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Iran strongly condemns Israeli air strikes on Gaza, Damascus 2

PERSPECTIVE

How did the

market?

main fall in oil prices.

coronavirus disrupt

rude oil prices remained low as

✓ COVID-19 that emerged in China

Assessments indicate that oil prices have

continues to spread worldwide while

keeping pressure on global oil demand.

fallen. China consumes about 14,000,000

barrels per day of oil, while the country has

not yet returned to its normal situation. This

trend has disrupted the market demand for

oil. Of course, the downward trend that we

have seen so far does not appear to be the

chases, and if it runs out previous purchases

and does not make new orders for oil, we

will witness more decrease in oil prices.

stock market indices have been down. On

the other hand, we have seen lower prices

for copper and some other metals, indicating

which are going to be held in the future

days, there has been no sign of an agree-

ment between Russia and Saudi Arabia

so far. The reason for this disagreement

seems to be the economic pressure that

Russia is enduring. Of course, the \$49

oil could be justifiable and proper for

Moscow. On the other hand, Russians

know that if they reduce the supply of

oil to the market, their rival, American

and Saudi Arabia reach an agreement. So

far, no agreement has brokered between

these two countries, but Moscow and Riyadh

may have some behind-the-curtain deals.

In this case, oil supply will remain steady.

which is an oil consuming country, has

become infected with the coronavirus. If

the same thing happens in Japan or the

United States, the coronavirus pressure

the first half of the year, the U.S. oil price,

which now stands at about \$49, seems to be

at least \$45 a barrel. In general, any chang-

es regarding the coronavirus, OPEC and

OPEC+ agreement could affect oil prices.

Given that oil demand often drops in

on oil prices will be obvious.

Demand has fallen as South Korea,

As a result, it seems less likely to Russia

Shale oil will take their place.

Given the OPEC and OPEC+ meetings,

general declining value of energy.

Since Monday this week, the various U.S.

China is still using its previous oil pur-

the novel coronavirus known as

the balance of oil



Top Iranian, Azeri officers meet, vow to broaden military co-op 2



Araghchi slams Dubowitz for cheering coronavirus spread in Iran 🔞



French festival to spotlight Iranian cinema 12

Parties reaffirm the need to preserve JCPOA



Iran's steel output growth 23 times global average

TEHRAN — The latest report released by the World Steel Association (WSA)

2.895 million tons of crude steel, 46.7 percent more than last January's 1.971 million tons. shows that Iran's crude steel output has increased 46.7 percent in January while the global average growth rate stood at 2.1 percent, IRNA reported, citing the data released by Iranian Mines and Mining **Industries Development and Renovation** Organization (IMIDRO).

Based on the WSA data, Iran produced

WSA report says that the world's 64 steel producers managed to produce 154.436 million tons of the commodity in January 2020, 2.1 percent more than last January's 151.228 million tons.

According to the WSA report, China, India, Japan, the U.S., and Russia were the world's top steel producers respectively. \rightarrow 4

Govt. urges approval of **FATF-related bills**

TEHRAN — The government of President Hassan Rouhani, in a 9-paragraph statement on Wednesday, urged the Expediency Council to remove the existing barriers in the way of approving the CFT and Palermo bills.

The main topic of the cabinet on Wednesday was to review the decision by the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which on Friday put Iran on its blacklist. The decision came after Tehran refused to comply with the watchdog's all requirements in due time.

Ratifying the FATF-related bills has become a contentious issue in Iran.

The parliament passed the FATF in October 2018. However, the oversight Guardian Council rejected the

Rouhani: Coronavirus must not act as 'enemy weapons' to shut down economy

TEHRAN – President Hassan Rouhani warned on Wednesday that the novel coronavirus epidemic should not be used as a "weapon by the enemies" to halt "work, activities and production" in the country.

He said the people must not allow the U.S. to add "another new virus" under the name of shutting down the country. "This is a plot that we are seeing today." Highlighted efforts taken by the Health Ministry to contain the coronavirus epidemic in Iran, Rouhani also said there is no plan to quarantine.

The president said what is more dangerous than coronavirus is the "virus of fear and anxiety and doubt and distrust



America is not immune

ne of the more absurd claims is the assertion by a kook rabbi in Israel (where there are many of the same ilk) that the coronavirus (Covid 19) that is sweeping across the world won't halt creating its trail of devastation and dislocation until the so-called "third temple" is built in East Jerusalem, presumably atop the rubble of a destroyed al-Aqsa mosque and the Qubba al-Sakra. This rabbi, one Aryeh Lipo, a "religious studies" teacher who is a Likudist, apparently gave a lesson on the Haram esh Sharif with a bunch of other unwelcome Zionists saying a "third temple" is a powerful cure for the coronavirus pandemic which now even Iran is struggling to corral and eliminate.

Better this kook might have suggested that the most damaging virus in the Middle East and beyond is Zionism itself, which is the deep root cause of most all the various conflicts in West Asia spawned by Israel and its U.S. partner in the Trump administration and by previous U.S. administrations in the Middle East? Lipo said he was sending up a prayer for the "healing of the entire world", a joke if ever there was one and equivalent to giving a murderous psychopath a loaded UZI machine gun.

At any rate, the virus seems to be just beginning its spread, and one Harvard University epidemiologist has said that it could infect 70 percent of the world's population before an adequate vaccine exists, which has been estimated anywhere from six months to more than a year away. Currently, the only possible palliative that may have some very modest promise is infusing some blood of those who have survived and recovered from the virus into those who are ill since some antibodies may be present there.

In the U.S. where the virus has not yet widely disseminated itself in the population, and this may not occur until later this year, there exists the potential for chaos such as one can read about in China (and other countries, like South Korea, rising). The financial markets are just beginning to reflect the threats of this disease with the stock market finally trending lower and possibly about to crash, an inevitability that existed before the virus emerged but which the virus has undoubtedly speeded up. →7

UN urges warring Libyan factions to negotiate

TEHRAN — The UN's Libya mission and world powers on Tuesday urged the country's warring parties to engage in peace efforts, as doubts hung over talks set to start the next day in Geneva.

Libya's National Oil Company (NOC) said financial losses over the blockade of Libya's vital oil fields and ports have rapidly swelled, surpassing \$2b on Tuesday, with production dropping from a typical 1.2m bpd to about 120,000 this week

On Sunday NOC said that guards under the command of renegade general Khalifa Haftar's forces shut down the two key oil fields in the country's southwestern desert, following earlier closure of all eastern export terminals. Libya is home of Africa's largest proven crude oil reserves.

Oil-rich Libya, a country of 6.5 million, has been

splintered between competing factions and militias since former leader Muammar Gaddafi was overthrown and killed during a NATO-supported uprising in 2011.

The 76-year-old Haftar is the leader of the Libyan National Army (LNA) which controls most of south and eastern Libya, including country's ports and has been laying seed to the capital, Tripoli. Haftar is backed by the UAE, Egypt, Russia and Jordan, with political backing from France. The Tripoli government controls just a shrinking corner of the country's west, but maintains highly-valued authority over Libya's central bank, which holds oil revenues

Since Haftar launched an offensive against Tripoli, seat of the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) last April. GNA was created during UN-brokered talks in 2015. The unelected administration has little influence outside Tripoli. According to Financial Times at least 2,000 Libyans have been killed and more than 150,000 forced to flee their homes in areas such as Ain Zarah since Gen Haftar launched a surprise assault on Tripoli last April.

U.S. stance has been ambiguous. In past U.S. has supported UN-backed government and efforts to reach a political solution, as have the UK and France. But Trump appeared to break with that policy last May when he made a phone call to Haftar, during which he voiced support for a shared vision with the commander.

Meanwhile, according to news reports from Canada last summer, Ari Ben-Menashe is an Iranian-born former Israeli intelligence officer whose Montreal-based firm Dickens and Madson Inc. Ben-Menashe has previously been paid to lobby for ousted Zimbabwean dictator Robert Mugabe and Libyan militia commander Khalife Hafter. \rightarrow 7

Sanders says may relocate U.S. embassy back to Tel Aviv if elected

Leading U.S. Democratic presidential candidate Israel, through Bibi Netanyahu, you have a reac-Sanders, who calls himself a democratic sc Bernie Sanders said he would consider moving the U.S. embassy in Israel back to Tel Aviv if elected president.

Sanders's comments about revisiting U.S. President Donald Trump's controversial decision in 2018 to relocate the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem came during Tuesday's Democratic presidential debate.

Sanders has called Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a "reactionary racist," days after the American senator said he would skip the annual conference by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

 $\hbox{``I'm very proud of being Jewish. I actually lived'}\\$ in Israel for some months. But what I happen to believe is that right now, sadly, tragically, in

tionary racist who is now running that country,"

Sanders said in a tweet on Sunday that he would not be attending the annual AIPAC conference, accusing the pro-Israel lobbying group of providing a platform to "leaders who express bigotry and oppose basic Palestinian rights."

An AIPAC spokesman fired back at Sanders' comments, saying in a statement that the senator "has never attended our conference and that is evident from his outrageous comment."

Sanders, an independent senator from Vermont, has become the clear frontrunner in the Democratic presidential race after strong showings in the first three nominating contests in Iowa, New Hampshire and Nevada.

cialist, proposes left-wing policies like increasing the minimum wage and scrapping private health insurance in favor of a government-run Medicare for All program, based on the government program for elderly Americans.

His momentum has alarmed a Democratic establishment wary of his plans to end economic inequality and strengthen the social safety net, something that will lead to defeat against Republican President Donald Trump

Sanders is the second Democratic presidential candidate to say he will not be attending the AIPAC conference, which will take place in Washington on March 1-4. Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren also said earlier this month that she would not attend. \rightarrow 10



Foreign envoys, health officials convene meeting on COVID-19

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted a meeting of foreign ambassadors residing in Tehran and national health officials on Wednesday.

The meeting was held with the aim of informing the audience of the preventive measures taken in the country to deal with spread of the novel coronavirus, known as



Trump has confessed Iran 'hates' Daesh, Zarif says

POLITICAL TEHRAN – Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said late on Tuesday that Donald Trump has admitted that Iran "hates" the Daesh terrorist group,

Also, Zarif said, Trump has confessed that the U.S. troops are stationed in Syria to steal the country's oil.

"Donald Trump just admitted what we all knew: U.S. troops in Syria to 'have the oil'" Zarif tweeted.

"Also, that Russia, Syria, and Iran can fight ISIS, confessing, 'Iran hates ISIS'," Zarif said.



However, Zarif said, the U.S. assassinated General Soleimani, Iran's legendary commander in the fight against Daesh.

"But not only did the U.S. NOT fight ISIS, it cowardly murdered its number 1 enemy-with ONLY Trump's cronies and ISIS celebrating.

 ${\bf ISIS} \ {\bf celebrated} \ {\bf the} \ {\bf assassination} \ {\bf of} \ {\bf General} \ {\bf Soleimani}.$ Zarif posted a video of Trump in which he says "Iran hates

ISIS" and also he confesses that the U.S. forces withdrew from Syria after taking the oil.

According to Press TV, in October last year, after ordering the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria, Trump said he wanted the U.S. firm ExxonMobil to go to the Arab country to tap its oil.

Iran strongly condemns Israeli air strikes on Gaza, Damascus

POLITICAL TEHRAN – Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi strongly condemned on Tuesday the Zionist regime of Israel's air strikes on Gaza and Damascus.

He expressed regret over the international community's passivity towards Israel's "war crimes".

Mousavi also pointed to the Israeli military's "inhumane" desecration of the body of a Gazan man killed by the regime's forces, saying this "brutal" action shows the Israeli occupiers do not respect the most basic human rights.

The Foreign Ministry spokesman hailed the Palestinians' legitimate resistance and brave resistance in the face of the Israeli occupation.

Resistance and national unity are the only option for the Palestinians to fight the occupying regime, he noted.

Israel has carried out air strikes against the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) in Gaza and Syria.

The Islamic Jihad resistance movement fired dozens of rockets and mortar rounds towards the Israeli-occupied territories after

the regime's forces killed one of its fighters on Sunday morning. According to Press TV, a video later went viral on social media showing what appeared to be the lifeless body of the resistance

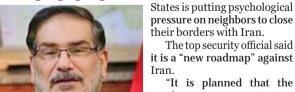
fighter dangling from an Israeli military bulldozer as it removed the corpse, in what human rights activists have denounced as a "war crime" and a blatant violation of international law.

Israeli fighter jets and helicopters also attacked Islamic Jihad targets across Gaza as well as in neighboring Syria, with the Palestinian movement reporting that two of its fighters had been killed in the raids near Damascus

Shamkhani says U.S. planning to complete maximum pressure on Iran through coronavirus

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iran's Supreme National Security S k Council secretary Ali Shamkhani said on Tuesday that the U.S. has made plans to use the outbreak of coronavirus in Iran as a pretext to complete its "maximum pressure"

strategy against Iran but Iran will succeed to control the virus. Through highlighting coronavirus, Shamkhani said, the United



maximum pressure strategy against Iran to be completed with the term 'Corona'. Psychological pressure on countries to close their land and air routes and propagating lies... is the new roadmap, Shamkhani tweeted.

Shamkhani added, "We will defeat Corona."

Earlier on Tuesday, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo accused Iran of a cover-up about coronavirus.

"The United States is deeply concerned by information indicating the Iranian regime may have suppressed vital details about the outbreak in that country," AFP quoted Pompeo as telling reporters

■'U.S. still hiding truth about Ain al-Asad, influenza fatalities'

Shamkhani also said while Pompeo expresses concern about what he calls Iran's cover-up of coronavirus, the White House has not still given a precise report about the damages inflicted on Ain al-Asad air base, the number of fatalities from influenza in 2019-2020, and the downing of the U.S. spy aircraft in Afghanistan.

"While Pompeo expresses concern about what he calls Iran's cover-up about 'Corona' no precise reports have still been released by the White House about the reality of Ain al-Asad, spy aircraft in Afghanistan, the number of those killed from this year's influenza..., Ali Shamkhani said in another tweet.

Top Iranian, Azeri officers meet, vow to broaden military co-op

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Azeri Deputy Defense Minister for Logistics Lieutenant General Mammadov Fuad Nadir held a meeting in Tehran on Wednesday with Major General Ali Abdullahi, the deputy chief of the general staff of Iran's Armed Forces for coordination affairs.

In the meeting, the two senior military officials underscored that Tehran and Baku are resolved to take giant strides in line with expansion of military relations.

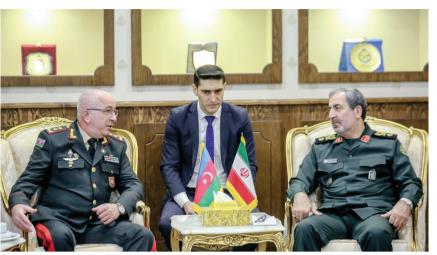
A number senior military experts of both countries were present in the meeting.

Exchange of military delegations, staging joint military drills and promotion of cultural cooperation were among the topics discussed in the meeting.

Iran and Azerbaijan as two neighboring states share common affinities in terms of history, culture and civilization. The two countries have record of cooper-

ation on military, security and defense areas.

Fighting terrorism, human trafficking and trafficking of illicit drugs in the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus are a common goal by Iran and Azerbaijan.



In October 2019, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani highlighted the importance of efforts to promote ties between Tehran and Baku and said the relationship was beneficial not only to both nations but also to the region.

"With the efforts of senior officials of Iran

and the Republic of Azerbaijan, relations between the two countries have progressed to a satisfying level," Rouhani said at a meeting with his Azeri counterpart, Ilham Aliyev, in Baku on the sidelines of the Non-Aligned

The deepening of the bilateral ties and cooperation is beneficial not only to both nations but also to the region, Rouhani noted.

Rouhani further praised the effective role of the Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Economic Commission in boosting cooperation between the two countries and said, "In the area of industrial cooperation and automotive industry, grounds are provided for the good cooperation, and Iran is also ready to construct power plants in the Republic of Azerbaijan."

Rouhani also underlined the importance of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and said Iran and Azerbaijan have had very good cooperation in the INSTC project and Tehran hopes that its final phases are constructed more quickly.

Aliyev, for his part, described Rouhani's visit to Baku as a good opportunity for the development of bilateral relations.

"The deep cultural and historical commonalities between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan have paved the ground for closer cooperation, and of course the cooperation has considerably increased in your term in office," he told Rouhani.

Beijing resolved to keep JCPOA alive: Chinese envoy

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Wang Qun, the Chinese

envoy to the Vienna-based international organizations, said on Wednesday that his country will do its best to save the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the official name for the 2015 nuclear deal.

The Chinese envoy's remarks came at the end of a meeting of joint commission of the JCPOA in the Austrian capital. Wang told reporters that members of the commission have different views over activating the JCPOA dispute resolution mechanism.

He further underscored that there was no debate in the Wednesday meeting over the mechanism.

