to Probe Origin of COVID-19



GENEVA (Dispatches) - Two World Health Organization (WHO) experts are heading to China to interact with scientists there to study the transmission of COVID-19 or coronavirus pandemic from animals to humans, the global health body chief said on Friday.

Addressing a webinar, the WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the global health experts will also prepare a scientific plan with their Chinese counterparts to identify the zoonotic source of the COVID-19 virus.

"As we continue to tackle the pandemic, we are also looking into the origins of the virus," he said.

Lebanon Spiralling Out of Control

GENEVA (AFP) - Lebanon's economic crisis is getting out of hand, the UN rights chief warned Friday, calling for urgent internal reforms coupled with international support to prevent further mayhem.

Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said the social fabric of the country was at risk as vulnerable populations are threatened with extreme poverty.

"This situation is fast spiralling out of control, with many already destitute and facing starvation as a direct result of this crisis," she said in a statement.



Russia, China Veto Approval of Cross-Border Aid for Syria



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Russia and China have vetoed a last-ditch attempt by members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to extend approval - which expires on Friday - for humanitarian aid to be delivered across two border crossings into Syria from Turkey for the next six months.

The UN says millions of Syrian civilians in the mostly rebel-held northwest of the country depend on the humanitarian aid delivered from Turkey, describing it as a "lifeline".

The remaining 13 council members voted in favour of the German-Belgian draft resolution on Friday. The UN authorisation, which allows the body to distribute aid to displaced Syrians without needing permission from Damascus, is due to expire later in the day.

The 15-member council has been split, with most members pitted against Syrian allies Russia and China, who want to cut the number of border crossings to one, arguing those areas can be reached with humanitarian help from within Syria.

This was the third failed vote on the issue by the council and the second veto by Russia and China this week.

The UNSC first authorised the cross-border aid operation into Syria six years ago, which also included access from Jordan and Iraq. Those crossings were cut in January due to opposition by Russia and China.

On Tuesday, Russia and China vetoed a bid to extend for a year-long approval which would have allowed for the maintenance of two crossing points on the Turkish border - at Bab al-Salam, which leads to the Aleppo region, and Bab al-Hawa, which serves the Idlib region.

Russia then failed to win enough support on Wednesday for its proposal to authorise one crossing for six months. Germany and Belgium, two non-permanent Council members responsible for the humanitarian aspect of the UN's Syria dossier, presented the draft on Thursday that was put to vote on Friday.

"We categorically reject claims that Russia wants to stop humanitarian deliveries to the Syrian population in need," Russian Deputy UN Ambassador Dmitry Polyanskiy wrote in a tweet ahead of the vote.

The council was expected to vote on a second Russian draft text to approve aid deliveries for one Turkish crossing for one year. Al Jazeera's diplomatic editor James Bays reporting from the UN said if nothing is agreed on by the end of Friday, there would be no aid crossing the border for a time.

UN director Louis Charbonneau reacting to the vote said on Twitter: "Russia and China again cynically vetoed renewal of Syria UN cross-border aid mandate, this time hours before it expires. 'They politicise humanitarian aid like they accuse others of doing elsewhere. Millions of Syrians rely on aid. This could be virtual death sentence for many.'"

Erdogan Reopens Hagia Sophia for Muslim Worship



ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced Friday that the Hagia Sophia, one of the architectural wonders of the world, would be reopened for Muslim worship, sparking fury among Christian leaders and in neighbouring Greece.

His declaration came after a top Turkish court revoked the sixth-century Byzantine monument's status as a museum, clearing the way for it to be turned back into a mosque.

The UNESCO World Heritage site in Istanbul, a magnet for tourists worldwide, was first constructed as a cathedral in the Christian Byzantine Empire but was converted into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453.

The Council of State, Turkey's highest administrative court, unanimously cancelled a 1934 cabinet decision and

said Hagia Sophia was registered as a mosque in its property deeds, in its detailed reasoning seen by AFP.

Greece branded Turkey's move an "open provocation to the civilised world".

TR #Turkey's top court has ruled that #Istanbul's 6th-century Hagia Sophia's conversion from a mosque to a museum in the 1930s was "unlawful", paving the way to its reconversion into a house of worship.

"The nationalism displayed by Erdogan... takes his country back six centuries," Culture Minister Lina Mendoni said in a statement.

The Russian Orthodox Church said Turkey had ignored "millions of Christians" with its move.

Hagia Sophia has been a museum since 1935 and open to believers of all faiths.

Transforming it from a mosque was a key reform under the new republic born out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. The landmark ruling will inflame tensions not just with the West and its historic foe Greece but also Russia, with which Erdogan has forged an increasingly close partnership in recent years.

Serbia, Kosovo Renew Very Difficult Dialogue

PARIS (Dispatches) - The leaders of Serbia and Kosovo on Friday held their first talks in 18 months on resolving one of Europe's most intractable territorial disputes, agreeing to a face-to-face meeting next week on the "very difficult" process.

Kosovo's Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic held a video summit that was also joined by French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

These discussions will be followed by more online talks on Sunday between Hoti and Vucic as well as EU officials, and then their meeting in Brussels on Thursday, a French presidential official said after the talks.

"There are very difficult perspectives for the outcome of this dialogue, but there is a commitment by everyone to proceed step by step," added the official, who asked not to be named.

Serbia has refused to recognise Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence after the province broke away in the bloody 1998-99 war that was ended only by a NATO bombing campaign against Serb troops.

But both Kosovo and Serbia have been facing mounting pressure from the West to reboot negotiations, where resolving the impasse is seen as crucial for Belgrade's bid to join the EU.

Also online for Friday's talks were EU foreign policy chief Josep Borell and Miroslav Lajcak, the EU's special envoy for dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina.

