

President Lauds Iran Central Bank's Efforts to Meet Basic Demands

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani praised the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) for its efforts to cope with the domestic demands and provide the necessary funding amid the severe international conditions.

In a telephone conversation with the governor of the Central Bank of Iran Abdolnasser Hemmati on Friday, Rouhani was briefed on the latest measures and developments in the process of providing foreign currency financing for basic and necessary commodities in Iran.

The president was also informed about the details of the CBI's efforts to repatriate foreign currency earned from exports, the CBI's use of various resources at its disposal, and its strategies to supply the basic and necessary products that the country needs.

Rouhani commended the CBI for satisfying the necessary domestic demands under the difficult international conditions according to the plans formulated by the administration, the government's official website reported.

For his part, Hemmati expounded on the process of the CBI's activities for open market operation in money and capital markets.

The latest report by the Central Bank of Iran shows that the monthly fluctuation in the producer price index, which is a leading indicator, has fortunately stood at minus 0.8 in the month of Farvardin (March 20-April 19), Hemmati added.

Iran's drug production exceeds 23% growth last year

Statistics of the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade showed that 48.2 billion human drugs were produced in the country last year [from March 21, 2019 to March 20, 2020], registering a 23.7 percent growth as compared to the same period of last year.

In the same period, 604,500 tons of detergents were produced in the country, showing a 5.1 percent decline as compared to a year earlier, the ministry added.

In addition, domestic factories succeeded in producing 36,600 tons of pesticides, recording a 37.2 percent growth as compared to the same period of last year.

Iran eyes resumption of border exchanges with neighbouring countries

The Iranian president says border exchanges and transportation of commodities with neighbouring countries should be resumed while observing health protocols. In a phone conversation with Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami, President Hassan Rouhani referred to his recent talks with some heads of state, including those of neighbouring countries, saying they welcomed the resumption of border exchanges and the transportation of goods.

President Rouhani ordered the minister to promptly adopt the necessary measures for the resumption of border exchanges in full compliance with health protocols.

During the phone conversation, the president was briefed on the latest situation of transport in the country during the implementation of the smart social distancing plan. President Rouhani also stressed the need to draw up creative plans with regards to the smart social distancing plan in the transport domain. "The social distancing plan as recommended by the health ministry should make it obligatory to use face masks in such a way that it both allays people's concerns and at the same time stem the spread of the disease," said the president.

President Rouhani further underscored the need to finish unfinished plans and projects in the country despite the current tough economic conditions caused by the United States' unfair sanctions as well as the consequences of the coronavirus outbreak.

"The necessary measures should be adopted to finish projects which are more than 80 percent complete as soon as possible," he added.

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Basic income is vital for the precariat, and for society; Guy Standing

The proletariat long ago ceased to be a radical progressive force, which it was a century ago, when it led the struggle for a welfarist version of industrial capitalism. Today, the radical potentially transformative class is the precariat, which is growing in every part of the world.



Guy Standing, (born 9 February 1948) is a British professor of Development Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies

(SOAS), University of London, and co-founder of the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN). Standing has written widely in the areas of labour economics, labour market policy, unemployment, labour market flexibility, structural adjustment policies and social protection. His recent work has concerned the emerging precariat class and the need to move towards unconditional basic income and deliberative democracy.

Key demands were to reconceptualize what we mean by 'work', and to move away from a total focus on 'labour'. The social democrats and labourists of Labour Parties and Labour Unions had been the progressive force in the early 20th century, and in my view, this was a historical error.

Below is the ILNA's interview with this authoritative thinker about the international worker's day, the epidemic of COVID-19 and the question of the proletariat.

In "The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class", you talk about the notion of an emerging class of people facing insecurity, moving in and out of precarious work that gives little meaning to their lives. It seems that this new class of people is increasing daily. What sort of politics should be taken to action in order to move toward a progressive strategy of redistribution and income security?

In the follow-up book, 'A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens', I posed the rhetorical questions: What set of demands as a manifesto would the progressive part of the precariat make, and how would that differ from one by the proletariat one hundred years ago, had they drawn up such a manifesto? The Precariat



Charter had 29 policies, centred on reviving a sense of the future, or reviving the enlightenment values of freedom, equality and solidarity.