The Chinese diplomat said that the commission's member states are firmly trying to keep the nuclear deal.

The envoy warned of consequences of the U.S. attempt to reimpose UN-ratified sanctions against Iran.

Also at the end of the commission meeting, Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna, said, "The participants in the joint commission of the JCPOA reaffirmed their adherence to the deal which is supposed as an important element in engineering Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear

Earlier this month, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and European Union foreign policy Chief Josep Borrell met in Tehran, discussing the JCPOA.

Zarif and Borrell held two rounds of talks at the time. It was the first trip to Tehran by Borrell who replaced Federica Mogherini. He was accompanied by a delegation in his visit to Tehran.

In a separate meeting with Borrell, President Hassan Rouhani criticized the European Union for failing to honor

its commitments under the JCPOA when the U.S. quit the deal and reinstituted sanctions on Iran.

In May 2019, Iran started to reduce its commitments to the JCPOA at bi-monthly intervals in response to the abrogation of the pact by the U.S. coupled with the European Union's inaction to shield Iran's economy from sanctions.

Rouhani said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran is still ready to cooperate with the European Union for resolving issues, and at any time that the other side (EU) fully observes its commitments Iran will also return to its commitments."

Rouhani said the JCPOA was the fruit of 12 years of negotiations but its implementation has faced serious

hurdles due to the U.S. unilateral exit from the agreement. The Iranian president went on to say that his country has been fully committed to the inspection of its nuclear activities by the International Atomic Energy Agency and

this policy will continue "otherwise we face a new condition".

Rouhani also described European countries as Iran's traditional partners and said Tehran attaches great importance

The president also expressed hope that Iran-EU relations would expand through the efforts of the European Union high representative.

In his meeting with Rouhani, Borrell also said he will use his utmost efforts to keep the nuclear deal alive.

"As the High Representative of the European Union Foreign Policy I will use my utmost energy to create a strong interaction in line with protecting the JCPOA," Borrell said. Borrell also said, "I am sorry that the European sides have failed to fulfill their commitments.

France, Germany and the United Kingdom, the three European states signatory to the JCPOA, issued a joint

statement on January 14 announcing they have formally triggered the JCPOA dispute resolution mechanism which could bring the Iran nuclear issue before the UN Security

Borrell said on January 24 that he had extended the time available to discuss ways to save the nuclear deal. "There is agreement that more time is needed due to the

complexity of the issues involved. The timeline is therefore extended," Borrell said in a statement at the time.

In January, Zarif had warned Iran would consider quitting the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) if the Europeans would refer Iran's nuclear case to the UN Security Council.

"If they (Europeans) take any action, the issue of quitting the NPT will be raised based on the letter of the President dating May 2018," Zarif said at the time.

Remaining parties reaffirm the need to preserve JCPOA

POLITICAL TEHRAN – The remaining parties to the JCPOA issued a statement on Wednesday reaffirming the need to keep the multilateral nuclear

The pledge was made as the JCPOA joint commission held a meeting in Vienna, where the agreement was struck in July 2015. The meeting was attended by diplomats from the European Union, Iran, Russia, China, Britain, Germany and France.

Helga Schmidt, secretary general of the European External Action Service (EEAS), and Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi chaired the joint commission.

One day before the joint commission meeting, Schmidt wrote on his Twitter account that "we have a collective responsibility to preserve the Iran deal."

The meeting took place as Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Twitter there was still a chance "to stop escalation before it is too late.'

In its last step announced on January 5, Iran said it would no longer observe limits on the number of centrifuges used to enrich uranium in protest to an inaction by Europe to shield its economy from the U.S. sanctions. Following is the text of the statement issued

by the JCPOA joint commission: A meeting of the Joint Commission of the

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) took place in Vienna on 26 February 2020. Under the terms of the JCPOA, the Joint Commission is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the agreement.

The Joint Commission was chaired, on behalf of EU High Representative Josep Borrell Fontelles, by EEAS Secretary General Helga-Maria Schmid and was attended by representatives of China, France, Germany. Russia, the United Kingdom and Iran at the level of Ambassadors/ Political Directors/ Deputy Foreign Ministers

The meeting addressed both Iran's steps in reducing its nuclear commitments under the JCPOA including its announcement of 5 January 2020, as well as longstanding concerns, recognised by all participants, regarding the impact of the US withdrawal from the agreement in 2018 and the re-imposition of sanctions by it. In this context, serious concerns were

expressed regarding the implementation of Iran's nuclear commitments under the agreement. Participants also acknowledged that the re-imposition of US sanctions did not allow Iran to reap the full benefits arising from sanctions-lifting

All participants reaffirmed the importance of preserving the agreement recalling that it is a key element of the global nuclear non-proliferation architecture.

As a follow up to the statement of the High Representative of 24 January 2020 participants reviewed expert-level discussions which have taken place in different formats in past weeks, both as regards nuclear implementation issues and the wider impacts of the withdrawal of the US from the JCPOA and its re-imposition of sanctions and benefits arising from sanctions-lifting. Experts were tasked to take these discussions forward.

Participants welcomed positive developments in the processing of first transactions by INSTEX and the addition of four European $countries\ as\ new\ shareholders,\ with\ more\ to$ follow, while acknowledging the importance of further strengthening the instrument.

Participants reiterated their strong support and collective responsibility for the continuation of key nuclear non-proliferation projects that are an essential part of the JCPOA.

They welcomed continued efforts by Arak Working Group Co-Chairs, China and the United Kingdom, in taking the Arak Modernisation Project forward. They took note of recent developments concerning the Fordow facility and expressed strong support for the work of Russia in continuing the implementation of the stable isotope project.

The meeting took place against the background of the COVID-19 outbreak. Participants expressed their solidarity with China, Iran and all countries affected, in their efforts to address the outbreak and, in particular, the contribution of China and those later affected to the global fight against this public health challenge.

Govt. urges approval of FATF-related bills

1 → Whenever there is a dispute between the parliament and the Guardian Council on a bill, it will be referred to the Expediency Council for final decision. Now it is up to the Expediency Council to reject or ratify the FATF.

The government's statement says approval of the bills will prevent the enemies to have more pretexts to put more pressures on the

In the statement, the government has laid emphasis on removal of any obstacle in ratifying the bills, noting that the government will do its best to solve the problem and improve the situation to prevent imposition of more losses on the country's national interests. On Sunday, Rouhani said that Iran had

been a forerunner in fighting money laundering and did not deserve to be blacklisted "The great Iranian people and the Islam-

ic Republic of Iran did not and do not de-

serve to be placed on an international body's countermeasures list while it [the country] is forerunner in fighting terrorism and money laundering," he said during a cabinet meeting

He added, "We made efforts to prevent

being introduced by the United States and the Zionist regime as violator of these measures while we are forerunner in fighting terrorism and money laundering.

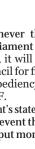
Being blacklisted by the FATF is against the Iranian people's interests, the president

"As it was expected, it made the United States happy and will justify intensification of cruel and inhumane sanctions. Now, those who gave pretext to the United States must be accountable for their unprofessional position," Rouhani asserted.

One of the actions Iran is required to take to appease the FATF is joining the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), which is also called the Palermo Convention, a 2000 United Nations-sponsored multilateral treaty against transnational organized crime.

The other action is to ratify the CFT, the convention combating financing of terrorism.

The opposition to join the FATF rose after the Trump administration revoked the 2015 nuclear deal in May 2018 and started imposing sanctions on Iran. Since that date, it has slapped multiple rounds of sanctions



at the time.

Araghchi slams Dubowitz for cheering coronavirus spread in Iran

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Deputy de sk Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has sammed Mark Dubowitz, the CEO of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), over cheering the spread of coronavirus in Iran.

"It's shameful and downright inhuman to cheer for a deadly Virus to spread - and enjoy seeing people suffer for it," Araghchi tweeted on Wednesday.

"But at least @mdubowitz understands that the American economic sanctions were not -- and will not -- as effective as a Covid-19 Virus," he added.

Araghchi made the comment after Dubowitz quoted part of a Bloomberg article which said "Coronavirus has done what American economic sanctions could not: shut down non-oil exports.

In another tweet, Dubowitz also quoted an article by The Star which said, "Iran may have many more coronavirus cases than reported, upwards of 18,000, according to a preliminary analysis by Canadian researchers, suggesting an epidemic nearly 200 times larger than what the country has reported.

Iran is one of the countries inflicted with the novel coronavirus, scientifically known as COVID-19.

Health Minister Saeed Namaki has said effective measures have been taken and comprehensive plans are underway to get rid of the novel coronavirus in

Iran has put in place a set of contingency



"It>s shameful and downright inhuman to cheer for a deadly Virus to spread and enjoy seeing people suffer for it," Araghchi tweeted.

plans, including the temporary shutdown of schools, universities and cultural centers, to curb the coronavirus outbreak that by

Tuesday afternoon had claimed at least

"With regard to the past experience,

I say that we will defeat the coronavirus before long," the minister said on Sunday. Meanwhile, the head of the Iranian

Judiciary's High Council for Human Rights has said countries imposing sanctions on supply of medicine to Iran are "murderers of human beings" and lack qualification to be members of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC).

Ali Baqeri made the remarks while addressing the 43rd session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland, on Monday, where he described the unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States on Iran as the "most recent grave and systematic violation of human rights."
Emphasizing that "the Iranian nation is the major victim of such a violation,"

Baqeri said, "The United States has created an international sanction regime which amounts to a systematic violation of human rights at an international level."

On Monday, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said like other viruses, including terrorism, coronavirus knows no borders, calling for more regional cooperation to combat it.

Like other viruses - incl terrorism -#COVID19 knows no borders and doesn't distinguish between ethnicities or faiths,' Zarif said in a tweet.

"To combat it, neither should we," he said, adding, "In line with #HOPE, Iran calls for more regional cooperation incl long overdue Joint Center for Disease

EU's Schmid: We have a 'collective responsibility' to preserve nuclear deal



POLITICAL TEHRAN — Helga Schmid, secretary general of the European External Action Service (EEAS), said on Tuesday that all sides have a collective responsibility to preserve the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the JCPOA.

"In Vienna to prepare first #JCPOA Joint Commission of 2020, to continue to oversee the implementation of the agreement. We have a collective responsibility to preserve the #IranDeal," she tweeted.

The Joint Commission of the JCPOA was held in Vienna on Wednesday

"A meeting of the Joint Commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) will take place in Vienna on 26 February. The Joint Commission will be chaired on behalf of the EU High Representative Josep Borrell Fontelles by EEAS Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid and will be attended by representatives of China, France, Germany, Russia, United Kingdom and Iran," the official website of the European Union said

In a tweet on Monday, Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organizations said, "Ways and means to improve the situation within and around #JCPOA will be discussed."

U.S. President Donald Trump quit the nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA, in May 2018 and introduced the arshest ever sanctions on Iran.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on February 16 that he will remain committed to keep the JCPOA alive. "As coordinator I remain committed to listen to all

sides and keep the #NuclearDeal alive," he said in a tweet. In May 2019 Iran started to reduce its commitments to the JČPOA at bi-monthly intervals in response to the abrogation of the pact by the U.S. coupled with the European Union's inaction to shield Iran's economy

Borrell has said that Europe must ensure Iran's benefits from the nuclear deal if it wants the deal to survive.

"If we want the Iran nuclear deal to survive, we need to ensure that Iran benefits if it returns to full compliance," he wrote in an article in the Project Syndicate published on February 8.

Borrell was notified in January by Paris, London, and Berlin that they had triggered the resolution dispute mechanism.

He has said that the EU will extend indefinitely the time limit to resolve disputes in the nuclear deal to avoid having to go to the UN Security Council or triggering new sanctions.

"There is an agreement that more time is needed due to the complexity of the issues involved. The timeline is therefore extended," Borrell said in a statement on

U.S. sanctions foreign entities over Iran's missile program

TEHRAN — The U.S. d e s k Department of State has imposed sanctions against 13 foreign entities and individuals in China, Iraq, Russia and Turkey for what it called supporting proliferation programs in Iran, North

"The United States is sanctioning 13 foreign entities and individuals in China, Iraq, Russia, and Turkey pursuant to the Iran, North Korea, and Syria Nonproliferation Act (INKSNA)," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement

"This action includes new sanctions against five entities/individuals in China (Luo Dingwen, Baoding Shimaotong Enterprises Services Company Limited, Gaobeidian Kaituo Precise Instrument Co. Ltd, and Wuhan Sanjiang Import and Export Co., Ltd) and Turkey (Eren Carbon Graphite Industrial Trading Company, Ltd) for supporting Iran's missile program. The Chinese individual Luo Dingwen has also been involved in supplying sensitive items to Pakistan's weapons program," the statement read.

"The recent determinations were the result of a periodic review of sanctionable activity as required by INKSNA. We have imposed two-year discretionary sanctions on the 13 individuals/entities identified in this report. The sanctions



include restrictions on U.S. government procurement, U.S. government assistance, and exports," it added.

Pompeo also claimed that the "imposition of these measures underscores that Iran's missile program remains a significant proliferation concern. The imposition of sanctions against these foreign entities is consistent with our efforts to use all available measures to prevent Iran from advancing its missile capabilities.

Over the past years, Iran has made

major breakthroughs in its defense sector and attained self-sufficiency in producing military equipment and hardware despite sanctions and economic pressures on

The Islamic Republic maintains that its military power poses no threat to other countries and is based on its military doctrine of deterrence.

The standoff between Iran and the U.S. began after Trump unilaterally withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal that Tehran sealed with world powers, and imposed the most severe sanctions ever on the Islamic Republic.

In response to this move, on May 8, 2019, Iran announced that its "strategic patience" is over and started to gradually reduce its commitments to the JCPOĂ at bi-monthly intervals. At the time Iran announced if the European parties to the deal take concrete steps to shield Iran's economy from the U.S. sanctions it will reverse its decision.

However, seeing no action by the Europeans, on January 5 Iran took the last and final step by removing all limits on its nuclear activities.

Iran's moves are based on paragraph 36 of the JCPOA which "allows one side. under certain circumstances, to stop complying with the deal if the other side is out of compliance.'

Despite taking the last step, Iran has reminded the Europeans to fulfill their commitments in order to keep the deal alive.

Iran and the U.S. came close to war last month after Qassem Soleimani, Iran's legendary commander in the fight against terrorism, was killed in an American drone strike. Soleimani's Quds Force, the wing of the IRGC responsible for overseas operations, has led Iran's fight against ISIS.

Armed forces mobilized to fight coronavirus: spokesman

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A senior spokesman for the General Staff of the Iranian armed forces said all capacities of the forces have been mobilized to help in the fight against the coronavirus outbreak in the country.

In remarks on Tuesday, Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi appreciated the establishment of a national task force on coronavirus outbreak and said the Islamic Republic's armed forces, including the Army, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Basij (Mobilization) Force, the Ministry of Defense, and the Law Enforcement Force, have mobilized their capacities to help in fighting against the in-

In addition to the round-the-clock efforts of the Ministry of Defense to provide the people with health supplies, all training centers of the armed forces are

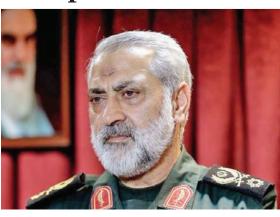
used by specialized medical teams and preventive measures have been taken, he stated.

The coronavirus has affected many countries in the world, he said, adding, "In addition to mobilizing medical and treatment facilities, the armed forces have also tightened control over air, sea and land borders.

According to Iran's Health Ministry, the number of people who have died from the coronavirus in the country has risen to 15 and the total number of confirmed cases to 95.

At least 24 people infected with COVID-19 have recovered from the disease after being admitted to the hospital. The Health Ministry says the source of contagion

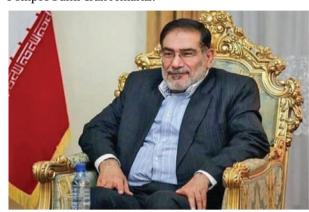
in Iran were the individuals returning to Iran from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and China, some of whom have crossed the border illegally.



Twitter unblocks Shamkhani's account after complaints

TEHRAN — Social media giant Twitter, which had blocked the account of Ali Sham $khani, secretary \ of \ Iran's \ Supreme \ National \ Security \ Council$ (SNSC), in a blatant violation of freedom of expression, has unblocked the top security official's account after complaints were lodged against the move.

@alishamkhani_ir became the target of Twitter's censorship after Shamkhani responded to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's anti-Iran remarks



In a series of tweets on Tuesday, Shamkhani pointed to Pompeo's meddlesome remarks on the Islamic Republic, saying Washington's "maximum pressure" policy against Iran is being completed with propagating lies about the outbreak of coronavirus in Iran.

Pompeo on Tuesday accused the governments of Iran and China of censoring information about the outbreaks in their countries and putting the rest of the world at greater risk of its spread.