The new push comes after Kosovo's President Hashim Thaci was charged last month with war crimes by prosecutors in The Hague. Hoti told the online summit that the normalisation of relations "can be achieved only if Kosovo and Serbia respect each other's statehood".

"We believe that the dialogue has no alternative. We are ready and committed to engage on the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue on an equal footing."

Netherlands Takes Russia to European Court Over MH17 Downing

THE HAGUE (AFP) - The Netherlands said on Friday it would take Russia to the European Court of Human Rights for its role in bringing down Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 over Ukraine, killing nearly 300 people.

The Dutch government's move is designed to support cases brought by the relatives of dozens of victims to the Strasbourg-based court, Foreign Minister Stef Blok said.

The Boeing 777 travelling from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur was blown out of the sky by a surface-to-air missile fired from rebel-held eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014.

"Achieving justice for the 298 victims of the downing of flight MH17 is and will remain the government's highest priority," Blok said in a statement.

"By taking this step today, bringing a case before the ECHR and thus supporting the applications by the next of kin as much as we can, we are moving closer to this goal."

There was no immediate reaction from Moscow.

The lawsuit is a rare example of one state taking another to the European Court of Human Rights, with just 24 such cases since 1953.

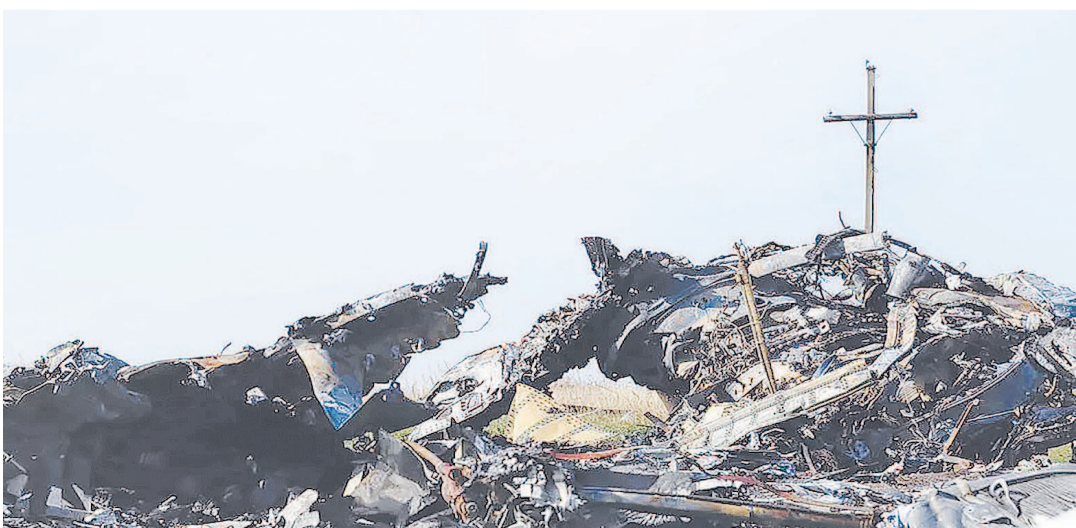
Ten of those so-called "inter-state" cases involve Russia. Most cases are brought by individuals or groups, such as the one lodged by the relatives of at least 65 Dutch MH17 victims in 2018.

Their complaint demanded that Russia take responsibility for the incident.

Both the Netherlands and Australia have previously said they hold Russia responsible for shooting down the plane.

The Netherlands would share all "available and relevant information about the downing of flight MH17" with the court, Blok said, adding the complaint would represent "all 298 victims, of 17 different nationalities".

The Dutch will also inform the UN Security Council about the move, he said.



Lavrov Warns of Growing Nuclear War Threat



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The risk of a nuclear war has risen significantly in recent years because of the US unwillingness to reaffirm its impossibility, the Russian foreign minister said on Friday.

"We are particularly concerned about the two-year-old refusal of the Americans to reassert the fundamental principle, the postulate that there can be no winners in a nuclear war, and, accordingly, it can never be unleashed," Sergey Lavrov said during his speech at the video conference of Primakov Readings Forum in Moscow.

He argued that Washington is destroying the international arms control mechanism to have "hands free in choosing means of pressure, including force, at any point of the globe -- don't matter what the price is" with the ultimate goal of getting the global dominance and win "in what they call the rivalry of major powers."

"This is particularly disturbing against the background of doctrinal shifts in the attitudes of the American political leadership, which now allow limited use of nuclear weapons," Lavrov said.

Washington takes practical steps to support the doctrinal shifts, developing and increasing the low-yield nuclear arsenal, he added.

Lavrov said the US used "Russian threat" to make necessary amendments, saying Russia has a secret part of its military doctrine, which the minister denied.

For Moscow's requests to reaffirm the impossibility of a nuclear war, handed in written, Washington responds that it is still examining the document, but by their comment the Russian side perceive that it would like to weaken the categoricalness of this axiom, he said.

In the recent years, the US called off its sign under a number of arms control treaties, including the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces, Open Skies, Anti-Ballistic Missile treaties, considered as pillars of international security.

The last existing agreement -- Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty -- will expire in 2021 and Lavrov predicts that the U.S. will not agree to expand it.

Shanon
(adviser)

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J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

Niavaran Apt (\$5000)
1000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, J, & pkg
marble floor
Fully Furn

Parsian

(\$2400)
Nice view
Gheitarieh
220sq.m, 3bdrs
S/pool, S, J
gym, & F.F

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

(\$10000)
Zaferanieh bldg
5storey, 20bdrs
S/pool, S, J, pkg
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Italy's May Industrial Output Rebounds More Than Expected

ROME (Reuters) - Industrial output in Italy rebounded much more strongly than expected in May after collapsing in the previous two months due to a coronavirus lockdown, data showed on Friday, and the economy minister forecast further gains in June and July.