Key demands were to reconceptualize what we mean by 'work', and to move away from a total focus on 'labour'. The social democrats and labourists of Labour Parties and Labour Unions had been the progressive force in the early 20th century, and in my view, this was a historical error.

Putting 'jobs' and 'Full Employment' on a pedestal, as the over-riding goal, was an exercise in alienation. But if we focus on creating the space, opportunity, and conditions in which everybody can pursue their own sense of occupation and work, including the precious activity of unpaid care work, then one is led to promote basic income or a new form of an income distribution system, along with a resurrection of the commons. So, my subsequent writing has focused on basic income and The Plunder of the Commons, published last year.

The work on basic income has been a preoccupation for several decades and sadly has been given a new impetus and urgency by the coronavirus pandemic. Basic income is now vital for the precariat, and for society.

The proletariat is a classical

important concept in Leftist thought. If in the past the proletariat included industrial workers as well as peasants, today the term can cover a huge range of socio-political classes, from refugees to college students who know even before entering the labor market that there is no place for them in society. One danger of this situation is the tendency of this unstable class towards various forms of extremism. How can this risk be avoided?

It makes no intellectual sense to use the term 'proletariat' to cover all people who rely on labour for their livelihood. It is too vague to be analytically or politically useful. In the Marxist or socialist tradition, the proletariat referred to workers with the famous 'two freedoms' - free of the means of production and free to hire themselves out in full-time labour. A key concept in thinking of the proletariat is 'proletarianisation' - the process of habituation to full-time labour. Ironically, social democrats, socialists, and communists in the 20th century did all they could to support proletarianization. They sought to obtain 'generalised labour', and in the process surrendered the rhetoric and values of freedom and equality.

In any case, the proletariat long ago ceased to be a radical progressive force, which

it was a century ago, when it led the struggle for a welfarist version of industrial capitalism. Today, the radical potentially transformative class is the precariat, which is growing in every part of the world. The great potentialist that while the precariat is internally divided into what I have called Atavists, Nostalgics and Progressives, it is the growing progressive part of the precariat that is intuitively looking for a way of living and working that is non-labourist, a psychological distancing from labour. This is profoundly ecological and democratic.

ILNA: With the current crisis of COVID-19, many analysts believe that a global recession is waiting for us. This, of course, means a darker future for the working class. What measures should we consider to deal with the uncertain future ahead? Would the idea of "Basic Income" be a practical solution in this regard?

I have always argued that a basic income system is justifiable fundamentally for ethical reasons - to promote social justice, enhance liberal and republican freedom, and to provide basic security for all. In my books on the precariat, I advocated it as a way of enabling the precariat to obtain freedom, security and enough resources to be able to obtain the key assets of a Good Society.

Iran, Turkey to talk on border closure on Monday

Head of Iran-Turkey Joint Chamber of Commerce Mehrdad Saadat Dehghan told "Iran's relation with Turkey is strategic and important and the country should not damage it with hasty actions over the closure of Turkey's border."

Speaking to ILNA about the latest development about the closure of the border by Turkey, Saadat Dehghan said that borders with Turkey are still closed and nothing has changed, adding that after talks with some related ministries in the country, they were urged to lift the pressure from the chamber's shoulder. He urged them to resolve the problem which has put the exporters and producers in limbo and they do not know about the future of their trades. Saadat Dehghan added that officials of both countries are to have a video-conference talk on Monday to find a solution to resolve the problem.

He added that representatives of all organization's bodies who are involved in the trade will participate in this video-conference.

Reacting to the letter written by Head of Iran's Chamber of Commerce to the Road and Urban Development Minister, he warned about any hasty action, reiterating that Iran's relation with Turkey is strategic and important and hasty actions should not damage it and one should not forget Turkish businessmen and government's support and help during the sanctions era.

Saadat Dehghan reiterated that the problem is just inland border and both countries have no problem in rail transit of goods.

He said some 300 Iranian trucks have been stranded in the Turkish borders which are to transport their cargos to this country and they carry agro products like date, watermelon, and dried fruits which may decay.