The United States is deeply concerned by information indicating the Iranian regime may have suppressed vital details about the outbreak in that country," he said.

While Pompeo expresses concern about what he calls Iran's cover-up about 'Corona' no precise reports have still been released by the White House about the reality of Ain al-Asad, spy aircraft in Afghanistan, the number of those killed from this year's influenza...," Shamkhani tweeted.

"It is planned that the #MaximumPressure strategy against

#Iran to be completed with the term '#Coronavirus'," he said in another tweet.

Psychological pressure on countries to close their land and air routes and propagating lies is the new roadmap," he added, using the hashtag #WeDefeatCoronavirus.

Shamkhani's exposing of the new plots hatched by the Islamic Republic's enemies under their hybrid warfare against the Islamic Republic was met with Twitter's wrath, as one of the wings of the Western-Hebrew-Arab psychological warfare.

This is while in recent days, all of the foreign-backed anti-Iran Persian media outlets – especially Iran International, BBC Persian and Manoto – have focused heavily on two false narratives, namely Iran's "suppression of information" and "spread of coronavirus from Iran".

Europeans have been slow in implementing INSTEX: **U.S.** professor

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Matthew Anthony Evangee s k lista, a U.S political science professor at Cornel University, has said that the Europeans have been "slow" in implementing the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX).

"The Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges was a European initiative to facilitate trade with Iran despite U.S. sanctions that particularly affected the banking sector. But the Europeans were slow in getting the process going, and they met fierce opposition from the United States, so INSTEX was only established in January 2019,'

ILNA quoted him as saying in an interview published on Tuesday.

"I think it is difficult for the $Europeans \,to\,continue\,trying\,to$ support Iran," he added.

Ĥe also noted, "The situation does not seem fair to Iran."

INSTEX has been designed by the European Union to facilitate legitimate trade with Tehran. It was introduced on January 31, 2019, by France, Germany, and Britain, the three countries party to the nuclear deal.

INSTEX is supposed to be a



In late November 2019, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden issued a joint statement announcing becoming shareholders of INSTEX.

"In light of the continuous European support for the agreement and the ongoing efforts to implement the economic part of it and to facilitate legitimate trade between Europe and Iran, we are now in the process of becoming shareholders of the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) subject to completion of national procedures. INSTEX was established by France, Germany and the United Kingdom in January 2019," read the statement, published by the Foreign Ministry of Finland.

Iran has likened INSTEX to a beautiful car which has no gasoline. Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said on Sunday that the INSTEX is ineffective and useless.

On May 8, 2019, exactly one year after President Trump abrogated the JCPOA, Iran said its "strategic patience" is over and started to gradually reduce its commitment to the JCPOA at bi-monthly interval. Finally, on January 5 Iran took the last and final step in reducing its commitments

However, Iran has insisted that it will reverse its decisions if the EU abides by its obligations under the multilateral pact.

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	524394.5
IFX	6744.44

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	45,644 rials
GBP	54,544 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

\$53.62b
\$49.53/b
\$56.14/b
\$1,648.85/oz
\$18.14/oz
\$932.50/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

TEDPIX jumps 5,800 points on Wednesday

ECONOMY TEHRAN — TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), rose 5,882 points to 524,394 on Wednesday, IRNA reported.

As reported, over 7.659 billion securities worth 55.898 trillion rials (about \$1.33 billion) were traded at TSE in the same day.



The first market's index climbed 10,422 points and the second market's index went up 11,002 points.

Indices of Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company (PGPIC), National Iranian Copper Industry Company (NICICO), and Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line (IRISL) mostly contributed to the TEDPIX growth during the Wednesday trades.

Tehran Stock Exchange has been ranked as the second best performer among the members of the World Federation of Exchanges (WFE) in terms of the main index growth during the 12-month period of December 2018-December 2019.

According to the TSE's office of public relations, TEDPIX registered a growth of 133 percent in the mentioned time span to become the second-best performer after Jamaica Stock Exchange.

On Wednesday, IFX, the main index of Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) known as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), also rose 52 points to 6,744, as 3.275 billion securities valued at 51.030 trillion rials (about \$1.21 billion) were traded at this market

China's economy on the brink of collapse amid corona fears — can Bitcoin lend a hand?

While the Coronavirus outbreak continues to cause concern across the globe, there are growing anxieties about its longterm effect on the economy of China which has already started

China has been hit by viral epidemics before and felt its sting on its economy. The 2003 SARS outbreak was estimated to have cost the country some \$40 billion. However, China's economy has grown far larger since 2003, and the impact of the Coronavirus outbreak could be significantly worse.

Chinese firms are nearing collapse if they do not receive some sort of assistance or bailout from the banks. This has put massive amounts of pressure on the banks and leaves many asking how much longer the economy can hold out.

According to the Bloomberg report, a survey of small to medium-sized Chinese companies conducted in February shows that over 30 percent of them admit to only having enough cash reserves to keep running for a month, while another third of the businesses claim they can only hold out for two months.

More concerning is that only a third of firms have been able to resume operations amid the spread of the virus due to complicated local government approval procedures as well as a lack

of employees and financing. Banks ordered to boost lending

In order to try and help some of the companies, the government has cut interest rates, ordered banks to boost lending, and loosened the rules that determine if a company can resume normal operations. Even still, many of the country's companies are saying they will not be able to meet deadlines for debt and salary.

"If China fails to contain the virus in the first quarter, I expect a vast number of small businesses would go under," said Lv . Changshun, an analyst at Beijing Zhonghe Yingtai Management Consultant Co.

What is even more concerning for the Chinese citizens looking to stay afloat, is their access to an ever increasingly popular digital safe haven has mostly been cut off. Bitcoin is emerging as a potential hedge in times of economic uncertainty, and with the Coronavirus fears, its designation as a safe haven is being accelerated.

China has, since 2017, tried to shut the door on Bitcoin for its citizens, as is evident from this report in the Asia Times remarking on how successful the clampdown had been.

(Source: beincrypto.com)

Iran's steel output growth 23 times global average

1 → Iran's crude steel production increased by 30 percent in 2019 while the average global growth in this sector stood at 3.5 percent, according to the WSA's previous report.

Based on the report, Iran produced 31.9 million tons of the mentioned commodity during 2019 compared to its previous year's nearly 24 million tons.

Global crude steel production stood at 1.848 billion tons in 2019.

WSA had also put Iran's steel production at 23.648 million tons in the eleven-month

period of 2019, rising 5.3 percent from 22.452million tons in the same time span of the

Iran produced 2.13 million tons of crude steel in November 2019, which was 2.6 percent lower than 2.187 million tons of the product produced in November 2018, the same report confirmed.

Iran which stood at the 13th place in 2017 could lag behind three major steel producers in the world, namely Italy, Taiwan, and Ukraine to stand at the 10th place in 2018, despite the re-imposition of sanctions by the U.S.



In early May 2019, Washington imposed new sanctions on Iran's metals and minerals sectors in an attempt to [as the U.S. president

Trump put it] "choke off the country's largest non-petroleum related sources of export

Chief banker holds talks with economists to discuss economy

ECONOMY TEHRAN — In the ninth meeting of the country's economists with the governor of Central Bank of Iran (CBI) in Tehran on Wednesday, various issues like CBI actions for stabilizing the currency market, open market operations, the importance of non-oil exports and the recent FATF decision were explored.

According to CBI office of public relations, in the meeting Abdolnaser Hemmati underlined the country's current economic conditions and said: "Considering the country's current conditions [mentioning the U.S. sanctions and FATF decision for blacklisting Iran], the central bank has made more efforts to stabilize the forex markets.

Mentioning the criticism toward the volume of liquidity, the chief banker noted that although 28 percent is a somehow high level of liquidity growth, but in the past 50 years the average level of liquidity growth has been 25 percent and only three percent deviation in the current situation means that the CBI is trying its best to control the situation.

He further noted that an under 20 percent inflation is not unreachable for the upcoming Iranian calendar year.

The economists at the meeting also appreciated the central bank's efforts for maintaining the balance in the foreign exchange market through setting up the integrated forex market as well as open market operations, saying that these are two of the most important outcomes of CBI's monetary and currency policy making.

Reforming the structure of the country's banking system, curbing inflation, removing barriers in the way of production, improving non-oil exports, and liquidity-control methods were also among the issues covered in this threehour session.

The CBI hosts periodic meetings with the country's senior economists and economic analysts to explore ways of improving the country's economic conditions and find solutions for the monetary problems.

The previous session of the economists' gathering at the CBI was held in late June 2019.

Senior officials hold meeting on basic goods supply

ECONOMYd e s k

TEHRAN — During a meeting held on

Wednesday, some Iranian high-ranking officials discussed the issue of supplying basic commodities for the country, IRNA

As reported, the meeting was chaired by First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri, Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami, Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani and his deputy Hossein Modares Khiabani, besides Head of Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) Mohammad Baqer Nobakht.

As announced last week by Central Bank of Iran (CBI)'s Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati, despite the U.S. sanctions and their most pressures on Iranian economy Iran has managed to supply \$35.5 billion for importing basic commodities in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 21, 2019).

The official said that of the mentioned figure, about \$14 billion has been for importing some more essential goods such as medicine, medical equipment and livestock food, and there is an abundant supply of such products in the country.

In last December, industry, mining and trade minister had announced that the basic goods that the country needs in the current Iranian calendar year and also in the next year have been reserved.

The minister said the government and private sector's warehouses are already filled up with the basic commodities and there is

Also, the deputy finance and economic affairs minister has announced that the government has provisioned \$14 billion of offi $cial\text{-}rate\,foreign\,currency\,in\,the\,next\,Iranian$ calendar year (March 2020-March 2021)'s budget bill for imports of basic goods.

Importers of rice, barley, corn, edible oils, oilseeds, and livestock feed, as well as medicines and a few other items are going to receive the government support, according to Mohammad-Ali Dehqan Dehnavi.

"The government has identified these goods as the basic needs of the people and has decided to keep the prices of such items low in the market, so \$14 billion of foreign currency with official rate will be provided to the importers of these commodities next year," Dehnavi said.

Tehran, Islamabad discuss free trade agreement

ECONOMY TEHRAN – A Trade delegation from Tehran

Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) traveled to Pakistan to discuss expansion of trade ties between the two countries.

In a meeting with their Pakistani counterparts on Tuesday, the Iranian delegation criticized the low level of trade between the two sides and suggested taking serious measures like holding exhibitions, exchanging business delegations and the use of non-bank channels for money transfers, for boosting the trade between the two nations.

Led by TCCIMA Head Masoud Khansari, the delegation also visited Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI), during which FPCCI President Mian Anjum Nisar said the level of economic relations between the two countries was insufficient considering the existing capacities and cultural closeness between the two sides.

Although the two countries have signed a preferential trade agreement a few years ago, but none of them has used this opportunity properly," Nisar regretted.



TCCIMA Head Masoud Khansari (3rd L) explores ways of expanding bilateral trade ties with Chief Executive of Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) Arif Ahmed Khan (5th L) in Karachi on Tuesday

According to the official, the U.S. sanctions against Iran are a major part of the obstacles

to the development of economic cooperation between the two countries, and both sides

Analysts are scaling back their bullish forecasts for gains in Japanese shares,

as the spreading coronavirus outbreak

has raised recession risks and cast a pall

over the outlook for corporate earnings,

fund managers polled Feb. 13-25 put the

Nikkei benchmark .N225 up 9.9% at 24,650

at the end of 2020 compared with Wednes-

day's close of 22,426.19. In November the

index was forecast to round out this year

before global markets took a beating.

Most forecasts were collected last week,

If the Nikkei did rise to 24,650 that

would mark the highest level since 1991,

but many analysts have cut their forecasts

compared to the previous survey in No-

vember as the outbreak of a new flu-like

virus in China ripples through the global

biggest daily decline in more than a year,

as investors re-price Japanese equities

to reflect an expected decline in exports,

consumer spending, and tourism as pub-

lic health officials struggle to contain the

On Feb. 25 the Nikkei tumbled 3.3%, its

The median estimate of 27 analysts and

By Stanley White

a Reuters poll showed.

at 25.000.

Analysts lower Japan share market

need to take serious measures to resolve such During the visit to Pakistan, the Iranian

delegation also met with the Chief Executive of Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) Arif Ahmed Khan in Karachi. In the meeting, the two sides emphasized

the need to use solutions such as the preferential trade agreement, free trade agreement, and removing customs barriers for boosting trade relations between the two

Speaking in this event, the head of the Tehran chamber pointed out some of the obstacles in the way of the development of the two sides' economic cooperation, noting that the annual trade between Iran and Pakistan does not exceed \$1.5 billion.

Ahmad Khan for his part noted that both Iranian and Pakistani authorities should know that the development of trans-regional trade is subject to a boom in regional trade. Therefore, along with the cultural, religious and geographical commonalities, the two countries must also take operational steps to improve trade relations.

Coronavirus could torpedo Germany's zero-growth economy this year, report says

The bad luck just keeps on coming for the German economy.

The first piece of news is that the country's economy failed to grow at all in the fourth quarter: Zip, zero, nothing.
"(W)e think the German economy

will not grow in the first half of this year either, even if the effects of the coronavirus are contained," states a recent report from London-based research firm Capital Economics. In other words, the base case is more of the same - zero growth - but the coronavirus outbreak could make the situation deteriorate.

The Capital report highlights "weak global demand and falling domestic investment' for the likely poor first half of the year.

The forecast situation isn't that much better in the second half. Overall the German economy will likely increase ny 0.2% in 2020. That compares to growth of 0.6% for the whole of last year.

While the base case is bleak, it may not paint a dire enough picture of what is probably ahead for the country.

Exports of manufactured goods in including cars are a key driver of Germany's economy. Unfortunately, that exposes the country to the Coronavirus impact.

First, China, which is the world's largest market for cars, will suffer heavily from the Coronavirus outbreak. Entire Chinese cities are getting shut down to stop the spread of the disease. That's likely to hurt demand



for all new vehicles, including those made

Second, the problems in China won't stay in China. Almost all automobile manufacturing relies heavily of multinational supply chains for vehicle components. If one part of the supply chain gets halted or slowed then the rest will more than likely do the same, at least temporarily. In other words, the industrial lockdown across China will quickly hurt Germany's ability to build cars.

"Any impact of the coronavirus on the $German\,economy\,via\,supply-chain\,disruption$ or reduced demand from China has been small so far," the Capital Report says. "But the longer the disruption in China continues the greater the risks."

Let face it, China's handling of the situation hasn't been great so far. And likely we can expect more government bungling. Ultimately, any missteps taken in Beijing will be felt in Germany's industrial heartland. That's why investors in Germany stocks might want to be cautious, at least for a while. (Source: forbes.com)

"We're going from an economic contraction in the fourth quarter to what will likely be another contraction in the first quarter

spread of the virus.

forecasts as virus spreads: Reuters poll because of the virus," said Norihiro Fujito, chief investment strategist at Mitsubishi

UFJ Morgan Stanley Securities in Tokyo. "We won't get a clear picture until companies start issuing earnings estimates around May, so at this point it is hard to say what fair valuations are for Japanese

shares.' Japan's gross domestic product (GDP), which shrank in the fourth quarter at the fastest pace in almost six years hurt by a sales tax hike, could contract again in the first quarter, economists say, as the virus outbreak roiled financial markets and global

trade from late January. Two consecutive quarters of contraction would meet the definition of a technical

The virus epidemic started in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in December, but rapidly rising infections in Japan, South

Korea, Italy and Iran has unsettled investors. There are signs the virus has peaked in China, where it has claimed more than 2,700 lives. However, investors are worried as the virus has spread to more than 30 other countries, raising the risk of a

global pandemic. Japan's economy, the world's third-largest, would face further downside risks if the virus continues to spread because of its reliance on exports and global supply

(Source: reuters.com)

25,000 nomadic households to access solar electricity by Mar.2021

ENERGYd e s k of Nomads Affairs Organization of Iran says 25,000 nomadic households are going to be supplied with photovoltaic power stations (known as PV systems) by the end of the next Iranian calendar year (March 2021).

"This year, 8,000 nomadic households will be supplied with solar panels and next year 17,000 households across the country will receive solar panels from the Energy Ministry," Karamali Ghandali said.

According to the official, the program was supposed to be implemented four years ago, however, due to some standard-related issues it was postponed until the current year.

Back in October 2019, the energy ministry announced the implementation of a program for supplying the country' nomadic households with mobile small-scale power stations.

According to the program's Executive Director Ali Chehel-Amirani, the plan is set to be completed by the Iranian calendar year of 1400 (starts in March 2021), the portal of the Energy Ministry (known as Paven) reported.



Also in November, Iran's Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) inked

a memorandum of understanding with Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation and the Organization for Mobilization of the Oppressed for construction of 20,000 photovoltaic power stations (known as PV systems) across the

According to the Deputy Head of PBO, Hamid Pour-Mohammad, the project was part of a bigger program in which at the first phase 20,000 PV systems would be constructed for rural and nomadic households and in the next phases the number will be raised to 100,000

Based on the Energy Ministry data, renewables, currently, account for nearly seven percent of the country's total electricity generation capacity.