National statistics institute ISTAT reported a production increase of 42.1% in May from the month before, almost doubling the median forecast of a 22.8% rise in a Reuters survey of analysts.

May's data followed a drop of 20.5% in April (revised from -19.1%), and a record decline of 28.4% in March.



IEA Sees Oil Output Recovery

PARIS (Dispatches) - Although crude prices have rebounded from coronavirus crisis lows, oil execs and experts are starting to ask if the industry has crossed the Rubicon of peak demand.

The plunge in the price of crude oil during the first wave of coronavirus lockdowns – futures prices briefly turned negative – was due to the drop in global demand as planes were parked on tarmacs and cars in garages.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) forecast that average daily oil demand will drop by 8 million barrels per day this year, a decline of around 8% from last year. While the agency expects an unprecedented rebound of 5.7 million barrels per day next year, it still forecasts overall demand will be lower than in 2019 owing to ongoing uncertainty in the airline sector.

Some are questioning whether demand will ever get back to 2019 levels. "I don't think we know how this is going to play out. I certainly don't know," BP's new chief executive Bernard Looney said in May. The COVID-19 pandemic was in full swing then with most planes grounded and white-collar workers giving up the commute to work from home.

"Could it be peak oil? Possibly. I would not write that off," Looney told the Financial Times.

The concept of peak oil has long generated speculation.

Mostly, it has been focused on peak production, with experts forecasting that prices would reach astronomical levels as recoverable oil in the ground runs out.

But in recent months, the concept of peak demand has come into vogue, with the coronavirus landing an uppercut into fuel demand for the transportation sector followed by a knock-out punch from the transition to cleaner fuels.

Michael Bradshaw, professor at Warwick Business School, said environmental groups are already lobbying to prevent the Paris agreements becoming another casualty of the pandemic, stressing the need for a Green New Deal for the recovery. "If they are successful, demand for oil might never return to the peak we saw prior to COVID-19," he said in comments to journalists. The transport sector may never fully recover, Bradshaw posited. "After the pandemic, we might have a different attitude to international air travel or physically going into work," he said.

Other experts say we haven't reached the tipping point yet, and might not for a while.

"Many people have said, including some CEOs of some major companies, with the lifestyle changes now to teleworking and others we may well see oil demand has peaked, and oil demand will go down," IEA executive director Fatih Birol said recently. "I don't agree with that. Teleconferencing alone will not help us to reach our energy and climate goals, they can only make a small dent," Birol added while unveiling a recent IEA report.

Moez Ajmi at consulting and auditing firm E&Y dismissed as "science fiction" the idea that a definitive drop in oil demand could suddenly emerge. He expects a slow recovery in demand even if the coronavirus leaves the global economy weakened. That weakness would also likely slow adoption of greener fuels.

"It will take time for fossil fuels, which today still account for some 80% of primary global consumption to face real competition" from rival energy sources, he said. Meanwhile, the oil industry could face financing challenges.

Bronwen Tucker, an analyst at Oil Change International, says the industry is now under pressure from investors.

After "a pretty big wave of restrictions on coal and some restrictions on oil and gas, the risks to oil and gas investment right now feel a lot more salient," she said.

The industry is already writing down the value of assets to face up to the new market reality of lower demand and prices.

Royal Dutch Shell said this past week that it will take a \$22-billion charge as it reevaluates the value of its business in light of the coronavirus.

Last month, rival BP reduced the worth of its assets by \$17.5 billion.

Oil Production Resumes in Libya After Months-Long Shutdown

TRIPOLI (AFP) - The Libyan National Oil Company announced Friday the resumption of oil production and exports after a nearly six-month shutdown due to conflict dividing the country.

"The NOC has lifted force majeure on all oil exports from Libya," the company said in a statement, adding that production will take time to return to previous levels. "The increase in production will take a long time due to the significant damage to reservoirs and infrastructure caused by the illegal blockade imposed on January 17," the statement said.

Libya, which has the biggest proven reserves of crude in Africa, is torn between the rival powers of the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli and strongman Khalifa Haftar, who rules over the east and part of the south.

Since January, groups loyal to Haftar, who was pushing an offensive to seize the capital, have been blocking the production and export of oil from the country's most important fields and terminals, claiming they want a fair distribution of the oil revenues managed by Tripoli. The NOC had invoked force majeure in response -- a measure used in exceptional circumstances that allows the NOC to be exonerated from liability in the event of non-compliance with oil delivery contracts.

NOC chief Mustafa Sanalla welcomed the resumption of oil production, saying: "We are very glad finally to be able to take this important step to national recovery," according to the statement.

A first ship was due to start loading crude from the oil port Al-Sidra in the east of the country, the statement added.

Libya produced 1.22 million barrels per day before January and had planned to increase production to 2.1 million bpd by 2024, the NOC said this week.

But due to infrastructure damage caused by the months-long blockade, production could drop to 650,000 bpd in 2022, it said.

Earlier this month, the NOC had reported talks, "supervised by the United Nations and the United States", to allow the resumption of production, the halt of which caused losses of more than \$6.5 billion, according to the company.

Oil exports are the source of almost all state revenue in Libya, which has been mired in chaos since the ouster and killing of dictator Moamer Kadhafi in a 2011 NATO-backed uprising.



Japan's Economy to Shrink at Fastest Pace in Decades This Fiscal Year

TOKYO (Reuters) - Japan's economy will shrink at the fastest pace in decades in the year through March 2021, forcing the government to compile another stimulus package to cushion the blow from the coronavirus pandemic, a Reuters poll showed on Friday.