He further added that 160 Iranian trucks are also stranded in Turkey and they are unable to return to the country.

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News

Opening Rimdan border point to help flourish regional economies: official

A local manager of Sistan-Baluchestan Province, said that opening Rimdan border point with Pakistan will be a turning point for the economy of the regional countries and local people. Ebrahim Javshiri told IRNA that Rimdan Border point, close to Chabahar, is the closest passage to Pakistan. It is only 650 kilometers away from Karachi, Pakistan's biggest port. Rimdan has been chosen for transporting people and goods between Iran and Pakistan. Javshiri said that lack of security in

Pakistan's Baluchistan has made its trade from Rimdan, which can change into an economic hub. On the other hand, Pakistan is planning to join Gwadar Port to Rimdan both to get connected to Iran's railroads and to have trade with Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. It is predicted that about one million passengers will commute and 200,000 tons of goods will be transported through the border point, which will provide 400,000 people on both sides of the border point with employment and a better economy.

Iran's Top Security Official Raps German Blacklisting of Hezbollah

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council said Germany's blacklisting of the "heroic" Lebanese Hezbollah has unmasked the true sponsors of terrorism, citing Berlin's sale of WMDs to Saddam Hussein and its servility to the child-murdering Zionist regime. In a post on his Twitter account on Friday, Ali Shamkhani lashed out at the German government for designating Hezbollah a terrorist organization and banning the Lebanese group's activities in the European country. Slamming Germany's action as a "new surprise", Shamkhani said, "Those who sold Saddam chemical weapons have now become advocates of human rights and are designating the heroic Hezbollah as terrorist, feeling intimidated by their child-murdering friend."

Paying tribute to Hezbollah for its contribution to the fight against terrorism, the Iranian official said, "Daesh (ISIS) could not reach Europe because it was held off behind the wall of resistance." "It's good that the true sponsors of terrorism are unmasked," Shamkhani said of Germany and its support for the Zionist regime.

On Thursday, Germany designated the Lebanese Hezbollah a terrorist organization, banned all of its activities in the European country and ordered raids on sites linked to the Lebanese group. The German police have raided several mosques and cultural associations linked with Hezbollah.

Iran Ready to Share Experiences in COVID-19 Battle with Friends: Top Commander

Iran's highest-ranking military commander expressed the Iranian Armed Forces' readiness to share their experiences in the fight against the novel coronavirus with friendly countries across the region. Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri sent separate messages to his counterparts and the defense ministers of Iraq, the Republic of Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Syria and Lebanon to offer help in handling the coronavirus pandemic.

In the messages, the top Iranian commander highlighted the Islamic Republic's success in dealing with the coronavirus outbreak, saying that Iranian military forces are ready to share their experiences in the battle with the infectious disease. "The Iranian Armed Forces are prepared to exchange the experiences that have been achieved and offer them to the officials of friendly and brotherly countries," the general said. He also warned that a failure to cope with the virus in a correct and scientific manner could increase the spread of the disease and threaten the health of nations. "The Islamic Republic of Iran's successful performance in controlling the virus could provide solutions for other Islamic nations and friendly and neighboring states," the top commander added.

In remarks on April 14, Commander of the Iranian Army Ground Force said his units are ready to provide other countries with the experiences in the fight against coronavirus at the discretion of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei. On Wednesday, the Iranian Defense Ministry provided Afghanistan with a consignment medical and health products for diagnosing COVID-19.



Dispute Resolution Mechanism of JCPOA is open "only" to current JCPOA parties: Finaud

Marc Finaud, the former French Foreign Ministry spokesman, says if the UN Security Council does not agree to extend the arms embargo, the United States can always apply unilateral sanctions as it has been doing since 2018 without legal force on third countries.



Former Senior Resident Fellow at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) adds "The Dispute

Resolution Mechanism of the JCPOA is, of course, open only to the current JCPOA parties." A senior member of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy also says that "It is indeed paradoxical that the Trump administration was critical of the JCPOA but at the same time criticized Iran for suspending its implementation."