Of the country's total renewable capacity, 44 percent is the share of solar power plants while the share of wind farms stands at 40 percent and small-scalded hydropower plants generate 13 percent of the total renewable

Overall, in the next five years, Iran is aiming for a 5,000 MW increase in renewable capacity to meet growing domestic demand and expand its presence in the regional electricity market.

Spain's Endesa brings forward full coal closure to 2021



By Gianluca Baratti

Spanish utility Endesa is to bring forward the closure of its 4.6 GW domestic coal-fired capacity by a year to 2021, amid a structural change in market conditions, CEO Jose Bogas said Tuesday

Now factors such as CO2 prices and a weak gas and LNG market have increasingly pushed coal out of the generation mix in Spain. That enabled Endesa to beat a 2020 target of 290 grams of CO2 per kWh a year early -- a figure it intends to repeat this year.

Spain's largest operator of coal-fired plants said it will close two plants -- the 1.1 GW unit at Litoral and 1.4 GW unit at As Pontes -- by next year, while confirming the closure of the 1.0 GW Compostilla and 1.1 GW Teruel plants by the middle of this year.

The closures will leave Endesa with 241 MW of coal-fired capacity at its Alcudia plant on the island Majorca, which recently shut half its capacity and has a target closure date

Overall, Endesa said it booked a Eur1.9 billion (\$2.05 billion) financial impairment to account for the early closures, including

The losing coal capacity

Part of the company's strategy in coming years is to replace the closing coal capacity with renewables, having added 926 MW in 2019 and acquired a pipeline of 1 GW from industrial group Prodiel at the end of last year.

The company sees 3.7 GW coming online in 2020-2022 and a further 1.7 GW just after, with a total pipeline of 19.1 GW and a target of 60% of renewables in installed capacity by 2022 from 39% in 2019.

Bogas, speaking on a results call, said the company would likely pursue a mixture of participating in government auctions and merchant capacity, including replacement capacity in the sites of closing coal plants.

Coal generation was the worst-performing sector in the company's 2019 generation mix, with output falling 66% to 7.6 TWh, or an operating rate of around 18% as generators principally switched to gas-fired output.

procurement costs to drive up its unitary power margin by 7% in 2019 to Eur27.60/ MWh. While unitary revenue edged up 70 euro cent/MWh on the year to Eur67.80/ MWh, unitary costs dropped Eur1.20/MWh to Eur40.20/MWh, it said. For 2020, Endesa has hedged 100% of

The company was able to use the lower

its forecast production at an estimated all-in price of Eur65/MWh -- a similar level to 2019 -- while it expected that level to remain in place through to 2021, for which it has already hedged 63% of its expected output, leaving an estimated 13 TWh of open position.

The current gas forward prices

It estimated it can increase its 2021 unitary margin to its target of Eur30/MWh given current gas forward prices, since CCGTs are expected to set the marginal price going forward.

The surge in CCGT demand was also beneficial to the company's gas margins, which more than doubled from Eur1.60/ MWh in 2018 to Eur3.40/MWh, boosted by a 70 euro cent/MWh contribution from CCGT sales, it said.

Endesa's gas sales to CCGTs increased gas sales volume dropped 10% to $66.8\,\mathrm{TWh}$

Bogas said more flexible sourcing and active portfolio management had been a factor in the gas performance.

Endesa's portfolio meant around half its contracted supply is from LNG long-term contracts and half is pipeline gas, which is indexed to Brent.

The company said it recently canceled two LNG cargoes from its U.S. supplier Cheniere and opted to purchase spot cargoes instead. with prices near Eur10/MWh.

The current situation with coronavirus meant there was a lot of gas in the market looking for a home, Bogas said.

Looking forward, Endesa said it expected to see a recovery in gas prices towards its strategic plan assumption of Eur20/MWh

(Source: spglobal.com)

Global challenges require global solutions



The 2020 Global Energy Forum - hosted by the Atlantic Council Global Energy Center on January 10–12, 2020 in Abu Dhabi identified that the conversation around U.S. energy markets tends to focus on gas and coal versus renewables, how to meet emerging state-level carbon goals, advancing battery storage, and how to update and future-proof our extensive grid infrastructure that already

Discussions at the forum applied an international lens with a look at oil markets in a changing world, gas as a bridge fuel, co-financing of nuclear plants, widespread energy poverty and how to bring electricity to all, and the potential vulnerabilities of grid interconnections between nations.

Polls taken in the United States indicate that 19 percent of the population does not believe human activity contributes to climate

Whereas outside the United Stateswhere climate denial is much less prevalent - multinational companies, governments, start-ups, and individuals agreed on the need to collaborate in order to keep carbon emissions low enough to prevent a 1.5 degree

The breadth of opportunities

Dr. Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency (IEA), presented the below slide at the beginning of the forum to demonstrate the breadth of opportunities that could be sought out by sustainable investors

As stated at the forum, we need most, if not all, of these to succeed in order to truly achieve the goal of stabilizing global temperatures.

Topics such as carbon pricing; Environment, Sustainability & Governance (ESG) ratings; and energy source planning through 2050 were covered with great detail at the forum, but what will it take to drive more sustainable investing to keep our planet temperature below a 1.5 degree increase?

Investment decisions are primarily based on two criteria: Internal Rate of Return (IRR) and relationships (investor to investor or investor to company).

IRR is simply the return on capital invested while incorporating the time value of money. Profits are what determine that return,

so either increasing revenue or decreasing operating expenses are what drive the profits that return capital to investors.

One solution that has spurred sustainable investment internationally is carbon pricing - essentially putting a price on carbon emissions that is equivalent to increasing operating expenses. The intent is to level the playing field, so

that high carbon-emitting energy producers, such as coal plants, yield similar profits as solar and wind energy producers that are still in the process of achieving economies of scale, in order to compete for energy demand. Policies becoming more efficient

During the 2020 Global Energy Forum, emphasis was placed on successful carbon pricing, but also on the possibility of such policies becoming more efficient.

Think of it as price discrimination as applied to companies at the country, state, or city level based on carbon output (and its impact in on the environment for that region), which would improve transparency deploy their capital.

One other solution to drive sustainable investment is to build out a more accessible clean energy investment network.

CleanTX is uniquely positioned as a clean technology economic development nonprofit, where clean energy start-ups are striving to grow in the energy market while investors are looking for future-proof investment opportunities.

Connecting and financing among these entities also relies on experienced investors, government buy-in, and trust.

Building rapport and driving coinvestment from the public sector in order to de-risk sustainable investment is necessary in order to attract sophisticated and unsophisticated investors towards opportunities that are good for the bottom line and for our planet.

(Source: atlanticcouncil.org)

coronavirus roils oil markets The coronavirus outbreak has been pressuring oil prices for weeks

Saudis put on brave face as

as Saudi Arabia-led OPEC and other oil producers try to gauge how the widening outbreak could affect global energy demand.

Tuesday saw even more pain inflicted on crude, as fears surrounding the outbreak sent prices down for a third straight session and the head of the International Energy Agency (IEA) said its oil demand growth outlook - already at its lowest level in a decade - might have to be trimmed again.

But so far OPEC, which is dominated by Saudi Arabia, has failed to persuade its allies to take action to offset the effect of

Earlier this month, a technical committee for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies, a grouping known as OPEC+, recommend an output cut of 600,000 barrels per day (bpd) to buoy prices.

But the cartel's most crucial ally, Russia, has so far resisted that course of action.

On Tuesday, Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told reporters in Riyadh that the kingdom remains in contact with Moscow on how to move ahead.

We did not run out of ideas, we have not closed our phones. There is always a good way of communicating through conference

Speaking at the same Riyadh conference, Saudi Aramco CEO Amin Nasser said he expected oil demand to pick up in the second half of this year.

Things are back to normal

"We expect by the second half, things are back to normal. There is an impact on markets but Aramco has dealt with many crises before," he said during a panel discussion.

The kingdom needs oil to fetch approximately \$83 per barrel to break even or balance its state budget, according to the International Monetary Fund.

Russia's break-even price is below \$50 a barrel.

Global benchmark crude for April delivery settled below \$55

A current OPEC+ agreement struck in December aims to cut output by 1.7 million bpd until the end of March. The group had already been facing lower oil prices from oversupply and waning demand in China - the world's largest oil importer. But the coronavirus outbreak, which started in China and is

continuing to spread to other parts of Asia, the Middle East and Europe, is throwing even more uncertainty into the global energy

Meanwhile, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States on Tuesday warned Americans to get ready for an outbreak

Russians will agree to some cut

whether it will spread.

 $\hbox{``I think that the downward pressure on prices that the virus has}\\$ created makes it more likely that the Russians will agree to some kind of cut," Gregory Gause, head of the International Affairs Department at Texas A&M University, told Al Jazeera.

"It is easier for the (Russians) to play hardball with oil above \$60 than it is with oil getting into the low \$50s," he added.

OPEC+ members are scheduled to meet in Vienna, Austria on March 5-6 to decide whether to extend their current production cut. "One of the more difficult things about this is that we do not know

how far the virus will go. It's difficult to figure out how to respond," Samantha Gross, a fellow in the Cross-Brookings Initiative on Energy and Climate, told

'Usually, when there is a disruption taking place, you know how much oil to take off the market. But the economy in China has slowed so much and we just don't know how long the virus will last and

(OPEC and its allies) would have to make a lot of decisions in real-time. And that is difficult for them to do because there are so many different players to reach consensus," Gross said.

Earlier this month, the EA said it expected global crude demand to drop by 435,000 bpd in the first quarter, the lowest in a decade. bringing demand growth for 2020 to 365,000 bpd from to 825,000 bpd.

On Tuesday, the head of the IEA told Reuters News Agency that the agency's outlook may have to be revised downward again.

LNG Canada says it's hitting 'critical construction milestones' amid blockades

LNG Canada is promising to deliver its first cargo before the middle of this decade as blockades continue around a central piece of the project's infrastructure.

The Coastal GasLink pipeline is expected to carry natural gas from B.C.'s Peace region to the proposed LNG plant in Kitimat. The liquefied natural gas (LNG) will then be shipped from the

port in Kitimat predominantly to Asian markets. "More than 2,000 people are benefitting directly from employment and contracting during this busy construction period. We've also spent more than \$2 billion on contracts with Indigenous companies, local companies, and companies in B.C. and across Canada," an

open letter from LNG Canada CEO Peter Zebedee reads. In 2018, a joint venture including energy industry players announced a final investment for the \$40-billion LNG megaproiect, which would be the fastest route to transport gas from North America to Asia

National blockades were triggered in support of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs opposed to the pipeline going through its territory. Twenty Indigenous communities have signed on to a commu-

nities benefits agreement for the pipeline. Markets for exporting LNG

"We are excited about the project, the opportunity it affords Indigenous and northern communities, and the market for exporting Canadian LNG," Zebedee writes.

"While there are some who want to #ShutDownCanada, there are many more who want to #BuildCanadaUp. We are a resource-rich country and I believe we have a responsibility to share our abundant energy resources with the rest of the world. In the process, we can demonstrate that Canada is a great place to conduct business."

The project has the support of the BC NDP and the BC Liberals. The BC Greens have repeatedly voted against it due to concerns around emissions.

"LNG Canada continues to lead in greenhouse gas emissions performance and we have purposefully designed our facility to have the lowest GHG emissions of any large-scale LNG export facility operating in the world," Zebedee writes.

At the time of the final investment decision, Prime Minister ${\bf Justin\,Trude au\,called\,the\,announcement\,the\,"single\,largest\,private}$ sector investment project in Canadian history.

(Source: globalnews.ca)

Oil rises on short-covering despite growing fears over coronavirus

Crude prices edged up on Wednesday as investors covered short positions after three sessions of losses, even as fears deepened that the rapid spread of the coronavirus will lead to a global pandemic.

Brent crude rose 42 cents, or 0.8%, to \$55.37 a barrel by 0154 GMT, while U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude gained 43 cents, or 0.9%, to \$50.33 a barrel. Still, both benchmarks are down nearly 7% since last Thursday's

Fears of a pandemic escalated after the coronavirus spread to more countries while infections worsened in South Korea and Italy.

In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Americans should prepare for possible community spread of the virus.

"Investors unwound short positions after WTI dipped below a key support level of \$50, as they have done a

few times earlier this month," said Hideshi Matsunaga, analyst at Sunward Trading.

The "reduction in Libya's output and expectations

for additional production cuts by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and OPEC+ are also lending support," he said.

Oil output in Libya has fallen sharply since Jan. 18 because of a blockade of ports and oil fields by groups loyal to eastern-based commander Khalifa Haftar.

OPEC and its allies including Russia, a group known as OPEC+, are due to meet in Vienna over March 5-6. Saudi Arabia's energy minister said on Tuesday he was confident that OPEC and its partners would respond

responsibly to the spread of the coronavirus. Still, lingering worries that the rapidly spreading coronavirus will dent the global economy and oil demand are weighing on investor sentiment.

The International Energy Agency's (IEA) outlook on global oil demand growth has fallen to its lowest level in a decade, IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol said on Tuesday, adding it could be reduced further due to the coronavirus outbreak. U.S. crude inventories are expected to rise for a fifth

week running.

The American Petroleum Institute (API) said late Tuesday that crude stockpiles rose 1.3 million barrels last week. Government data were to be due at 10:30 A.M. EST (1530 GMT) on Wednesday was expected to show a 2 million-barrel rise, according to a Reuters poll. Meanwhile, the United States is preparing to impose

more sanctions on Venezuela's oil sector, President Donald Trump said on Tuesday, in an attempt to choke financing to President Nicolas Maduro's government.

(Source: ca.reuters.com)

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The U.S. and the inner collapse

TEHRAN — The leader of Islamic Revolution Seyyed Ali Khamenei recently met with the people of East Azerbaijan province and said that the U.S. is collapsing from inside, but has been faking its glorious look.

The Leader's remarks is an obvious fact that can be seen in statistics and economic misery of the tens of millions of Americans.

A small percentage of people in the U.S. live in high level of financial prosperity, but a significant number of Americans are struggling with poverty.

Francis Fukuyama is an American political scientist, political economist, who was a member of the Political Science Department of the RAND Corporation, one of the Pentagon-affiliated companies. Fukuyama is known for his book "The End of History and the Last Man" (1992), which argued that the worldwide spread of liberal democracies and free-market capitalism of the West and its lifestyle may signal the end point of humanity's sociocultural evolution. However, his recent book "Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment" (2018) modified his earlier position and stated that the rise of trumpism and far-right wing in Europe has become a trouble for protecting liberal ideology.

Fukuyama thought that with the decline of communism and socialism a global consensus would be formed in favor of liberal democracy, which would be regarded as the end of all ideologies and the supremacy of



Samuel P. Huntington, Fukuyama's professor, who presented the clash of civilizations thesis, considered his theory wrong and warned him not to be too optimistic. Vladimir Putin's continued presidency in Russia, China's surprising developments in economic field, U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and Islamic awakening in the Islamic states diminished Fukuyama's optimism.

The American writer saw the Bush and Clinton family's presence in the American political scene as a sign of American political decline and warned that it would lead to the people's frustration.

Fukuyama's prediction came true. Trump has won the long-running conflicts of north eastern elites and southern populists. American public opinion and the media realized his prediction. He explicitly claimed taking power by Trump as a result of decline of the American political system.

In his new book "Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment",

Fukuyama discusses populist nationalism, authoritarianism, religious conflict and the wane of democracy and the crisis of identity.

He believes that the demand for identity recognition has increased and has become the cause of many political conflicts and struggles. Policy making based on the recognition of those whose 'identities' have been ignored or oppressed is so common. The Ŭ.S. is scared of nations and countries that want to be seen and recognized.

Fukuyama believes that today's liberal system is suffering from the identity vacuum and does not promote a particular lifestyle. It took him 30 years to realize that optimism is enough, and talking about a unipolar system in the world is a political delusion. So he has entered the phase of self-criticism. Today, Western elites admit that liberal democracy cannot be imposed on any community by force. The fate of the U.S. and its international allies in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with the economic and political sanctions against the Iranian people show that any use of force to impose liberalism and liberal democracy is doomed to failure. The U.S. is constantly faking it to show that it is in good condition. The air attack on the Ain al-Assad airbase showed U.S. military power has declined. There are only few elites in the U.S. that believe that the situation in Washington is under control and in line with the values of liberalism.

The U.S. will soon realize that divine fate and the will of nations cannot be prevented. Oppressors and criminals will have no place

America is not immune

■ In a move that has become acutely important this year in the U.S., the citizenry is learning that in 2018 Trump fired the entire then existing chain of command for a response to any pandemic. This president apparently thought, as with so many other now fired remainders from the Obama years, they were not loyal enough to him.