Many respondents predicted the Bank of Japan's (BOJ's) next policy step would be to expand stimulus, but they do not see the pandemic triggering a banking sector crisis this year.

The world's third-largest economy is forecast to contract 5.3% this fiscal year, a July 3-9 poll of over 30 economists shows, the most it has shrunk since comparable data became available in 1994.

It will rebound 3.3% next year, according to the poll.

The economy will grow at an annualised 10.0% pace in the current quarter of the calendar year 2020 after having shrunk 23.9% in the second quarter ended June, the poll shows.

"It would take two to three years for economic activity to return to normal levels in Japan as its overseas markets are likely to continue suffering from the spread of the virus," said Atsushi Takeda, chief economist at Itochu Research Institute. Two-thirds of economists polled expect Japan to compile its next stimulus package this year to ease the pain on companies and households. Japan has so far rolled out two packages totalling \$2.2 trillion.

Arata Oto, market economist at Societe Generale Securities Japan, expects the next stimulus package to be worth about 1-2% of the country's gross domestic product. The package "would aim at accelerating Japan's recovery ... once there are more signs the pandemic is beginning to subside, or to help further cushion the blow from COVID-19 if the likelihood of a second wave heightens", he said.

Globally, more than 12 million have been infected by the virus and over half a million people have died. In Japan, more than 21,000 people have been infected and over 900 killed.

Policy support for hard-hit firms should help counter worries about Japan's financial system, over 90% of economists surveyed said.

Asked about BOJ's next move, 26 of 40 economists said they expect it to expand its stimulus, with 18 saying it would happen this year and five predicting it would be next year.

At next week's rate review, the BOJ is expected to roughly maintain its view the economy will gradually recover this year from the virus-led downturn, sources have said, even as fears of a second wave of infections cloud the outlook.

Japan's core consumer prices, which exclude volatile fresh food but includes energy costs, will drop 0.4% this fiscal year and rise 0.3% next fiscal year, the latest poll showed.

ADB, IEA to Scale Up Collaboration on Sustainability



SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has renewed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the International Energy Agency (IEA) to scale up collaboration and advance progress on sustainability with increased focus on energy sector resilience in Asia and the Pacific, Trend reports with reference to ADB.

Under the 3-year agreement, the two organizations will share knowledge and best practice in energy sector data and analysis, on-the-ground engagement, capacity building, technology, and innovation, among other areas.

This will help to overcome critical knowledge and experience gaps blocking the development of sustainable energy systems in ADB's developing member countries and enhance IEA's data collection and capacity building efforts in Asia and the Pacific.

ADB first signed a 3-year MOU with IEA in March 2017 to facilitate knowledge and analytical work to advance clean energy development in ADB's developing member countries. As part of this, ADB worked with IEA to study power system flexibility in India to integrate more solar and wind energy in the grids.

The renewal agreement was signed on the occasion of IEA's Clean Energy Transitions Summit. Last month, IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol delivered the keynote address at ADB's 15th Asia Clean Energy Forum 2020.

IEA is a knowledge partner of ADB's leading annual energy forum. ADB invested more than \$23 billion in clean energy, including both sovereign and non-sovereign initiatives from 2008 to 2019. Last year, ADB's climate financing reached a record \$6.5 billion, meeting its target of doubling its annual climate investments from 2014 one year ahead of schedule.

Under Strategy 2030, ADB is targeting \$80 billion in cumulative climate financing from its own resources by 2030 and for at least 75 percent of its country operations to feature climate adaptation and mitigation initiatives.

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members - 49 from the region.

UK Economy to Slump over 10%, Debts to Surge - Moody's

LONDON (Reuters) - Britain will suffer the sharpest peak-to-trough economic slump of any major economy this year, rating agency Moody's warned on Friday, and ramp up national debt as a share of GDP by nearly a quarter.

Moody's said the UK government's latest 30 billion pound (\$37.9 billion) stimulus package, announced this week, would aid a gradual economic recovery but add further pressure to the UK's fiscal position.

"The UK's public debt ratio will likely rise by 24 percentage points of GDP or more relative to 2019 levels," a group of Moody's top analysts wrote in a note.

"We forecast a contraction of 10.1% in the UK's GDP for this year, but expect a gradual subsequent recovery on the back of the easing in lockdown measures, with growth rebounding to 7.1% next year".

Moody's rates Britain Aa2 with a negative outlook following a series of cuts since the country voted to leave the European Union in mid 2016.

Britain is on course to take state borrowing to World War Two levels with 160 billion pounds of coronavirus emergency measures, though the government has said finances will return to a sustainable footing over the medium term.

Moody's said high-frequency indicators suggested that economic activity has gradually begun to recover after reaching a trough in April, when GDP is estimated to have contracted by just over 20%.

"Our forecast estimates a sharper peak-to-trough contraction for the UK than for any other G-20 economy, taking account of our view that lingering uncertainty around Brexit will hold back the recovery in the second half of the year."

It added the country's Autumn budget, which usually happens in the last months of the year, would be key to providing greater clarity on the UK's future path of government indebtedness.

Thailand Plans Economic Rehab Center for Post COVID-19

BANGKOK (Reuters) - Thailand plans to set up a center to help revitalize an economy hit by the coronavirus outbreak and is considering more relief measures for small businesses, government officials said on Friday.

A rehabilitation centre will work similar to the government's health-focused COVID-19 administration, but its task will be addressing economic issues, said Kobsak Pootrakool, deputy secretary-general of the Prime Minister's Office.

"From now on, it must be a balance between disease issues and the mouth and stomach of the people," he told reporters.