Following is the full text of the interview:

The United States is working to extend the issue of Iran's arms sanction in the UN Security Council. Given that the United States has violated and withdrawn from the JCPOA, can it legally make such a request?

It is true that, by withdrawing from the JCPOA, the United States has acted against UN Security Council resolution 2231 unanimously adopted to endorse the agreement which does not contain



any provision on unilateral withdrawal. That resolution provides for the lifting of the arms embargo against Iran by 2020 or 2023 depending on the category of arms and technology and if the IAEA certifies that Iran's nuclear program remains peaceful. In any case, for a decision to be taken by the Security Council to extend the sanctions, all the Permanent Members must agree, and at this stage, it seems unlikely that Russia or China (and perhaps France and the United Kingdom) will join such a decision.

The United States, despite withdrawing from the UN Security Council, is set to establish itself as a participant in the JCPOA. Why is the United States looking for this?

It is indeed paradoxical that the Trump administration was critical of the JCPOA but at the same time criticized

Iran for suspending its implementation. It would have been more logical for the United States to remain a party to the JCPOA and use the internal mechanisms of the agreement to raise any question about compliance. If the United States fails to extend its arms sanction on Iran, it is likely to turn to a trigger mechanism. How can he do this legally, even if he considers himself a participant in JCPOA?

If the UN Security Council does not agree to extend the arms embargo, the United States can always apply unilateral sanctions as it has been doing since 2018 without legal force on third countries. But because of its extra-territorial jurisdiction, it has a powerful deterrent to pressure foreign companies with interests in the United States to renounce trade with Iran. The Dispute

Resolution Mechanism of the JCPOA is, of course, open only to the current JCPOA parties. Do European countries want to activate the trigger mechanism and take Iran's case to the UN Security Council?

It is true that the E3 (France, Germany, United Kingdom) triggered the Dispute Resolution Mechanism to address the suspension of implementation by Iran of some provisions of the JCPOA. However, the EU High Representative, who is chairing the process, suspended it in the hope that further negotiations will allow finding a solution instead of deferring Iran to the UN Security Council. This is part of diplomacy made both of public signals and private talks to salvage the JCPOA, to which the Europeans are strongly attached.

If the UN Security Council does not agree to extend the arms embargo, the United States can always apply unilateral sanctions as it has been doing since 2018 without legal force on third countries.

Iran Closely Monitoring US Moves in Persian Gulf, Oman Sea: IRGC Commander

Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy Rear Admiral Ali Reza Tangsiri said the country's naval forces closely watch US vessels' movements in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman. "The Islamic Republic of Iran's (Navy) forces are monitoring all US moves in the Sea of Oman and the Persian Gulf," Rear Admiral Tangsiri said in a recent interview with local media.

He said the US is looking for tensions and confrontation in the region and has always sown insecurity wherever it had a presence.

"Today, we have a powerful presence in the entire Persian Gulf region and the Strait of Hormuz," Rear Admiral Tangsiri stressed, adding that full security will be established in the Persian Gulf if US forces leave the region.

Earlier this week, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei said the Persian Gulf belongs to the nations living there, and those are the ones responsible for ensuring its security.

"The Persian Gulf belongs to the nations living there. Its security is the duty of these nations, & Iran with its long coastlines has a key role in

keeping the security of this region. By God's grace we will do our part. This is our historical, geographical & regional duty," the Leader said in a series of tweets published Wednesday on the Twitter page of Ayatollah Khamenei on the occasion of the National Persian Gulf Day. The Leader also said that a "wise and rational collective policy" in favor of the people of the region cannot be achieved while foreign forces are present in the Persian Gulf.

"The #PersianGulf region can be managed by a wise and rational collective policy that benefits all Persian Gulf countries. The factor that threatens such a proper, wise move is the presence of foreign forces in the region," Ayatollah Khamenei added.