While Trump continues to claim that the virus is something like a marginal, minor irritant to the country that is not going to get out of hand, it's almost as if he does not want his fellow Americans to know of, or even do much about, this critical issue threatening not just Americans but the entire world with radical disruptions such as we are now seeing in China, where hundred of millions of people can't go back to work for fear of infecting many more people and deepening the already deep dislocations. China has been paralyzed and nothing like it has ever been seen before

chains are being broken willy nilly, and the U.S. in particular is at risk for, dare it be said, an economic Depression not seen since the 1930s. Procter and Gamble, one of the largest U.S. consumer supply companies with many thousands of products, asserted this past week that the production of some 17,000 items it sells could become unavailable because many of the critical components of its goods are dependent on failing production in China. It probably was a grave mistake that U.S. companies, in the pursuit of higher profits from cheaper labor in Asia, were allowed to offshore production over the past 20 years especially, hollowing out U.S. industry along with the "financialization" of the economy where Wall Street paper pushing has become the dominant economic activity.

Of particular note right now is Senator Bernie Sanders' victories, so far, in the

the nomination to run against Trump in November. These victories, which make him the front runner for the nomination, have appalled the Democratic Party establishment and the entrenched main street U.S. media, who have been banking for their continued provenance and power on the status quo in all its ugly ramifications through rival candidates such as, for example, billionaire former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg, who was slaughtered in a recent "debate" by another rival for the nomination, Elizabeth Warren.

Bloomberg, a Jew and a Zionist, has already spent the obscene sum of half a billion dollars on his campaign, but this is a piddling amount given his fortune of an estimated \$60 billion. Bloomberg is everything Bernie Sanders abhors given Sanders' posture as an alleged "socialist' who wants to raise taxes on people like Bloomberg and reform the health care system to make Medicare available to all Americans. Sanders, another Jew, also wants to make Israel more accountable for its crimes and give the Palestinians a fair shake, and many Democrats obviously agree with this notion and other various reforms that Sanders advocates, especially for the forgotten middle class and workers.

Probably with some accuracy if Sanders were to be elected President, a possible miracle, the economy and markets would suffer, but it's likely they are going to suffer anyway even if Trump is reelected. The money printing and more does have diminishing economic returns, not to mention the debasement of the dollar towards oblivion. America is just on the verge of a huge crisis that may be delayed but cannot be stopped. The coronavirus just quickens the pace of a lambent social, medical and economic disaster this year or next.

The war will have an impact on the course of the Israeli elections: Agel Salah

We talked to the Professor Agel Salah about the latest issues in the Palestine occupied territories and the conflicts between the Zionist regime and the resistance groups, as follows:

Why didn't Hamas join the Palestinian Islamic Jihad at the time of the military response after the killing of Baha'i Abu al-Atta?

A: Initially, Hamas in the Gaza Strip is besieged in all directions and realizes the suffering of the Gazan people as a result of the blockade imposed on it and its inability to break the blockade. Therefore, Hamas has its own calculations related to politics, economy, regional and international relations. In the event that Hamas's military intervention in response, the battle will turn into a broad war Hamas does not want it, and Israel also does not want the war because it got what you want from the assassination of the leader Abu Al-Atta, and because the war will have an impact on the course of the Israeli elections, in addition to the role played by the Egyptian intelligence and the State of Qatar in calming the situation and the paper of reassurances Qatar provided by Hamas and continuously increase its aid if they do not resort to expand the circle of response to the war.

In your opinion, why does Hamas not hold elections in Gaza?

A: If the intended legislative and presidential elections, Hamas realizes that it cannot take place in conducting these elections, which means complete separation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the formation of a new body that does not enjoy local, regional and international legitimacy. Not to mention that it will be a factor of pressure, criticism and popular retreat in support of Hamas, and it will show Hamas that it applies the policy of Israel and the United States of the century deal, which considers the state in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank under Israeli

sovereignty: therefore, Hamas cannot take

this suicidal political step. But if the intention is student, union, and union elections, Hamas realizes that the blockade and pressure by the authority, Egypt, and Israel have created a miserable situation in the Strip, which has resulted in a state of aversion to Hamas for this reason. You find that the percentage of popular support for Hamas in the sector is small because it bears responsibility for the poor economic conditions of the people, and for this reason



You cannot win in these elections, unlike the West Bank, which retaliates from the ruling party - the Fatah movement - and elects the Hamas movement and refrains from electing the Fatah movement to bear the consequences of the corrupt government and the favorable economic conditions of the people. In the West Bank and Gaza, both the Fatah movement and the Hamas movement pay the bill for bad governance.

What prevents the Palestinians from organizing resistance in the West Bank?

A: There are many reasons that stand in the way of armed resistance in the West Bank, the most important of which are:

1. The occupation of the West Bank by Israel. After the second intifada, Israel reoccupied the cities in the West Bank and returned to direct action through pursuit, arrest, demolition, and assassination.

2. The security coordination between the Palestinian Authority and Israel and the provision of essential information by the Palestinian Authority's authorities to Israel concerning armed groups, which frustrated hundreds of armed operations, and this is recognized by the Palestinians and Israel.

3. Fighting movements and parties by the Authority and Israel in the West Bank that support the resistance by all means and prohibiting these organizations and their activities, even political and popular.

4. Trapping these organizations financially by closing their charitable and social and relief societies and institutions, and drying the financial artery of these organizations through arrest and the laws of the authority

by preventing financial transfers and other various means in preventing the financing of any operation against the occupation.

5. Continuous detentions in the West Bank of the leaders and members of these movements by the Authority and Israel, interrogating them and cooperating in the exchange of information between the Authority and Israel.

6. In addition to besieging arms smuggling and trade, which raised the price of arms, so that the price of a single piece has exceeded tens of thousands of dollars, which cannot be provided under the financial blockade and financial control over the movement of internal and external bank accounts by the Palestinian Authority.

 $7. \, The \, head \, of \, the \, pyramid \, policy \, in \, the \,$ authority of President Mahmoud Abbas, who stands strictly against military action and the non-launch of a new intifada, and this is clear by not cutting security coordination despite the announcement of the deal of the century and the annexation of Jerusalem and other Egyptian issues that have been

It is Known that a number of Palestinian organizations are operating in Syria on the side of the Assad government, do you think they have the potential to fight Zionism from Syria?

A: Yes, there are many Palestinian organizations present in Syria, including those who worked to support and support the Syrian army against terrorist groups through participation in operations, and some of them stood beside the Syrian state politically because they were convinced that the war on Syria is a war led by Israel and the United States of America to destroy the Syrian state to punish it for its support of the movements Lebanese and Palestinian armed forces operating against Israel. The Palestinian movements are convinced that the war against Syria is a war against the axis of resistance and on Palestine.

As for armed action against Israel from the Syrian territories, it is not possible at the present time due to the surrounding reality in Syria and the conditions in which the Syrian state lives. Therefore, Syria compensates this through training, material, moral, and military support and hosting these movements on its soil to regulate its military capacity in the West Bank and Gaza.

You've probably heard about the new

al-Sabireen Movement in the Gaza Strip. It is known that Hamas banned the activities of this organization, why do you think Hamas took this step?

A: Initially, the Al-Sabreen movement was a newly established movement that was founded by officers who came out of the Islamic resistance, specifically from the Islamic Jihad movement, and this movement belongs to Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah in terms of education, Shiite ideology and organizational management, and therefore Hamas movement besieges this movement for many fundamental reasons, including:

1. This movement arose before the Iranian-Hamas rapprochement, that is, reconciliation and the return to normal relations between Hamas and Iran: therefore, Hamas feared that this movement would become a substitute for cooperation between it and Iran, and Iran would dispense with the Hamas movement, which stands as a dagger in the side of Israel.

2. This movement receives significant financial and military support from Iran in light of the financial blockade that applies to Hamas and the Gaza Strip. In light of the Sabrians 'movement possessing large amounts of funds, it can extend and attract many members of Islamic and national jihadi organizations, particularly from Hamas, which increases support and popular support for it. Hamas's account becomes a rival to the movement as it did with the Islamic Jihad movement. Therefore, Hamas does not want to repeat the experience of Islamic Jihad, which has become today the second organization in the sector after Hamas in terms of number, military capacity and others

3. That Hamas has its own calculations of governance in the sector, relations with Sunni states, and the special understanding that links the movement to the mother movement, the global Muslim Brotherhood. which stands against Shiism and does not support Iran.

4. At the present time, after the Iranian-Hamas rapprochement, Hamas eased the pressure on the Al-Sabreen movement in order to satisfy Iran and not anger it, and all this depends on the progress and decline of Hamas's relationship with Iran. The more the Iranian-Hamas rapprochement decreases, the pressure on the followers of Iran and vice versa.

UN urge warring Libyan factions to negotiate

Libya's oil blockade loss surpasses \$2b

■ The firm also proposes alliance between the Sudanese regime and Libyan militia commander, Haftar, in which the Libyan commander would prove "military help" to Sudanese regime in exchange for funding for Sudan. Turkey renews support

The dynamics of the war shifted in January after Turkey deployed troops to Libya, heeding a plea from the besieged Tripoli government as Russian mercenaries and air superiority offered by Chinese-made drones supplied and allegedly operated by the UAE - appeared to tip the balance in Haftar's favor.

Turkey insists that its troops have no combat role. But Ankara has dispatched Syrian Turkmen militias to Libya, adding yet another foreign ingredient to the mix. Having started to arrive in December, there are estimated to be some 3,000 Syrian foreign fighters in Libya, a foreign diplomat was quoted by Financial Times.

General Haftar tighens control





Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan killed in Libya, where Ankara has sent dozens of military trainers since signing a deal with the GNA Premier Fayez al-Sarraj last year.

On November 27, 2019, Turkey and Libya's GNA signed a bilateral Memorandum after a meeting between Erdogan and al-Sarraj in Istanbul. The deal enables Turkey to secure its rights in the Mediterranean while preventing any fait accompli maneuvers by other regional states.

Greece has not welcomed the deal, regarding it as a violation of its own rights.

Last week, Erdogan confirmed pro-Turkish Syrian fighters were in Libya alongside the training teams.

Russia is widely reported to have sent mercenaries to back Haftar's forces, which are also supported by the United Arab Emirates. For the UAE, it is one of the most geographically distant examples of the assertive foreign policy Abu Dhabi adopted in the wake of the 2011 Arab uprisings.

Erdogan speaking at ruling AK Party group meeting last week in Ankara said that Turkey will support Libya's GNA in Tripoli in taking control of the whole country.

LNA said Tripoli port attack targeted Turkish weapons, reported Al Jazeera last week. Turkey denies ships carrying arms were in Tripoli port after rocket barrage led Tripolibased GNA to pull out of UN-brokered talks.

EU foreign ministers agreed on Feb. 17 to launch a naval mission to enforce an arms embargo, which the UN said was being violated by air, land and sea. The naval operation will be authorized to intervene to stop weapons shipments into North African state.

UN Libya envoy Ghassan Salame launched a second round of talks on Feb. 18, said there was "more hope" this time, mainly because of the approval of the UN Security Council resolution calling for a "lasting ceasefire".

Talks are being held in Geneva and Salame was trying to convince Tripoli delegation to stay and resume indirect talks, sources said.

The International Crisis Group has said tensions between Iran and the U.S., and violence in Libya and Yemen are among the most important conflicts to watch in 2020. Libya was chosen because Russia and Turkey were getting involved. Brussels-based ICG is an independent, non-profit, nongovernmental organization which seeks to sound the alarm to prevent deadly conflict

Rare rhytons recovered in northeast Iran

HERITAGE TEHRAN – Iranian police have recovered

tique dealers and smugglers in Garmeh, North Khorasan province, CHTN reported on Thursday.

two suspected cars in which the rhytons had been concealed. The culprits were detained and handed over to judicial system for further investigation, the report added.



A is a roughly conical container from which fluids were intended to be drunk or to be poured in some ceremony such as libation, or merely at table. They are typically formed in the shape of an animal's head, and were produced over large areas of ancient Eurasia, especially from Persia to the Balkans. Many have an opening at the bottom through which the liquid fell; others did not, and were merely used as drinking cups, with the characteristic that they could not usually be set down on a surface without spilling their

Plans to shut schools and curb travel in UK if coronavirus spreads

Schools could close and travel around the UK could be re-

Four countries registered new cases on Tuesday, while the death toll rose in Italy, which is struggling to contain the

England's chief medical officer, Prof Chris Whitty, said: things like school closures, you look at things like reducing

expectation is we will be looking systematically, using the science, at all the building blocks and balancing the effects against costs to society.

self-isolate if one of them shows symptoms and, in a further expansion of British efforts to detect and contain the virus, patients who have flu and other breathing conditions will be tested. Health officials plan to start with patients in eight hospitals in England, including some in intensive care, and also at 100 primary care centers, including GP surgeries.

spreading, although officials stressed there was no evidence that it was circulating in the community at the moment. So far, 13 people have tested positive for coronavirus in the UK but have not suffered any major setback to their health as a result of Covid-19, the illness the virus can trigger.

two rare rhytons, which are estimated to date from Sassanid era (224-651).

The objects were confiscated from a band of illegal an-

A couple of days ago, the law enforcement officers stopped



stricted under stepped-up government plans to deal with the coronavirus as its spread accelerates across Europe.

"There's a variety of things you need to look at, you look at

"The expectation is not that we will do all these things, the

Contingency planning may request that whole families

Experts said the move would help show if the virus was

Visit modem village where all structures are made of timber

sprawling in a well-watered and fertile plain at the southern foot of the Binalud Mountains, Choobin ("Wooden") village is a special tourist destination situated near Neyshabur, northeast Iran.

Nearly every structure there is made of timber using modern methods inspired by cultural and historical background of the region. The village embraces a wooden mosque, museum, library, restaurants, bakery, pergola, as well as houses and shops.

Many visitors say that its mosque is the most attractive building of the village. Resembling an upside-down ship, the mosque is said to bear earthquakes of magnitude 8 on the Richter scale and less. Having a gable roof, the mosque covers an area of 200 square meters. Its two minarets are 13 meters high from ground and weigh four tons each.

Construction of the mosque took about two years and 40 tons of lumbers have been used in it. The wooden mosque is unique not only in Iran but also in the world. It can resist earthquake with intensities up to eight Richter and its structure is such that it would not be damaged for hundreds of years, according to Iran Review.

The minarets are joined to the roof in a way that there are no pillars inside the mosque. Its walls are double layered, and the framework is located between the layers. The framework of the minarets and the roof as well as the roof and the walls are connected in a spidery web style. It refers to its construction method which is similar to weaving web by spiders so that the minarets are joined together in a way that their weights are transferred equally first to the roof and then to walls and from there to ground.

It is interesting that one can get access to the upper parts of the minaret by using ladder inside the minaret. More interesting is that a window has been installed at the spot the minaret and the roof are joined. The window acts like a ventilator helping to move hot and polluted air out of the mosque in summer and move in clean air through a special air duct installed on the roof. In this way, natural air conditioning

The walls of the mosque are a little slanted



Wooden mosque at Choobin ("Wooden") village near Neyshabur, northeast Iran.

in order to make it easier to transfer weight from minaret to the ground.

It is to be noted that the place where the mosque is constructed is termite prone, therefore, special strategies have been used in construction of the mosque and other buildings of the complex to prevent the destructive effects of termites. As an example, the resident of the constructor of the complex has remained intact after 20 years. To protect the exterior walls of the building against rain and snow, special timbers with special processing have been used.

The cabinets, walls and even the trays of

the pantry of the mosque are made of wood.

The mosque has an exterior porch, the floor of which is made of mud-brick. On the interior and exterior walls of the mosque, seven and six beautiful inscriptions with Quranic verses and with frames made of walnut and mulberry timbers, respectively, have been hung. Various kinds of timber from fruitful and

fruitless trees such as pine, mulberry, walnut, pear, cherry, ash and white poplar are used in the building and its interior decoration. Special lighting of the complex and extraordinary harmony of lively colors give special effects to it at nights.

By constructing this complex, the constructor aimed to flourish tourism industry and revive the name and memory of a great man who once lived and served at this place.

Neyshabur, which has shifted its position repeatedly in historical times, lies at an elevation of 1,213 meters some 75 km west of Mashhad. The surrounding area produces cereals and cotton, and the town's industries include agricultural marketing and the manufacture of carpets and pottery. Neyshabur is linked by road and railway with Tehran

Iran urges citizens to postpone travel to Qatar amid coronavirus fears

TOURISM TEHRAN - In the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, Iran's embassy in Qatar has urged Iranian citizens to temporarily postpone travels to the Persian Gulf littoral state.

"All [Iranian] citizens planning to travel to Qatar, as their final destination, are strongly recommended to delay their travel until conditions are back to normal," IRNA reported on Wednesday.