The government plans to extend debt moratoria for small-and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) from October as the pandemic is likely to continue for a while, he said after meeting the prime minister, economic agencies and the private sector.

Although Thailand has had relatively few cases and no domestic transmissions for more than one month, the global impacts of the pandemic have hit the economy badly.

The central bank predicts the economy will shrink by a record 8.1% this year.

A planned 50 billion baht (\$1.6 billion) fund to aid SMEs will be considered by the state planning agency, which is supervising some spending under the government's 1 trillion baht of borrowing to help recovery from the pandemic.

Finance Minister Uttama Savanayana said he had asked to increase credit guarantees to help more than 40,000 small firms borrow 45 billion baht from banks.

"The most urgent issue for SMEs is liquidity because it directly affects jobs," he said, adding SMEs employed 80% of the total workforce.

Police Seize 483 kg of Opium

TEHRAN (MNA) – The police forces of the eastern Iranian province of South Khorasan have busted 483 kilograms of opium in the city of Ghayen.

Police Chief of South Khorasan province Second Brigadier General Majid Shoja said on Saturday that the consignment was discovered in a car on route to the northern parts of the country.

Two vehicles have been seized in this regard, he added.

According to the police chief, two smugglers have been arrested and handed over to the judicial officials.



IMF Outlines Plans for Inclusive Economic Recovery From Covid-19 Crisis

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The International Monetary Fund said it has outlined plans for essential work until October to help countries mitigate the coronavirus crisis, restore stability, and prepare for strong and sustainable recovery.

The Work Programme will prioritize emergency financial support, analysis of the crisis impact and will formulate the necessary policy responses, the IMF said in a statement.

With countries facing mounting debts, the fund will discuss a framework to guide lending in the current environment of inherent uncertainty.

The IMF will also examine options for a temporary increase in access limits to its resources in order to provide additional room for emergency financing, while managing related risks.

"The Covid-19 crisis continues to take a heavy human and economic toll. The outlook remains highly uncertain as many countries are facing the economic fallout of the pandemic," the IMF said. "This has led to an unprecedented surge in demand for Fund support and a strain on staff resources."

In June, the IMF projected that the world economy will contract 4.9 per cent this year, down 1.9 percentage points below its April forecast, before expanding 5.4 per cent next year.

The pandemic, which forced governments to close borders and shut all but essential businesses to stem the spread of the virus, has taken a heavy toll on the global economy.

The IMF projects a cumulative loss to the global economy of over \$12 trillion (Dh44tn) over this year and next, as a result of the virus. Although most economies have started opening up, the rate of infection is still on the rise in Americas and Asia, including the US, Brazil and India.

Two thirds of governments globally, including Saudi Arabia, have topped up their fiscal support to offset the effects of the pandemic, pumping about \$11tn into their economies, compared with \$8tn in April.

In its latest directive, the IMF pledged to continue supporting debt-ridden countries and said it will implement relief from debt servicing under the G20 Debt Service



Suspension Initiative (DSSI). Later this year, the IMF and the World Bank will jointly prepare an assessment on a possible extension of the DSSI.

The IMF will also work toward extending the second tranche of the Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust (CCRT) – a fund which allows the lender to provide grants for debt relief to the poorest countries suffering from natural disasters.

The fund also pledged to help countries restore "macroeconomic stability and foster a strong and inclusive recovery", under the assumption that the pace of direct crisis work will relent somewhat in the months ahead, it said.

The lender will examine financial sector developments and risks then recommend regulatory and supervisory approaches to reinforce stability, it said.

"The crisis offers an opportunity to reshape the global economy and put it on a sound, sustainable, and greener footing," it said. "It will be important to now resume work on long-term global and country economic health, resilience, and preparedness for future shocks."

India Plans To Enhance Trade With Bangladesh



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India is adopting a multi-pronged strategy to enhance trade and business partnership with Bangladesh amid Beijing's recent efforts to woo Dhaka with duty-free access to its products.

While Chinese trade concessions can push Bangladesh into a "dual deficit and debt trap", India is activating various connectivity initiatives for seamless movement of Bangladeshi products to the landlocked northeastern states and other parts of India, ET has learnt.

There is a major push to connectivity initiatives via sea ports, inland water transport, rail and highways that will enable Bangladesh to connect with Bhutan and Nepal markets too along with India, according to experts who focus on cross-border trade and connectivity issues. Both India and Bangladesh are undertaking various measures to restore the pre-1965 rail and other connectivity links.

Last week's decision to resume border trade via West Bengal despite opposition from the Mamata Banerjee government will help increase Bangladeshi exports to India after a hiatus, said sources. Foreign minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday wrote to his Bangladeshi counterpart reinforcing special ties.

India had offered duty-free access to several Bangladeshi products a decade before the Chinese decision and that step helped reduce deficit in Dhaka's trade with New Delhi, said a source while stating that India's terms and conditions from trade concessions to loans are more favorable. Beijing has mulled over years before giving trade concessions to Dhaka and the step can push it towards a debt trap, said the above mentioned source.

Bangladesh should ideally tap into south and southeast Asia markets for favorable return.

Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia. Bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh has grown steadily over the last decade. India's exports to Bangladesh in FY 2018-19 stood at \$9.21 billion and imports during the same period was at \$1.04 billion. In comparison, Bangladesh's trade deficit with China is hugely tilted in Beijing's favour. China exported goods worth \$1, 3638 million to Bangladesh in 2018-19 but Bangladesh's exports stood at \$568 million. One-fourth of Bangladesh's total import basket comprises Chinese goods and the bilateral trade deficit has seen a 16-fold increase over the last two decades, ET has gathered.