Iran has lowest ratio of coronavirus death in world: official

The head of Iran's Red Crescent Society said on Saturday that in comparison to its population, Iran has the lowest of the death toll. Kareem Hemmati said that no country had a plan to fight the epidemic; many countries were severely hit and the United States has the highest death toll in the world. Hemmati said that at the beginning of the crisis, Iran had the second-highest number of infected cases after China. He added that others were pointing a finger of accusation at Iran, claiming that Iran had spread the virus, but before long, the claim was proven unfounded. Hemmati said although the hospitals were full of patients and "we were under suppressive sanctions, we managed to curb the disease with the least equipment even recovery hospitals" that were allotted were not all used. He said 70 thousand volunteers are helping the poor. Head of Iran's Health Ministry's Public Relations Office Kianoush Jahanpour said on Friday that 76,318 people out of a total of 95,646 infected with the coronavirus (COVID-19) have recovered whereas 6,091 have lost their lives.

Russia criticizes US' silence on its UNSC 2231 obligations

Russia's permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov criticized US administration's attempts to present itself as a participant to the 2015 nuclear deal to pressure the United Nations Security Council to extend Iran's arms embargo. "US officials claim that US retains the rights under the UNSC resolution 2231. No single word about the US obligations which come together with rights. In particular, what about refraining from 'actions that undermine implementation of commitments under #JCPOA' (paragraph 2 of res. 2231)?" he wrote on his official Twitter account. Ulyanov's remarks came after The New York Times said in a report that US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is preparing a legal argument that the United States remains a participant in the Iran nuclear accord that President Trump has renounced, part of an intricate strategy to pressure the United Nations Security Council to extend an arms embargo on Tehran or see far more stringent sanctions reimposed on the country.

80% of Patients Recover from Coronavirus in Iran

Iran's Health Ministry said 80 percent of the coronavirus positive cases in the country have fully recovered from the infectious disease and left the hospital. Speaking at a press conference on Saturday, Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said the number of patients who have recovered from COVID-19 infection has reached 77,350. It shows that so far eighty percent of the COVID-19 cases in Iran have recovered and left the medical centers, he added.

The spokesperson also noted that the number of people tested positive for the virus across Iran has risen to 96,448 following the detection of 802 new cases since yesterday.

According to the spokesman, 65 coronavirus patients have died over the past 24 hours, bringing the death toll to 6,156.

News

Al-Nujaba's Political Board: Washington attempting to bring terrorism back to Baghdad

Al-Nujaba Islamic Resistance calling the emptying of the US bases in Iraq a show warned on the US new project on bringing back terrorism and the top commanders of the ISIS to Iraq. Al-Nujaba's Political Board, in response to the new movements of the US, issued a message and announced, "Although the world is in the fight against Coronavirus pandemic, Washington, once again using its forces in other countries, is attempting to play with the national geography of nations and undermine the stability of the Arabian homeland", reported al-Nujaba's Centre for Communications and Media Affairs in Iran. The Board, mentioning that "The rash policy of the US still regards Iraq a part of its big project, which is aimed at creation of religious divisions and political ethnocentrism," states, "Through a new endeavor, in order to compensate its failures in

finding new effective solutions for resolving its internal problems, its inability in putting an end to the suffering of the American nation and repairing all the damages caused by Coronavirus pandemic followed by the evident collapse of this country's economy, the US is attempting to exert influence in Iraq."

Al-Nujaba's Political Board, divulging the new plot of the Americans, reiterates, "Washington is insisting on returning terrorism, including the commanders of the ISIS from Syria, to Iraq. The evidence for what mentioned, the evil plan and goals of the US for undermining the security and stability of Iraq are carrying the ISIS forces from the east of the Euphrates and some areas of Syria bordering with Iraq, together with the security problems and terrorist attacks in Kirkuk, all being preliminaries for the conduction of the US new project." The statement further mentions, "We express our deep concern over the expansion of the insecurities and emphasize to American occupiers that the Iraqi Islamic Resistance is closely observing their destructive plans so that it can neutralize all the perils threatening Iraqi provinces. Therefore, we ask the Iraqi official to



adopt necessary decisions for maintaining the Iraqi security and make the required plans for controlling terrorist groups, and by doing so, prevent recurrence of 2014 events. And to this end, all the movements of Americans, including the entrance of convoys and their military equipment backed by massive air strikes, ought to be uncovered by government officials."