The travel advisory comes in accordance with regulations and preventive measures being practiced at air and sea borders by Qatari authorities in relation to countries where the coronavirus spread has been

Qatar Airways on Monday announced that it would quarantine any passengers arriving from Iran and South Korea who show symptoms of the deadly coronavirus.
"In line with various global and local health warnings,

all incoming passengers from Iran and South Korea whose final destination is Doha and are showing no symptoms of the Novel Coronavirus will be asked to stay in home isolation or a quarantine facility for 14

days," a statement from the airliner said.

The virus initiated in the Chinese city of Wuhan in late December. It has since spread to countries across the globe, but until this week only minimal cases have been detected in the Middle East.



Arts of ancient Iran: Bowl with human figure

TOURISM TEHRAN - The pictured bowl, with an irregular circumference probably warped during firing, is one of painted ceramics which were crafted in Iran from the 5th and early 4th millennium BC.

Painted ceramics were the principal medium for artistic expression in prehistoric Iran. The objects have a simple, often open form and vary from one site to the next, according to Louver website.

At Susa, now situated in southwest of modern Iran, the three principal types of painted tableware were the bowl, the bushel and the small carinated jar. Their decoration consisted mainly in geometric and animal motifs, human figures being rare. This bowl is therefore an exception.

Painted ceramics in Iran Then painted ceramics in Iran are characterized by the quality of their workmanship and diversity of their decoration. Pots were handthrown from a clay coil, the potter's wheel not having been invented. The ceramics were decorated with brown motifs including geometric figures and mo-



tifs inspired by the natural environment, with plants and animals stylized to the point of being hardly recognizable. Man is rarely depicted, except as a hunter. The rhythmical repetition of motifs was pre- at a time when goats were not only used for ferred to narrative in the art of this period. Art at Susa at the time of the

city's foundation

The predominant medium for art in prehistoric times was indisputably painted ceramics. This craft was at its most accomplished at Susa, a city in the Susian plain extending from the Mesopotamian plain. The clay used by the potters was often light-colored, very slightly green-tinted, so thin that it is sometimes known as "eggshell" pottery, and fired at a high temperature to the point of becoming "resonant." The decoration of each vase was unique, except for a small series of wide bushels with zigzag motifs, probably made at a time when funerary ware was in high demand

following a large-scale killing.

More description of the object On either side of the central Maltese cross motif are two superposed "comb-animals" drawn with such a degree of stylization that only their heads and tails are recognizable. Parallel lines suggest their

motifs were repeated several times; the long wooly coats, an element emphasized their meat but also for their milk and wool

> Flocks were specifically selected to meet these new demands. On either side of the "comb-animal" motifs are the figures of three birds and a scorpion, also highly stylized. At the top and bottom, within the frame formed by a group of three broken lines, interpreted by some scholars as irrigation channels, are two spade-shaped emblems, apparently references to work on the land.

> The male figure with a highly geometrical body stands, arms spread, in the position of master of the animals. He may personify a spirit of agriculture and livestock breeding. In this life-giving world, death is not absent, for the scorpion figure is there to bring it. If this interpretation is correct, this is a unique representation of man in the painted ceramics of Susa, in which only four human images have been found: contrary to the others, this is not a hunter but a figure related to a primitive mythology of the domestication of nature.

Stanford issues spring break travel guidelines restricting travel to China, South Korea

Vaden Health Center emailed students a list of spring break travel guidelines regarding coronavirus (COVID-19) on Tuesday, adding South Korea to the list of restricted countries along with China.

Vaden director James Jacob also recommended against travel to Hong Kong, Macau, Japan and Italy, writing that "it is possible that the 14-day self-isolation period may be extended to these locations." Stanford currently encourages those who have recently returned from China to self-isolate for 14 days.

According to the World Health Organization, there are now over 80,000 reported cases in 34 countries, including one in Santa Clara County and over 300 in Italy. On Monday, Stanford announced that students participating in the Stanford in Florence program will have to return

home before the start of next week.

In addition to restricting specific countries, Stanford encouraged students who are traveling internationally during spring break to be aware of the evolving situation

and to consider the following four guidelines.
First, Jacobs wrote, COVID-19 may spread in current areas or into new regions. Stanford recommends checking for travel updates using International SOS, which has a comprehensive list of travel restrictions.

"Recently, community spread that is not linked to other cases or recent travel to mainland China has been observed," Jacobs wrote. "Stanford continues to assess risk based on the number of cases, community spread, public health infrastructure, as well as other factors.

Second, Stanford urges students traveling abroad to

monitor travel advisories daily. According to the announcement, re-entry into the U.S. and one's ability to return to campus could be affected by sudden changes to travel restriction policy, canceled flights or additional quarantine measures put in place.

Third, Jacobs warned that visa status may be impacted for international students and foreign nationals if they are unable to return to the U.S. by the start of the quarter. Stanford recommends checking immigration documents before leaving the country.

Lastly, he recommended that students register their travel with Stanford, allowing the University "to contact [them] in the event of a major emergency or changing circumstances related to your travel destination."

(Source: The Stanford Daily)



The Sundarbans contain the world's largest mangro ests and one of the most biologically productive of all natural Located at the mouth of the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers between India and Bangladesh, its forest and waterways

support a wide range of fauna including a number of species

threatened with extinction.

The mangrove habitat supports the single largest population of tigers in the world which have adapted to an almost amphibious life, being capable of swimming for long distances and feeding on fish, crab and water monitor lizards.

They are also renowned for being "man-eaters", most probably due to their relatively high frequency of encounters with local people.

The islands are also of great economic importance as a storm barrier, shore stabilizer, nutrient and sediment trap, a source of timber and natural resources, and support a wide variety of aquatic, benthic and terrestrial organisms. They are an excellent example of the ecological processes

and plant colonization. Covering 133,010 ha, the area is estimated to comprise about 55% forest land and 45% wetlands in the form of tidal rivers, creeks, canals and vast estuarine mouths of the river.

of monsoon rain flooding, delta formation, tidal influence

About 66% of the entire mangrove forest area is estimated to occur in Bangladesh, with the remaining 34% in India.

(Source: UNESCO)

Rainfall in Tehran hits 69-year record high

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Rainfall e s k doused the capital city of Tehran over the past two days, reaching 55.5 millimeters, which was unprecedented in the past 69 years.

The precipitation station in Tehran was first set up in 1951, and this is the first time it has recorded such rainfall rate, Sahar Tajbakhsh, head of Meteorological Organization said.

Tehran short of rain compared to last year

Since September 23, rainfall in Tehran has amounted to 147.7 mm, compared to 186.4 mm in the previous year and 137.9 mm in the long run. Therefore, it demonstrates that the capital meets above-normal levels of rain compared to the same long term mean. But short of rain compared to the last year.

Above-normal rainfall compared to lung run

According to the data released on Tuesday by the National Drought Warning and Moni-

toring Center affiliated to the Meteorological Organization, the whole country received 156.2 millimeters of precipitations since September 23, which indicates a 14.1-percent rise compared to the long-term averages.

But the amount shows a 7.8 percent drop compared to last year's precipitations in the

corresponding period.

However, statistics show that Gilan, Mazandaran and Lorestan provinces with 539 mm, 420.1 mm and 343.6 mm precipitation, ranked the first three provinces with highest rainfall respectively.

This is while the three provinces are still short of rain compared to the previous

When it comes to the highest variations in mean precipitation, provinces of Sistan-Baluchestan, Bushehr and Kerman are the winners with 89.7, 40.7 and 40.2 mm increase in rainfall compared to their long term means, respectively.

China provides Iran with masks, COVID-19 diagnostic kits



SOCIETY d e s k delivered 250,000 face masks and 5,000 COVID-19 diagnostic kits to Iran.

Some 5,000 coronavirus test kits, a gift from the Chinese embassy and Chinese companies in Iran, was delivered to the Iranian side, China's Ambassador to Iran Chang Hua wrote on his Twitter account, adding that "our efforts will continue."

'Today, on behalf of the Chinese embassy in Iran, I granted 250,000 face masks to Iran and more aid will be provided in the future. Stay strong Iran," he also wrote.

infected with the virus, of whom 19 died.

Meanwhile, Hua Chunying former Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman has praised Iran for sending medical face-masks.

She referred to Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's message that China has taken effective and firm actions to contain coronavirus as a sign of long-term and traditional friendship between two countries.

She also noted that Iran has so far sent three million face-masks to China and has expressed readiness for providing more medical aid to China, IRNA So far, 139 people in Iran have been reported on Monday.

Broadcasters of coronavirus fake news to face imprisonment



SOCIETY d e s k casting fake news about casting fake news about coronavirus will have a punishment of imprisonment up to 3 years, Hassan Norouzi, member of Majlis (the Iranian

Parliament) has announced. Concerning the crime and the punishment of those who publish false news about the spread of COVID-19, he stated that broadcasting false information is considered a crime under the law and the violator will be imprisoned for one to three years or flogged, IRNA reported.

Spreading fake news about the disease has raised people's concern and fright

which can result in interruption of daily routine, he stated, lamenting, closure of large factories and commercial complexes can cause widespread economic damage.

Following the closure of schools, children will have to attend school during the summer to compensate for this month, he noted.

COVID-19 outbreak is a matter of concern for health officials in both Iran and the world to think of a solution, but the closure of manufacturing and economic units will result in thousands of billions of damage to the nation, he

Rare bat may have been in UK for decades

An elusive British mammal, the tiny bat Nathusius' pipistrelle (Pipistrellus nathusii), may be more widespread and numerous than previously thought.

Sometimes described as a rare visitor or a new coloniser because of climate change, it may have been here decades but had gone undetected.

Perhaps this is because the species tends to avoid humans and lives in woods on the edge of lakes where insects are plentiful. It is also a featherweight, a maximum of 15g, the same as a 50p coin.

All British bats are fragile-looking creatures, most often seen by humans on warm summer evenings at dusk, although they are often unnoticed when out hunting. They



even emerge in the winter if it is warm enough.

Now that bat detectorists know this species of pipistrelle is resident in the UK, sightings are being reported not just in the south-east of England but in Anglesey, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Cornwall.

In the summer breeding season males have territories, the successful ones have a harem of up to 10 females, while others manage only two or three.

Perhaps the most extraordinary feature is that they migrate across the North Sea. One that was ringed at Blagdon Lake, near Bristol, was discovered in the Netherlands three years later, 370 miles away.

(Source: The Guardian)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

'City-friendly schools' scheme launched in Tehran

The "city-friendly schools" scheme was launched in the capital to promote environmental protection and urban development issues among students, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

Mojtaba Daneshvar, director general of citizenship education at Tehran Municipality, said that the project covers more than 550 schools, consisting of 160,000 students.

It aims to familiarize students with the rights and duties of citizens, the environment, waste, transportation and traffic, safety and security, crisis management, he explained.

The training programs will be in the form of workshops, role plays, cultural and educational camps, production of educational content such as books, brochures and posters, he concluded.

آغاز طرح «مدارس دوستدار شهر» در تهران

طـرح «مـدارس دوسـتدار شـهر» بـا هـدف آشـنا كـردن دانـش آمـوزان با حقوق و تکالیف شهروندی، محیط زیست و پسماند، حمل و نقل و ترافیک، و ایمنی و مدیریت بحران در مدارس منتخب شهر تهران

به گزارش ایسنا مجتبی دانشور، مدیرکل آموزشهای شهروندی شــهرداری تهــران، گفــت ایــن طــرح بیــش از ۵۵۰ مدرســه شــامل ۱۶۰ هـزار دانشآمـوز را در بـر مـی گیـرد.

برنامهٔ های آموزشی این طرح در قالب برگزاری کارگاههای آموزشی، تولید محتوای آموزشی در قالب کتاب، بروشور و پوستر، اجرای نمایش و برگزاری اردوهای فرهنگی و آموزشی خواهد بود.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"agro-, agri-, agr-"

Meaning: soil or field For example: The workshop presents information on sustainable *agricultural* systems.

PHRASAL VERB **Hand something down**

Meaning: to give or leave something to people who will live after you

For example: The ring was handed down to her from her grandmother.

IDIOM

Broad strokes

Explanation: if something is described or defined with/in broad strokes, it is outlined in a very general way, without any details

For example: "In a few broad strokes he summed up the situation.

'Unprecedented' globally: more than 20% of Australia's forests burnt in bushfires

More than 20% of Australia's forests burned during the summer's bushfire catastrophe, a proportion scientists believe is unprecedented globally, according to new research.

Research published in a special edition of Nature Climate Change focused on the bushfire crisis finds that 21% of the total area covered by Australian forests – excluding Tasmania - has burnt so far in the 2019-20 bushfire season.

The analysis examined the area of forest burnt on each continent as a proportion of total forest cover in every fire season for the past 20 years



The 21% figure contrasts dramatically with the proportion of forest burnt in any season on any other continent in that timeframe, which for most continents and forest types was 4-5%

The one exception was for tropical and subtropical dry broadleaf forests in Asia and Africa, for which the analysis found medians of 8-9% had been recorded in that 20-year period.

The paper adds that the 21% is likely to be an underestimate because the data has not included fires in Tasmania and Australia's fire season is still going.

The data point for this year's fires show it stands out completely from all other years for Australia or other countries," the study's lead author, Matthias Boer, said. "There is just nothing like it out there and we felt confident to call it unprecedented.

"The word unprecedented has been used a lot the last two months. [Our analysis] is the first in the peer-reviewed literature that puts some data behind that.'

The Nature Climate Change edition features analysis and commentary from some of the world's most respected scientists. In another paper, scientists Benjamin Sanderson and Rosie Fisher examine some of the factors that have influenced the current fire season and what gaps in knowledge could be addressed to better prepare society for more potentially extreme events in future.

The paper says that in the case of recent events in Australia, "there is no doubt that the record temperatures of the past year would not be possible without anthropogenic influence". It adds that "under a scenario where emissions continue to grow, such a year would be average by 2040 and exceptionally cool by 2060".

Andrew King, a lecturer in climate science at the University of Melbourne, co-authored another piece examining the role of climate variability and drought. He said the consequences of extreme drought, heat and bushfires had been well-documented, but the collection of articles in Nature Climate Change was intended to "provide informed commentary on this summer's severe weather".

There was a lot "we don't fully understand yet", King said. "While we can say with confidence that human-caused climate change has amplified the extreme heatwaves that have been observed this summer, the influence of human-caused climate change on drought and fires in Australia is much harder to disentangle and natural climate variability plays a very large role in both.

He said the climate models used to make projections had "deficiencies in simulating both drought and fire such that we cannot yet provide robust guidance on how these extremes of Australian climate will change as the world continues to warm".

James Collett, a lecturer in psychology at the School of Health and Biomedical Sciences at RMIT University, said the fact the journal had published an issue framed around Australia's disastrous bushfire season "shows just how important an impact the bushfires are having on the global consciousness"

"Australia is now a striking example that is driving international climate change discourse," he said. "We can only hope that the psychological impact of the bushfires contributes to the political, economic, industrial, scientific and social changes necessary to manage climate change and create a sustainable world.

(Source: The Guardian)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Geneva conventions on prisoners of war

(March 24, 2003)

The American Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, has condemned the sight of captured American soldiers being interviewed on Iraqi television. He said the interviews violated the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of prisoners of war. But what do the Conventions say, and how do they apply? This report from

The **Geneva Conventions** say that prisoners of war must not be **subjected to** insult or public curiosity. Legal protections begin for PoWs at the moment of capture. Recognized prisoners of war have to be charged or repatriated at the end of a conflict. They're expected to give only their name, rank and number when questioned - and must be removed from the combat area as soon as possible so that they're not in danger. Nearly two hundred countries have signed the conventions – including Iraq and the United States. The United States has itself been criticised for failing to apply the Conventions to prisoners of war captured in Afghanistan. Instead it declared them "unlawful combatants".

Words

Geneva Conventions: agreements about how to treat people hurt or taken prisoner in war

subjected to: affected by

PoWs: prisoners of war Recognized prisoners of war: people who are officially ac-

cepted as prisoners of war **charged:** formally accused of having committed a crime

repatriated: sent back to their own country a conflict: a war or battle

the combat area: the place where the fighting is taking place in a war to apply the Conventions to prisoners of war: to use the Geneva conventions in relation to prisoners of war

combatants: people who take part in a fight or in a war

(Source: BBC)

Arab League wants intl. observers back in al-Khalil to protect Palestinians

The Arab League has called for the redeployment of international observers to al-Khalil (Hebron) and other Palestinian cities to protect the Palestinians against Israeli crimes a year after the regime expelled the civilian observer mission from the occupied territories.

Arab League Assistant Secretary General for Palestine and Occupied Arab Territories, Saeed Abu Ali, made the remarks on Tuesday, marking the 26th anniversary of the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre.