Reliance to Load Venezuelan Oil Cargo Under Fuel Swap Deal

LONDON (Reuters) - India's Reliance will load its first cargo of Venezuelan crude in three months this week in exchange for diesel under a swap deal the parties say is permitted under the U.S. sanctions regime on the Latin American country, according to a Reliance source and a shipping document from state oil firm PDVSA.

Washington has exempted some Venezuelan oil trade from sanctions, when transactions are in exchange for fuel and food or to repay debts rather than for cash. But that trade slowed as the U.S. tightened restrictions and refiners, shippers and insurers have been steering clear of Venezuela to avoid any risk they may fall foul of sanctions.

Washington aims to deprive Venezuelan socialist President Nicolas Maduro of his main source of revenue with the sanctions, which have driven Venezuelan oil exports to their lowest level since the 1940s.

Reliance gave the U.S. State Department and the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) notice of the diesel swap and received word back that the policies that allowed the transaction were still in place, the Reliance source told Reuters.

Reliance has previously said that its supplies of fuel to PDVSA in exchange for crude were permitted under sanctions.

An oil tanker named Commodore would load the cargo of crude in Venezuela and ship it to India, the tanker's manager NGM Energy said.

"All details of the transaction and transportation were shared with U.S. authorities, who confirmed that the U.S. policy authorizing such transactions remained in place," NGM Energy said in a statement to Reuters.



"The shipment is made in connection with humanitarian exchange of oil for diesel fuel."

The Commodore is loading a 1.9-million barrel cargo of crude for Reliance at Venezuela's main oil port of Jose, according to an internal PDVSA cargo schedule seen by Reuters.

The Liberian-flagged Commodore was at the Jose Terminal on Thursday, ship tracking data on Refinitiv Eikon showed.

The U.S. State Department, Treasury's enforcement arm OFAC, and PDVSA did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Reliance has a swap deal to provide diesel to Venezuela in exchange for fuel, but has not received a cargo of crude since April. Sources at Indian refiners told Reuters earlier this year they planned to wind down their purchases of Venezuelan oil to avoid any problems with supply due to sanctions.

Other long-time customers of PDVSA, including Italy's Eni (ENI.MI) and Spain's Repsol have continued taking cargoes of Venezuelan crude this year under permission granted by the U.S. Treasury Department to exchange the oil for diesel supply as part of debt repayment deals, according to sources from the companies.

NGM Energy also manages the Voyager I tanker, which the United States removed from its list of sanctioned vessels last week after NGM and the ship's owner Sanibel Shiptrade said they would increase measures to ensure vessels complied with international sanctions.

Michel Proposes 5b Euros Brexit Emergency Fund

LONDON (Reuters) - European Council President Charles Michel said on Friday that EU talks with Britain on their new relationship were "not easy" and countries, regions and industries will face disruptions from 2021 whether there is a new pact or not.

European Council President Charles Michel holds a news conference on the EU budget for 2021-27 ahead of an EU leaders summit, in Brussels, Belgium July 10, 2020. Kenzo Tribouillard/Pool via Reuters

Laying out his compromise proposal for a multi-billion-euro economic stimulus for the EU to recover from the coronavirus pandemic, Michel said a new Brexit "adjustment reserve" of 5 billion euros (\$5.64 billion) was also needed to "counter the unforeseen consequences" of Britain's departure.

Michel said the EU's executive European Commission should review by February 2021 the first consequences of the new reality between Britain and the bloc, and the money could then be used to support those most affected in Europe.

"Hope for the best, prepare for the worst: a sound principle in politics," Belgian Prime Minister Sophie Wilmes said in reaction to the proposal that will be debated by the 27 national EU leaders in Brussels next week.

"Proposal for a new Brexit adjustment reserve to counter consequences in member states worst affected is a very good signal to start the negotiations," said the leader of one of the countries, along with Ireland, most likely to seek such aid.

Britain left the EU in January but is still covered by a status-quo transition phase until the end of the year to allow time to negotiate new ties from trade to security.

Negotiations have so far stalled over differences on fisheries and fair competition guarantees, among others. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson only wants a loser trade pact with the EU from 2021, while the bloc seeks much closer links in many other areas, including security.

Talks this week in London between EU and British negotiators, briefly joined by Johnson at a No.10 dinner, brought no breakthrough and more negotiations are due next week in Brussels.

Assassination of Gen. Soleimani...

FROM PAGE 1

He said the terrorist act of assassinating general Soleimani was committed upon direct orders by U.S. President Donald Trump, saying the move was a blatant violation of the principles of international laws, especially the principles stipulated in the UN Charter.

"This illegal and, at the same time, adventurous move by the US reveals that Washington's claim of fighting terrorists is a hollow one. In fact, the United States is fighting those who are combating terrorists," he noted.

"This hypocritical policy which runs counter to the United States' international commitments in fighting terrorism, including those under UN Security Council resolutions, seriously undermines regional and international efforts in the war on international terrorism," he said.

Takht Ravanchi said the designation part of a government's military as a "Foreign Terrorist Organization" is in breach of the principles of international law and the UN Charter, including the principle of equality of sovereignty of governments, and can, by no means, be regarded as a pretext to use threat or force against them, including in other countries' territories.

He roundly rejected all unfounded arguments by U.S. officials to justify the criminal assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and categorically condemned that "heinous crime."

"The Islamic Republic of Iran reserves every right under international law to adopt the necessary measures to safeguard its innate right to legitimate defense," he said.

"This very provocative move by the United States was made to increase tension in the region up to point where it would get out of control, and obviously this country should accept full responsibility for all its consequences," said the ambassador.