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Pompeo's JCPOA Plan Has No Place in Int'l Law: Iran UN Envoy

Iran's ambassador to the United Nations derided the US state secretary's new plan for the 2015 nuclear deal as a joke, saying such American plans for extending an arms embargo against Iran have no place in the international law.

In comments on Friday, Majid Takht Ravanchi dismissed the US government's attempts at extending the arms embargo on Iran for an unlimited period.

"(World) countries will naturally not accept this and would not agree to be an accomplice in the very gross action that the Americans are taking in violation of the international law," he added.

Denouncing the US' plan to become a participant of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal again as an invalid hypothesis, the UN envoy said it is a joke that Washington is seeking to resort to the UNSC Resolution 2231 to extend an arms embargo on Iran.



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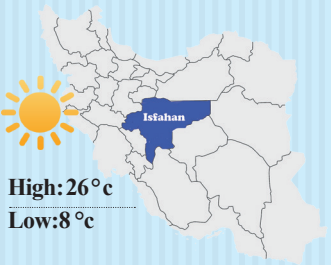
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Evening call to prayer:

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WEATHER



COVID19-daily infection rate reduces to %2.96 in Iran: Official

Official statistics suggest that the rate of daily infections to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has reduced from 2.45% to 1.32% over the past ten days, according to Mohammad-Javad Dehqani, the President of the Islamic World Science Citation Center (ISC). He said that the rate reduced from 4.72 to 2.96 globally in the 10-day period. The total COVID-19 cases grew from 82,211 to 93,657 patients over the past ten days which shows an average daily growth rate of 1.3%, Dehqani said. This is while the daily growth rate of infections to the disease used to be 2.45 in the preceding 10 days, he added.



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US States Loosen Lockdowns As Virus Drug Approved

More US states eased pandemic lockdown measures on Friday even as coronavirus deaths rose, while American authorities green lighted an experimental drug for emergency use on patients.

Washington also renewed its warnings to Beijing a day after President Donald Trump threatened to slap tariffs on China, with the White House accusing Chinese authorities of "slow-walking" coronavirus data and putting US lives at risk.

India meanwhile announced that the world's biggest lockdown — on most of the nation's 1.3 billion people — would continue for two more weeks.

But several European countries have begun to ease restrictions that have shut in half the world, joining some Asian nations that feel they have already turned a corner.

The United States also took a major step in that direction, with Texas becoming the largest state yet to ease lockdowns, despite reporting 50 deaths on Thursday, the most there since the outbreak began.

Receptionist Diane Curtis headed to a mall in Houston to buy shoes and "get out of the house."

"Eventually it's like every other sickness that comes around," she said of coronavirus. "It'll go away but it'll probably take time."

With about 1.1 million confirmed cases, nearly 65,000 of them fatal, the United States has the highest tolls of any country.

"Hopefully, we're going to come in below that 100,000 lives lost, which is a horrible number nevertheless," Trump said Friday at the White House, after suggesting earlier in the week the country could expect 60,000 or 70,000 fatalities.

Many Americans are wearying of stay-at-home orders. More protests demanding the end of restrictions took place in several states Friday including California, where officials had re-closed beaches to avoid a repeat of last weekend when crowds flocked to the shoreline.

Trump, eager for a turnaround, announced Friday that US regulators have authorized the use of remdesivir to treat serious virus cases. A major clinical trial found that the antiviral helped patients with serious cases of COVID-19 recover faster.

Meanwhile, the White House again pointed fingers at Beijing.

"It's no secret that China mishandled this situation," press secretary Kayleigh McEnany said, highlighting what she described as Beijing's failure to quickly share the virus's genetic sequence or information on human-to-human transmission.

"Slow-walking some of that information put American lives at risk," McEnany said.

Scientists believe the killer virus jumped from animals to humans, emerging in China late last year possibly from a market in Wuhan selling exotic animals for meat.

The World Health Organization has asked to be allowed to take part in a Chinese investigation into the animal origins of the pandemic, WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic said Friday, adding that the global agency was "not currently involved in the studies in China" but would be "keen" to participate.