On February 25, 1994, an Israeli settler randomly opened fire at Muslims observing the dawn prayers at the Ibrahimi Mosque in the holy fasting month of Ramadan, killing 29 worshipers and

Later in the day, Israeli forces killed an additional 21 Palestinians who took to the streets across the occupied lands to protest the al-Khalil bloodshed.

The Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), tasked with safeguarding Palestinians in al-Khalil, was set up in the wake of the fatal attack. The mission was staffed by nationals of Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey.

The mission did not start its work until 1998, after the Israeli military refused to leave al-Khalil following the establishment of an illegal Israeli settlement at the heart of the city.

TIPH's mandate, which came up for renewal every six months, ended on January 31, 2019 after Israel decided to expel the force.

According to Palestinian media, Abu Ali underlined the need for TIPH's redeployment to al-Khalil and other Palestinian cities, adding that a mechanism should also be set up to implement the Articles of the Fourth Geneva Convention in a bid to prevent terrorist acts against Palestinians similar to what happened at the Ibrahimi Mosque.

The massacre anniversary, he added, comes at a time of increased U.S.-encouraged Israeli violations of Palestinian rights.

There are 'no Patriots' U.S. could give Turkey: Erdogan

The U.S.f is unlikely to provide any Patriot missiles for its NATO ally, the Turkish President has acknowledged, less than a week after media reports suggested Ankara make another request for the air defense systems.

'As for the Patriot issue, let me say very clearly: currently there are no Patriots that America will give us," Erdogan told reporters on his return from Azerbaijan. "We made our offer ... but at the moment, they have no such thing in their hands," he admitted.

The Turkish government has reportedly asked the U.S. to deploy Patriot air defense systems on the country's southern border, an American official told local media, but "no decision has been made."

Turkey has long sought the Raytheon-built air defense systems, but to no avail, as many countries inside NATO, including the U.S. itself, weren't keen on selling such a weapon.

Finally, the Turkish military turned to Russia, signing a hefty deal to procure several units of the newest S-400 missile systems.

The S-400 deal ultimately became a major irritant for the NATO allies. The U.S. disconnected Turkey from its F-35 fighter jet program, citing its incompatibility with the Russian-made system. Washington piled immense pressure on Ankara, demanding that it scrap the deal with Moscow, but, as Turkish officials often reiterated, the purchase was to serve Turkey's security needs.

In recent years, some NATO members did deploy their Patriot systems on Turkish soil to fend off incoming threats in the region, but these deployments didn't last long, leaving Turkey in a precarious position.

(Source: RT)

Dubai ruler seeks to keep judgments private in UK court fight with former wife

Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, began an appeal on Wednesday to prevent the publication of two judgments in a British court battle with his former wife Princess Haya bint al-Hussein over the wardship of their two children.

The contest began last May and there have been a number of private hearings at London's High Court before the president of the Family Division. Andrew McFarlane.

On Wednesday, the Court of Appeal in London heard a challenge by Sheikh Mohammed, aged 70, against publication of two judgments by McFarlane, who decided last month that these should be made public.

Princess Haya, 45-year-old daughter of the late King Hussein of Jordan, and the court-appointed guardian of the children both supported publication, the court heard.

This appeal arises from wardship proceedings in the High Court concerning two children who are at present within the jurisdiction of the Court," said Justice Nicholas Underhill, vice-president of the Court of Appeal

He said the two judgments "raise matters of public interest beyond the particular issue in the wardship proceedings".

"The first concerned certain disputed factual issues; the second concerned issues arising out of the special position of the father as the sovereign and head of government of a foreign state," he said.

The two parties said in a statement in July that the case did not concern divorce or finances but was limited to their children's welfare.

(Source: Reuters)

Sanders says may relocate U.S. embassy back to **Tel Aviv if elected**

→ 1 This is not the first time that Sanders has condemned Israel's policies against the Palestinian people. He has repeatedly criticized Netanyahu and has advocated for Palestinian rights. During a town hall meeting last week in Nevada, Sanders

pointed to the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. "To be for the Israeli people and to be for peace in the Middle

East does not mean that we have to support right-wing, racist governments that currently exist in Israel.

Sanders has also been a relentless critic of Trump, repeatedly calling him a liar and the "most dangerous president" in U.S. history. (Source: al Jazeera)

Syria Army units liberate seven new villages in Idleb

Staff& agencies

TEHRAN— The Syrian Arab Army units on Wednesday continued their advance in Idleb southern countryside and liberated new seven villages from terrorism, inflicting heavy losses upon terrorists in personnel and equipment.

SANA reporter said that "After less than 24 hours from liberating Kafranbel strategic town, Army units carried out military operations against fortifications and supply routes of terrorists of Jabhat al-Nusra and liberated villages of Shinshrah, Tarmalah. Deir-Sonboul, Ma'aret al-Mikhes, Kherbet al-Luaibdeh, and Hassaneh in Idleb southern countryside and they are still hunting down the fleeing terrorists in the neighboring villages".

Last Tuesday, Army units liberated Kafranbel strategic town and the villages of Hass, Ma'aretmater, Ma'artasin and Ba'rbou southwest of Ma'aret-al-Nu'aman in Idleb southern countryside after elimination of many terrorists of Jabhat al-Nusra and the affiliated terrorist groups.

On Tuesday, Syrian troops shot down a Turkish drone over Idleb, saying it was carrying out a reconnaissance mission over a town recently captured by government forces.

A Syrian army statement said government forces captured, in addition to dozens of villages, some strategic hills deep inside the heavily fortified areas once held by insurgents. It said the villages captured include



former strongholds such as Kafranbel, Has, Kfar Sajneh and al-Dar al-Kabira.

Regaining control

The Army and Armed Forces General Command announced regaining control over many villages and towns in Idleb southern countryside after inflicting heavy losses on terrorists in the personnel and equipment.

The Army and Armed Forces General Command said in a statement on Wednesday that the Syrian Arab Army units operating in Idleb southern countryside "continue to make qualitative field achievements, and to inflict heavy losses on terrorists in the personnel and equipment.'

The statement added that "Over the past few days, our brave soldiers have been able to establish control over many towns, villages and strategic hills including Rakaya Sajneh, Ma'aret Mouges, Kafr Sajneh, al-Sheikh Mustafa, Ma'ar Zita, Hass, Ma'aret Harmeh, Kafranbel, Ba'rbou, al-Dar al-Kabira, Shinshrah, Deir Sonboul and Hazarin, after eliminating large numbers of terrorists and cutting their supply routes."

The statement added that the importance

fact that they represent the "fortified depth for armed terrorism" in Idleb southern countryside and they link Shahshabou mountain and al-Ghab Palin on one hand, in addition to linking the countryside of Hama and Idleb with al-Zawyia Mountain and al-Arbain Mountain with al-Ghab Plain on the other hand.

In its statement, Army General Command reaffirmed that "the army will continue to carry out its sacred national duties and its determination to liberate all the lands of the Syrian Arab Republic from terrorism and its backers and to eliminate it completely.

Afghan presidential palace cites coronavirus as cause for Ghani inauguration delay

Afghanistan's presidential palace confirmed on Wednesday that a ceremony to swear in Ashraf Ghani as president has been delayed, but contradicted reasons cited a day earlier by the U.Š. government behind the postponement.

The U.S. State Department on Tuesday said that the Afghan government had agreed to postpone its presidential inauguration, citing an electoral feud in which both Ghani and his main rival Abdullah Abdullah claimed victory in disputed Sept. 28 elections.

Ghani was scheduled to take the oath of office on Thursday, according to an Afghan official, but a statement from the presidential palace on Wednesday said the event would now be held on March 9.

The reasons the presidential palace cited for the delay pertained to "rumors about coronavirus in Afghanistan" and the short notice for world leaders to attend the in-

The United States wanted Ghani to defer his second-term inauguration over concerns it could inflame an election feud with his political rival and jeopardize U.S.-led peacemaking efforts, sources familiar with the matter had said.



U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, who has been in Kabul since last week trying to defuse tensions, said on Twitter that the postponement would allow time for 'necessary consultations"

"President Ghani, as the declared winner, and other leaders should ensure that the new government is inclusive and reflects the aspirations of all Afghans," added Khalilzad, who is expected to sign an agreement with the Taliban on

behalf of the United States in Doha on Saturday.

The signing of an agreement, which will include the pulling out of U.S. troops, is to be culmination of a seven-day "reduction in violence" understanding currently being observed in Afghanistan between U.S., Afghan and

President Donald Trump has made the withdrawal of U.S. service members from Afghanistan after 18 years of fighting a major foreign policy objective.

Officials privy to the talks had said the signed agree $ment\ with\ the\ Taliban\ will\ be\ followed\ by\ negotiations\ on$ an intra-Afghan political settlement between the Taliban and an Afghan delegation.

Members of the Afghan delegation have yet to be announced. Reaching a consensus on members could pose a challenge with the Ghani-Abdullah Abdullah feud.

Abdullah Abdullah also wants representation in the delegation and subsequent talks, Western diplomats in Kabul familiar with the process told Reuters, but Ghani was reluctant to oblige.

(Source: Reuters)

Malaysia's Mahathir and Anwar in new showdown amid turmoil

Malaysia's decades-old political rivals Mahathir Mohamad and Anwar Ibrahim set out claims to lead the Southeast Asian country on Wednesday after Mahathir's shock resignation as prime minister sparked turmoil.

The struggle between Mahathir, 94, and Anwar, 72, who formed a surprise pact to win a 2018 election, has shaped Malaysian politics for more than two decades and is

Mahathir, the world's oldest head of government in his role as interim prime minister, proposed a unified administration without political party allegiances at a time Malaysia faces a flagging economy and the impact of the new coronavirus.

"Politics and political parties need to be put aside for now," Mahathir said in a televised message. "I propose a government that is not aligned with any party, but only prioritizes the interests of the country.

Anwar later said he opposed forming a "backdoor government" and that three parties from the former Pakatan ruling coalition had proposed his name to the king as candidate for prime minister.

'We wait for the decision of the king," he told a news conference.

To try to end the crisis, Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah has been meeting 222 elected members of parliamen over two days.

Those in the meetings said they were asked to name their favored prime minister or whether they wanted fresh elections.

Anwar's Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), or the People's Justice Party, has 39 seats and alliance partners could potentially give it another 62.

While some politicians have openly voiced support for Mahathir to stay in office, it was not clear whether enough of them would give him their backing.

At least 24 killed in India violence

At least 24 people have been killed after India's capital was hit by the worst religious violence in decades, which was triggered after Muslims protesting against a discriminatory citizenship law were attacked.

Nearly 200 people have been injured during three days of violence in Muslim populated areas of northeast Delhi, with police accused of looking the other way as a mob went on the rampage, killing people and damaging properties, including mosques.

India's Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who hosted U.S. President Donald Trump as the violence continued, has been criticized for not acting on time. On Tuesday night, civil society mem-

march against the violence. The violence was triggered after weekslong peaceful sit-ins in the Indian capital against a new citizenship law were attacked

bers took out a peace march in a solidarity

by Hindu nationalist mobs. Muslims, India's largest minority, say the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)

passed last December discriminates against them and goes against the country's sec-

Parts of the capital descended into violence on Sunday after a ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader warned Muslims against continuing with peaceful sit-ins. Over the next three days, northeast

Delhi's Karawal Nagar, Seelampur, Maujpur, Bhajanpura, Vijay Park, Jafrabad, handbagh, Mustafabad and Yamuna Vihar witnessed pitched battles between Hindus and Muslims. Modi calls for calm

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has

finally broken his silence on the Delhi violence, saying "peace and harmony are central to our ethos".

"I appeal to my sisters and brothers of Delhi to maintain peace and brotherhood at all times. It is important that there is calm and normalcy is restored at the earliest," he tweeted.

(Source: al Jazeera)

UNSC adopts resolution extending Yemen sanctions

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has approved a resolution extending sanctions against Yemen despite criticisms by Russia and China that the document fails to meet their concerns.

The much-revised resolution, proposed by Britain, was passed on Tuesday by 13 votes in favor and two abstentions from Russia and China. It prolonged until February 26, 2021 the asset freeze and travel ban imposed on individuals or entities claimed to be threatening peace, security and stability in Yemen. Those sanctions were first imposed on the impoverished country in February 2014 under UNSC Resolution 2140.

The resolution reaffirmed the provisions of an arms embargo imposed in April 2015 on fighters of the Houthi Ansarullah movement, which currently runs Yemen, and forces loyal to ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The resolution also renewed until March 28, 2021 the mandate of the UN panel of experts on Yemen, which was established pursuant to UNSC Resolution 2140.

The resolution asks a panel of experts to report on "commercially available components which have been used by individuals and entities" on the UN sanction blacklist "to assemble unmanned aerial vehicles, water-borne improvised explosive devices, and other weapons systems.

The panel claimed in late January that Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement is receiving parts for drones and weapons, some with technical characteristics similar to arms



manufactured in Iran. It also claimed a smuggling route seems to run overland from Oman and the southern coast of Yemen, through territory controlled by the [self-proclaimed] government of Yemen, towards Sana'a.

Both Tehran and Sana'a have rejected the claims as baseless. Russian and Chinese objections led to many revisions to the draft, including the elimination of all references to Iran and the Houhis, according to reports.

However, Beijing and Moscow, both of which wield veto power at the council, abstained from voting, saying the document did not still address their concerns despite the revisions.

At the session, Russian UN Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya said his country was presented with "a take-it-or-leave-it approach which does not allow for compromise," adding, "We cannot agree to that kind of approach."

"The Russian Federation did not support the draft resolution proposed by the United Kingdom extending sanctions and the mandate of the Panel of Experts on Yemen established pursuant to SC Resolution 2140, because not all of our concerns were taken into account," he noted. ?Nebenzya also stressed that the Security Council needs to

focus on joint efforts aimed at finding ways to settle the conflict in Yemen, which has been the target of a Western-backed military campaign led by Saudi Arabia for almost five years.

"The aim of the resolution was to extend the sanctions regime and the mandate of the Panel of Experts, rather than to compete in promoting their approaches that go beyond the objectives of the resolution," he said.

Similarly, Wu Haitao, China's deputy permanent representative to the UN, complained that the UNSC resolution did not take into account Beijing's concerns.

"The Chinese delegation proposed many amendments, but the final text failed to meet its concerns," he said.

Therefore, he added, China could not vote in favor of the document. The Chinese diplomat further described the task assigned to the UN panel of experts on Yemen as excessively broad.

Backed by the U.S., a number of other Western states and a coalition of its allies, the Saudi regime launched the bloody war in March 2015 aimed at reinstalling a former Riyadh-friendly government in Yemen

(Source: Press TV)

Iranians the world's most hospitable people: Dragan Skocic

S P O R T S
d e s k
coach Dragan Skocic says that the Iranian

people are the most hospitable people in the world. In an interview with vecernji.hr, the Team Melli coach lauded the Iranian nation and said that the country is very safe.

"I've coached in Iran for five years and have a good knowledge of the country's football. I've already worked in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and played in the UAE and know the Middle East and I have to say there is unfair judgment against the Iranians," Skocic said.

"The Iranian people are wonderful. They are interested in going restaurants and music can be heard everywhere. You don't know how good the Iranians are and they have a great history. Iran and Croatia have historical ties and I have to say I am feeling good there because it's a normal country," the 51-year-old coach added.

"I've traveled around the world and I think the Iranian people are the most hospitable. I am not saying this because I am working there. I used to live there and the country is safer than so many European countries. However, traffic is a big problem there and their football is an organized chaos. The Persian cuisine is good as well," Skocic said.

"I have been appointed as Team Melli coach with the aim of helping them book a place at the 2022 World Cup qualification next stage. We are third in Group C but we know our strengths and weaknesses," he stated.

"Iranian players have high quality and Team Melli are the best Asian football team. The nation love football and we have a lot of work to do," Skocic concluded.



Abbas Aghakouchaki named Iran wheelchair basketball coach



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Abbas d e s k Aghakouchaki has been appointed as new head coach of Iran wheelchair basketball team on Wednesday.

Aghakouchaki led the Iranian team in the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, where Team Melli finished in 10th place

Team Melli finished in 10th place. Aghakouchaki will be assisted by Kamal

Eshgh and Masoud Fallah. He led Iran to a bronze medal at the

He led Iran to a bronze medal at th 2014 Asian Para Games.

Moradi only Iranian weightlifter in West Asian Championship



SPORTS TEHRAN — Sohrab desk Moradi will represent Iran in the West Asian Weightlifting Championship.

Iran was supposed to participate in the competition in Dubai with seven weight-lifters but their flight was cancelled to the UAE due to coronavirus threat.

Moradi, who won gold at 94kg in Rio but has suffered two serious injuries during qualifying, will compete in the event. Moradi badly injured his spine a year ago then dislocated a shoulder last July.

He also is hopeful of a good performance at the Asian Championships in Kazakhstan in April. Moradi is way down in 78th place in the current rankings and would probably need to lift close to world-record levels in

need to lift close to world-record levels in both those competitions to make it – but he is the world record holder in snatch and total at 96kg, both set when he won the 2018 world title.