"In the meantime, the UN Security Council should discharge its responsibility and condemn this illegal criminal act given the grave repercussions of this dangerous military adventurism of the US for international peace and security," he noted.

"I should emphasize that the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially the Qods Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), which have always been at the forefront of the campaign against terrorism and extremism in the region, are, in line with the international obligations and rights of the Islamic Republic of Iran, set to decisively follow in the footsteps of martyr Lieutenant General Qassem Soliemain in fighting terrorist groups in the region until they are fully eradicated," he noted.

Iran Rejects...

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"The friendly and brotherly lasting relations between the two countries imply that Iran interpret the security of Pakistan as its own security and strongly condemns and rejects any effort to destabilize this country," he continued.

"As repeatedly mentioned in high military and security bilateral meetings, Iran has ultimate readiness to cooperate with their Pakistani brothers for eliminating any security threat in common borders," the statement said.

"Tehran emphasizes on essential and urgent need of removing any possible misunderstanding which mainly happens due to the deceptive and malicious efforts of third parties. For sure, developing relations between Tehran and Islamabad don't comply with their desire."

Russian Exports to...

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The data provided by Iran's customs are only limited to Iran's non-oil exports. Since the United States imposed full oil sanctions Tehran does not release oil export data.

The value of Iran's non-oil exports in this period amounted to \$6.36 billion while imports worth \$7.6 billion also show a drop of 27 percent. The drop in imports has not helped the trade balance which is now in the negative.

Germany Confirm Match Against Spain in September

BERLIN (AFP) - Germany host Spain in Stuttgart this September in their first match since the coronavirus pandemic with Cologne and Leipzig to host internationals this autumn, the German FA confirmed Friday.

The home match against the Spanish on September 3 in the Nations League A will be the first time Germany has played in 2020 after friendlies against Spain and Italy were cancelled in March, as was May's away match against Switzerland.

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Ricciardo Limpes Away After Big Crash in Practice

VIENNA (Dispatches) - Daniel Ricciardo limped away in pain on Friday after crashing his Renault heavily during second free practice for this weekend's Styrian Grand Prix.

The 30-year-old Australian lost control of his car at Turn Nine and bumped backwards into the barriers, destroying much of the rear of his vehicle.

After a lengthy delay, the McLaren-bound driver hauled himself out of the cockpit and, limping heavily, walked out across the gravel trap.

Champions League Draw Offers Possibility Barcelona-Bayern Clash

PARIS (AFP) - Barcelona and Bayern Munich will meet in a blockbuster Champions League quarter-final should both sides make it through, after Friday's draw for the latter stages of the competition which will be played out in Lisbon in August following a long suspension because of the coronavirus.

Barca and Bayern, who have each won five European Cups, are hoping to be among the eight teams who will head to the Portuguese capital for a 'Final Eight' mini tournament behind closed doors, with the final on August 23 at Benfica's Estadio da Luz.

Bayern, who won their eighth straight German Bundesliga title last month, already have one foot in the quarter-finals having won 3-0 away to Chelsea in the first leg of their last-16 tie in March, while Barcelona have more work to do after a 1-1 draw with Napoli in the first leg in Italy.

"We all know what's happened, but football is back now and we're up for the Champions League campaign," Guillermo Amor, Barcelona's director of institutional relations, told UEFA.com.

"We've got a final to play against Napoli and we're fully focused on ending the season the best way we can."

Meanwhile, if Manchester City can finish the job in their last-16 tie against record 13-time European champions Real Madrid, Pep Guardiola's team will go on to a quarter-final against either Juventus or Lyon.

City won 2-1 in Madrid in the first leg in March and are well placed to advance to the mini tournament in Lisbon in what could be their last chance to win the coveted trophy for a while -- they are due to be banned from the Champions League for the next two seasons for breaches of Financial Fair Play rules, pending the outcome of an appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

German League Confirm 2020-21 Bundesliga Season To Start September 18

BERLIN (AFP) - The German league confirmed Friday that the 2020-21 Bundesliga season will start on September 18 with the traditional January winter break shrunk to a fortnight amid a string of changes forced by the coronavirus pandemic.

Having originally been scheduled to begin on August 21, the new season in Germany's top tier nows start four weeks later and should finish on May 22, three weeks before the European Championships is due to start.

The German Cup final, which traditionally ends the season in Germany, is planned for Thursday, May 13 at Berlin's Olympic Stadium, a week before the league season finishes.

The Bundesliga winter break has also been halved, from four weeks last season, to just a fortnight with the last round of league matches in 2020 played on the weekend of December 19-20 and the restart on January 2-3.

German fans will be able to watch football right up until Christmas with the second round of cup games due to be held in mid-week on December 22 and 23.

Werder Bremen Decide To Keep Coach Kohfeldt

BERLIN (AFP) - Werder Bremen confirmed Friday that Florian Kohfeldt will remain head coach next season after narrowly avoiding an historic relegation from the Bundesliga in a play-off.

The club's board confirmed both Kohfeldt, 37, and sports director Frank Baumann keep their roles despite needing away goals in the relegation play-off to preserve Bremen's record as the club with the most season in Germany's top flight.

"After very open, very honest and a very self-critical review of a season in which we did not achieve our goals... the personnel constellation will continue," said board chairman Klaus Filbry.

Kohfeldt said it had been a "crap season, happy ending" after Bremen's 2-2 draw at Heidenheim last Monday in the relegation/promotion play-off, second leg, kept them up after a goalless first leg.



all remaining last 16 second legs are due to be played on August 7 and 8.

The winners will advance to the Final Eight, which will be held as a unique straight knockout tournament in Lisbon due to the difficulties caused by the coronavirus.

The draw threw up the possibility of a Clásico semi-final, with Barcelona and Madrid on a collision course to meet in the last four should both make it that far.