Washington's sharp rhetoric, including Trump's unproven allegation Thursday that the virus might have come from a Chinese lab in Wuhan — an accusation rejected by Beijing — and threats of more US trade tariffs sent stocks in London and New York tumbling.

The FTSE shed 1.7 percent while the Dow Jones Industrial Average slid more than 2.5 percent.

Tech giants Apple and Amazon became the latest firms to announce worrying results as corporations around the world shed staff and slash profit forecasts.

The economic mood darkened further with the release of a manufacturing survey that pointed to a historic decline in US output in April due to the pandemic.

The Cuban government suspended May Day celebrations on the island, normally marked by the country's largest annual march, due to the pandemic.

North Korea's Kim Jong Un Appears in Public amid Health Rumors

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un made his first public appearance in 20 days as he celebrated the completion of a fertilizer factory near Pyongyang, state media said Saturday, ending an absence that had triggered global rumors that he may be seriously ill.

North Korea's Kim Jong Un Appears in Public amid Health Rumors

The North's official Korean Central News Agency reported that Kim attended the ceremony Friday in Suncheon with other senior officials, including his sister Kim Yo Jong, who many analysts predict would take over if her brother is suddenly unable to rule.

The official Rodong Sinmun newspaper published several photos of Kim wearing black and smiling as he looked around the factory and cut a red ribbon, his sister looking from behind. One of the photos showed him smiling and clapping with his sister and other senior officials under a sign that read "Suncheon Phosphatic Fertilizer Factory: Completion Ceremony: May 1, 2020."

Seemingly thousands of workers, many of them masked, stood in lines at the massive complex, releasing balloons into the air. The images gave no clear sign that Kim was in discomfort. He wasn't seen with a walking stick, like the one he used in 2014 when he was recovering from a presumed ankle surgery.

However, one of the photos at the factory showed a green electric cart, which appeared similar to a vehicle he used in 2014. It was Kim's first public appearance since April 11, when he presided over a ruling Workers' Party meeting to discuss the coronavirus and reappoint his sister as an alternate member of the powerful decision-making Political Bureau of the party's Central Committee.

That move confirmed her substantial role in the government.

Speculation about his health swirled after he missed the April 15 birthday celebration for his late grandfather Kim Il Sung, the country's most important holiday, for the first time since taking power in 2011.

The possibility of high-level instability raised

troubling questions about the future of the secretive, nuclear-armed state that has been steadily building an arsenal meant to threaten the US mainland while diplomacy between Kim and US President Donald Trump has stalled.

Some experts say South Korea, as well as its regional neighbors and ally Washington, must begin preparing for the possible chaos that could come if Kim is sidelined by health problems or even dies. Worst-case scenarios include North Korean refugees flooding South Korea or China or military hard-liners letting loose nuclear weapons.

"The world is largely unprepared for instability in North Korea," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul. "Washington, Seoul and Tokyo need tighter coordination on contingency plans while international organizations need more resources and less controversy over the role of China," AP reported.

South Korea's Unification Ministry, which deals with inter-Korean affairs, confirmed Kim's visit to the fertilizer factory and said it was part of his efforts to emphasize economic development. The ministry called for discretion on information related to North Korea, saying that the "groundless" rumors of past weeks have caused "unnecessary confusion and cost" for South Korea's society and financial markets.

South Korea's government, which has a mixed record of tracking Pyongyang's ruling elite, repeatedly downplayed speculation that Kim, believed to be 36, was in poor health following surgery.

The office of President Moon Jae-in said it detected no unusual signs in North Korea or any emergency reaction by its ruling party, military and cabinet. Seoul said it believed Kim was still managing state affairs but staying at an unspecified location outside Pyongyang.

The KCNA said workers at the fertilizer factory broke into "thunderous cheers" for Kim, who it said is guiding the nation in a struggle to build a self-reliant economy in the face of "head wind" by "hostile forces."

The report didn't mention any direct comment toward Washington or Seoul.

The World Health Organization has asked to be allowed to take part in a Chinese investigation into the animal origins of the pandemic, WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic said Friday, adding that the global agency was "not currently involved in the studies in China" but would be "keen" to participate.