The other side of the draw is clearer. First-time quarter-finalists RB Leipzig of Germany will meet Atletico Madrid, runners-up to city rivals Real the last time the Champions League final was played in Lisbon in 2014. Atletico knocked out holders Liverpool in the last 16.

The winners of the Leipzig v Atletico quarter-final will face either Paris Saint-Germain or Atalanta in the last four. None of those teams have ever won the trophy, and only Atletico have been to the final before.

"It is a difficult draw. Atalanta are a team who love to attack and score lots of goals," said PSG coach Thomas Tuchel. "We still have a good few weeks to prepare. It's exciting."

The quarter-finals will be played between August 12 and 15 in the Portuguese capital, with matches shared between the Estadio da Luz and Sporting's Estadio Jose Alvalade. The semi-finals are scheduled for August 18 and 19.

All games are set to be played without spectators after UEFA confirmed on Thursday that "matches should take place behind closed doors until further notice" because of the uncertain health situation around Europe.

The situation in Lisbon itself is particularly concerning, with lockdown restrictions reimposed last week on 19 neighbourhoods across the northern periphery of the city as virus cases increase at a worrying rate.

However, UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin has dismissed fears that an alternative plan to complete the tournament may be required, saying last week "there is no need for a Plan B".

This season's final was initially supposed to be played in Istanbul in late May before the Covid-19 crisis took hold. The Turkish city will now host the 2021 final instead.

De Gea Proud to Beat Schmeichel Record at Man Utd

LONDON (AFP) - David de Gea has spoken of his pride after surpassing Peter Schmeichel's appearance record for an overseas player at Manchester United.

The Spanish international, who joined the club in 2011, kept a clean sheet on his 399th appearance for United on Thursday as Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side won 3-0 at relegation-threatened Aston Villa.

"Sorry to Schmeichel," he told mufc.com. "It's great. That means I've been here a long time and I've been playing really, really well to the top level so I'm really, really proud. I'm happy to play for this club for that many games. Hopefully I have another 400 games coming. So I'm really, really happy."

Solskjaer's team -- unbeaten in 17 games in all competitions -- moved to within one point of the Premier League's top four after goals from Bruno Fernandes, Mason Greenwood and Paul Pogba.

Fifth-placed United are a point behind Leicester, who they face on the final day of the season, and two adrift of Chelsea as they bid to return to the Champions League.

But with four games remaining De Gea, 29, said the job needed to be completed.

"Of course we are very confident now but we haven't done anything yet," the goalkeeper said. "We have some important games coming now so we need to be very, very focused and keep the level that we showed today and in the last four games."

Liverpool Captain Henderson Out for Rest of Season



Henderson was forced off in the midweek 3-1 win over Brighton following a collision with Yves Bissouma but the Reds boss revealed surgery is not needed and expects the midfielder to return in time for next season.

"Hendo is the best possible of all bad news -- it is a knee injury but no surgery needed but he will not play any more in the latter stages of this season but I am pretty positive he

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp confirmed on Friday that captain Jordan Henderson's season is over due to a knee injury.

will start with us the new season," said Klopp. Premier League champions Liverpool, who host Burnley on Saturday, are on course for a record points tally.

They have 92 points, eight short of Manchester City's record of 100 points from two seasons ago, with four games to play.

Klopp, speaking at his pre-match press conference, said the skipper would still be the man to lift the Premier League trophy.

"It was an awful moment when he went down with injury," he said "You saw he knew something happened which shouldn't have happened."

"It was a real mood-killer. He deserves to lift the trophy and he will lift the trophy."

Real Madrid in Sight of Title After Beating Alaves

MADRID (AFP) - Real Madrid could win La Liga on Monday after a routine 2-0 win over Alaves on Friday put them within touching distance of the title.

With suspended skipper Sergio Ramos sitting in the stands, Karim Benzema took over the armband and then penalty duties, firing in from the spot before teeing up Marco Asensio to add a second at the Alfredo di Stefano Stadium.

After restoring their four-point advantage at the top of the table, the pressure is back on Barcelona. If Barca fail to win away at Real Valladolid on Saturday, Madrid will clinch the title with two games to spare by beating Granada on Monday at Los Carmenes.

Yet even if Madrid have to wait, it seems inevitable they will host the trophy given they also boast the superior head-to-head record against Barcelona with three games left.

Madrid can afford to draw two of those, even if Barcelona manage three victories out of three.

After five consecutive defeats Alaves never looked likely to cause an upset and another loss leaves them hovering above the relegation zone, only three points ahead of Real Mallorca, who have hope after their win over Levante on Thursday.

Real coach Zinedine Zidane will be relieved all the same, particularly as he had to do without a string of key players.



Organizers Revamp Wimbledon Men's Seedings

LONDON (Dispatches) - The men's singles seedings will revert to the world rankings at next year's Wimbledon, after almost two decades of being based on grass-court form, organizers announced on Friday.

The All England Lawn Tennis & Croquet Club (AELTC) said they had taken the decision after consultations with various player groups.

Next year's Championships will run from June 28 to July 11 after the 2020 edition was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Given the quality of competition, entertainment and modern grass courts, following detailed discussion with the player groups, the AELTC has decided that the grass court seeding formula used since 2002 has served its time," they said in a statement.

"From The Championships 2021, seeding for the Gentlemen's singles draw will be based solely on ranking."

"There will be no change to the method of seeding for the Ladies' singles draw."

The AELTC has also decided to allocate money to those players, based on world rankings, who would have either played in the qualifying tournament or made the main draw automatically for this year's event.

They were able to due to being covered by insurance for cancelling the Grand Slam tournament.