Maria Sharapova announces retirement

The Russian tennis legend has announced her retirement from the sport. The former-world-number-1 played just two matches this season.

Maria Sharapova announced on Wednesday that she was retiring from tennis.

The 32-year-old won five Gram Slam titles during her career, but has been battling shoulder problems in recent

The former world number one played just two matches this season.

Sharapova, one of the highest paid sportswomen in the

Sharapova, one of the highest paid sportswomen in the world, broke the news of her retirement in an article for Vanity Fair magazine. "I'm new to this, so please forgive me. Tennis -- I'm saying goodbye," she wrote.

"How do you leave behind the only life you've ever known?" read the essay.



Sharapova made her tennis debut with a victory at Wimbledon in 2004 at the age of 17. However, her last years were fraught with losses, a doping scandal and injuries. She only played two matches this season and lost both, while she served a 15-month ban from the sport after testing positive for meldonium at the 2016 Australian Open.

She has also struggled with health problems in her right shoulder for more than 10 years.

"Looking back now, I realize that tennis has been my mountain. My path has been filled with valleys and detours, but the views from its peak were incredible," she said.

"After 28 years and five Grand Slam titles, though, I'm ready to scale another mountain, to compete on a different type of terrain."

(Source: dw.com)

Fears of coronavirus pandemic spreading Olympic unease

Fears that the new coronavirus outbreak is on the verge of becoming a global pandemic have stoked concerns about the Tokyo Games and while the International Olympic Committee says there is no "Plan B" doubts remain the event will go ahead as planned.

Five months before the opening ceremony in Tokyo, health authorities around the world are scrambling to contain outbreaks of the flu-like virus which has infected about 80,000 and killed more than 2,700 people, the vast majority in China.

Infections have also spiked in Iran, Italy and South Korea while Japan has recorded some 160 cases of the virus as well as 691 discovered onboard a cruise ship docked south of Tokyo.

Sports have been brought to a virtual standstill across large swathes of Asia, and on Wednesday Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe urged sporting and cultural events be scrapped or curtailed for two weeks as part of containment efforts.

Markets have begun pricing in the risk of a canceled Olympics, with the Dentsu Group's share price hammered as spooked investors fret about the local ad agency's high exposure to the Games.

While comments by IOC member Dick Pound on Tuesday stoked concerns about the Games, Japan's minister in charge of the Olympics sought to quell fears they could be canceled.

Iranian national wheelchair basketball

team booked their place at the 2020 Olym-

pic Games after receiving a bronze medal

in the 2019 Asia Oceania Championship

are set to be the biggest and best yet with

around 4,400 Para athletes from more

than 160 countries taking part in 22 sports. The Games will be held from Aug. 25

The Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games

held in Thailand in December.

"The IOC is preparing for the Tokyo Games as scheduled," Minister Seiko Hashimoto said in parliament.

In a briefing with reporters, Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said he had been told by the IOC that Pound's comment, that any cancellation decision would be made in May, was not the IOC's official stance.

WATCHING BRIEF

The quadrennial sporting showpiece was last called off due to World War Two but doubts about Tokyo have grown since Organizing Committee chief executive Toshiro Muto said he was "seriously concerned" the virus would pour "cold water" on their momentum.

National Olympic committees remain on a watching brief, relying on assurances from the IOC, which says it is taking advice from Japanese officials and the World Health Organization.

But Australia has said its athletes would not compete if their safety was compromised.

"Australian athletes are ready to make their mark at the Tokyo Olympics — but it should not be at the risk of their health and wellbeing," federal health and sports minister Richard Colbeck said in an emailed statement.

No Australian athletes have reported

serious concerns about competing in Tokyo, however, and they are being advised to prepare as if the Games will go ahead there, the Australian Olympic Committee has said.

"This is obviously a very serious matter and it's not something we thought would be happening," Australia chef de mission Ian Chesterman told reporters in Canberra on Wednesday.

RIO FEARS

Preparations have already been disrupted for dozens of athletes, with qualifying events postponed and training camps scrapped altogether.

Concerns about athlete safety were also high on the agenda four years ago in the runup to the Rio Olympics due to fears over an outbreak of the mosquito-borne Zika virus.

Some athletes, including golfer Rory McIlroy and tennis player Simona Halep, pulled out of the Games over Zika but the event went ahead as scheduled.

British former track athlete Jessica Ennis-Hill, who won the heptathlon silver at Rio after seriously considering withdrawing, said Tokyo-bound athletes would be similarly torn.

"It's a really difficult position because you are thinking about your health and the virus that's going around but also you train so hard for that one moment and you don't want to lose that opportunity,"



Ennis-Hill told Reuters.

"You do have concerns but you have to trust (that) the World Health Organization and the governing bodies and everyone would not put you in unnecessary risk."

Dutch gymnast Epke Zonderland, who won a gold at the 2012 London Olympics, arrived in Australia a month ahead of a World Cup event over the weekend because he feared being delayed by virus-related travel restrictions.

"Every time you're in a plane for a long time, there are a lot of people on board, probably a few are sick with a cold and the air circulates," he told Reuters in Melbourne in a recent interview.

"There's a big chance of getting sick, especially as an athlete."

(Source: Reuters)

Weightlifters cancel trip to UAE

IRNA — Iranian male and female weightlifters cancelled their flight to the United Arab Emirates to attend West Asian Championships due to coronavirus threat.

The West Asian Championships will be underway until February 29 in Dubai.

The event is regarded as qualifying for 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games.

In men's category, Sohrab Moradi participated in the event.

Fathollahzadeh appointed Esteghlal General Manager

 ${\bf TASNIM-A li\ Fathollahzadeh\ has\ been\ appointed\ as\ Esteghlal\ General\ manager\ on\ Wednesday.}$

He was named as a member of club's board of directors in December but resigned after serving just one week in the post.

On Wednesday, local media reported that Fathollahzadeh has been appointed as the club's GM.

Under management of him, Esteghlal won Iran Professional league twice in 2001 and 2014 and Hazfi Cup four times.

Persepolis, Al Taawoun match in ACL postponed: report

TASNIM — Persepolis of Iran and Al Taawoun of Saudi Arabia match in the 2020 AFC Champions League group stage has been reportedly postponed.

stage has been reportedly postponed.

The game was scheduled for Monday in Dubai in Group

C of the competition.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has suspended all flights to and from Iran for at least a week over the outbreak of the new coronavirus.

AFC has already announced that it will likely postpone some matches due to the coronavirus threat.

AFC fines Iran football federation

The Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran was ordered to pay a fine of USD120,000 for violating the AFC Club Licensing Regulations.

Club Licensing Regulations.

In accordance with Articles 34.1 and 34.3 of the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Code, USD80,000- of the amount referred to in Paragraph 1 of this Decision is suspended for a probationary period of two (2) years. Should another violation of a similar nature occur within the probationary period, the suspension is automatically revoked, and the sanction applied; it is added to the sanction pronounced for the new infringement, the AFC announced.

It informed Iran that a repeat violation of these provisions may be met with more severe punishment.

The "AFC Club Licensing Regulations" (AFCCLR) is the basic working document which incorporates the AFC minimum requirements that must be transformed into a "National Club Licensing Regulations".

(Source: the-afc)

Takakura wants the title at SheBelieves Cup

Japan women's national team head coach Asako Takakura has called on her side to compete strongly at next month's US-based SheBelieves Cup, their final tournament before July's Tokyo Olympics.

Speaking at the unveiling of the Nadeshiko's squad for the round-robin competition, which also features the United States, Spain and England, Takakura said the Cup is one her side wants to win.

"With Spain, England and the USA participating, this will be highly competitive tournament," said the seven-time AFC Female Coach of the Year.
"Our team will not compete in the Olympic Qualifiers,

"Our team will not compete in the Olympic Qualifiers, so this will be our final tournament ahead of the Olympics. We are expecting a tough challenge, but we will compete to win the title."

Japan have used previous iterations of the tournament, as well as the similarly structured Tournament of Nations, as something of a testing ground for younger players, but with Tokyo 2020 appearing ever closer on the horizon, this trip to the US will be serious business for the 23 players selected.

Reigning AFC Player of the Year Saki Kumagai (pictured below) will lead the squad, which is comprised almost entirely of players in their twenties, with 19-year-old Nippon TV Beleza prodigy Jun Endo the sole exception.

With only 18 places available in Takakura's final Olympic squad, there is little room for complacency, and the highly experienced boss believes the team is well-placed to deliver strong performances.

"We started a training camp 10 days ago with the short-listed squad," said Takakura. "It was evident that our players were in much better shape than usual.

"Typically this is a tough time of the year for the players to maintain their fitness, so I have high hopes for our players this year."

Japan will hold their first training session on US soil next Monday, before beginning their SheBelieves Cup campaign against Spain in Orlando on Thursday.

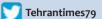
They will then meet in England in New Jersey three days later, before completing their tour with a clash against the world champion Americans in Frisco, Texas on March 11. Takakura's side haven't appeared on the international

stage since December, when successive wins over Chinese Taipei, China PR and Korea Republic saw them clinch the EAFF E-1 Championship in Busan.

(Source: the-afc)

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and one's modesty completes the benevolence to others and greatness is the result of bearing hardship. Imam Ali (AS)

"Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH" comes to Iranian bookstores

CULTURE TEHRAN — The children's book "Mrs. Frisby e s k and the Rats of NIMH" by American novelist Robert Leslie Carroll Conly, also known by his pen name Robert

C. O'Brien, has been published in Persian in Tehran.

Translated into Persian by Parastu Purgilani, the novel has been released by Peydayesh

Publications.
The 1971 book is about a widowed field mouse, Mrs. Frisby, who seeks the aid of a group of former laboratory rats in rescuing her home from destruction by a farmer's plow, while her youngest son is suffering from pneumonia.

The novel is the winner of the Front cover of the Persian 1972 Newbery Medal, which is version of "Mrs. Frisby and the given to the author of the most Rats of NIMH" by American distinguished contribution to writer Robert C. O'Brien American literature for children.

After O'Brien's death in 1973, his daughter, Jane Leslie Conly, wrote two other novels based on the book, "Racso and the Rats of NIMH" and "R-T, Margaret,

and the Rats of NIMH". "Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH" was adapted for the screen in 1982 by American director and animator Don Bluth.

NEWS IN BRIEF



"Elsinor" to compete in San Diego mobile filmfest

TEHRAN — "Elsinor" directed by Ehsan e s k Majuni from Iran will be competing in the International Mobile Film Festival in the U.S. city of San Diego during April, the organizers have announced.

The synopsis of "Elsinor" is "I'm going to mom's wedding". Only films shot with smartphones are allowed to participate in the festival, which will be held from April 24 to 26.



Intl. Quran **Competition** postponed until end of Ramadan

URE TEHRAN — The 37th International Quran Competition has been postponed to a time after the holy month of Ramadan due to the new coronavirus epidemic in the country.

The exact date of the competition will be specified later, the organizers announced on Wednesday.

The competition was scheduled to be held in the holy

shrine of Imam Reza (AS) in Mashhad in mid-April. Ramadan will probably begin on April 24 and end on May 23.

Jane Goodall's 'The Book of Hope' coming out in 2021

NEW YORK (AP) — Jane Goodall's next book will be a tribute to her enduring optimism.

 $Celadon\ Books\ announced\ Monday\ that\ Goodall's\ "The\ Book\ of$ Hope" will be published in fall 2021. The project is a collaboration with Doug Abrams, author of the bestselling "The Book of Joy," and comes 60 years after the celebrated primatologist began her

pioneering research of chimpanzees in Africa. "The Book of Hope' will serve as an extraordinary exploration of our very nature as human beings and offer a compelling path forward to create hope in our own lives and in the world," according to Celadon's announcement. "Through both Jane's observation and the latest scientific research, readers will experience the resilience of nature to recover from the harm we have inflicted and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of loss and devastation."

Goodall's previous books include "My Friends the Chimpanzees," "In the Shadow of Man" and "The Ten Trusts: What We Must Do To Care for the Animals We Love.'

French festival to spotlight Iranian cinema

TEHRAN — The 15th Panorama of Maghreb and Middle Eastern Cinemas, a Parisian international film festival, will review a lineup of the latest Iranian movies in a special section.

Feature films "Dressage" by Puya Badkubeh, "Yalda, a Night for Forgiveness" by Masud Bakhshi, "Hendi and Hormoz" by Abbas Amini and "Esrafil" by Ida Panahandeh are among the films to go on screen in this section.

Documentary films "Sonita", a co-production from Iran, Germany and Switzerland by Iranian filmmaker Rokhsareh Qaem-Maqami and "Women According to Men" by Saeid Nuri will also be screened at the festival, which is scheduled to be held from March 3 to 21.

The festival will also screen short films by female Iranian filmmakers, including "Personal" by Sonia Haddad, "Double" by Ronak Jafari and "The Drive" by Tanin Torabi.

"The Toaster I Used to Live In" by Rojin Shafiei and "Horn" and "Online Shopping", both by Ghasideh Golmakani, are also among

Round tables on women elites of Iranian cinema will also be organized on the sidelines of the festival. Filmmaker Ghasideh Golmakani, France-

based Iranian cinema expert Bamshad Purvali, Lebanese director Dima El-Horr and French scholars Emna Mrabet and Claudine Le Pallec Marand are scheduled to attend the sessions.



A scene from "Hendi and Hormoz" by Iranian director Abbas Amini.

Musicians Abdi, Haqiqi touring Europe to promote dotar



Dotar virtuoso Abdollah Abdi performs in an undated photo.

A R T TEHRAN — Dotar of the control Abdollah Abdi from Torbat-e Jaam and percussionist Rahman Haqiqi are touring Europe to promote the dotar.

The tour has been organized by Iran's embassies in Warsaw and Lisbon to observe the registration of the traditional skills of crafting and playing the dotar in Iran on the UNESCO list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December 2019, the Persian service of IRNA reported on Wednesday.

The tour began with performances in several Polish cities in early February.

They performed another concert at the Ismaili Center in the Portuguese capital of Lisbon during the second leg of their tour on Tuesday. The duo has previously performed in Faro, Portugal's southernmost city.

They will have their next stop in Darmstadt, a city near Frankfurt in southwest Germany, and Munich.

Geneva and Bern in Switzerland will also host performances by the group.

Dotar, a string instrument with a pear-shaped body, is mostly played in folk performances common in Torbat-e Jaam and nearby regions in North Khorasan Province.

IRIB prepares listings of comedies to relieve stress caused by coronavirus outbreak



A scene from "A Man with a Thousand Faces" by Mehran Modiri.

R T TEHRAN — Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) has prepared listings of comedy series to help alleviate stress and worries in society due to the new coronavirus outbreak in the country.

The TV series, previously aired on different channels, include "Homeless Man" directed by Reza Attaran, "Life Is Amazing" by Mojtaba Cheraghali and "A Man with a Thousand Faces" by Mehran

"Samu Bandari", a mini-series by Ebrahim Foruzesh, is also included, IRIB announced on Wednesday.

In addition, a lineup of children's programs has been arranged to entertain schoolchildren who are forced to stay at home in light of the latest spread of the novel coronavirus.

Moreover, several educational programs on basic protective measures against the new coronavirus are due to be aired.

The programs produced by world organizations teach how to protect against the disease, what the symptoms of the disease are, how to protect against it, what people must know about the disease, and what to do if an individual

Berlin documentary explores value of work in Germany's struggling car industry "You messed with the wrong women" say Weinstein accusers, turning sights to LA

BERLIN (Reuters) — Disruptions in Germany's car industry are eroding job security and national identity, with the most vulnerable drawing more self-respect from work than the wealthy, the director of a documentary screening at this year's Berlin Film Festival said.

German documentary "Automotive" explores the value of work in the age of automation and digitization. with low-skilled workers struggling to keep their jobs in Germany's mighty automobile industry.

The malaise in Germany's car industry, caused by weaker demand from abroad, stricter emission rules and electrification, is starting to leave a wider mark on Europe's largest economy by pushing up unemployment, eroding job security and hitting pay.

German auto manufacturers and their suppliers are expected to cut nearly a tenth of their 830,000 jobs in the next decade, the VDA industry association has said.

Some think-tanks and government officials fear that the toll will be higher as electric cars provide less assembly work than combustion engine vehicles, simple work steps are replaced by automation and companies relocate production.

The documentary follows 20-yearold Sedanur who during night shifts is sorting car parts on the assembly line for the robots at a near-by car factory in the Bavarian town of Ingolstadt. But when the diesel emission scandal

starts to hit, temp worker Sedanur is among the first to become unemployed. Her dreams of getting a permanent job contract and earning enough money



A worker assembles a new Audi at the production line of the German car manufacturer's plant in Ingolstadt, Germany, March 14, 2018. (Reuters/ Michael Dalder)

one day to buy a Mercedes Benz contrast sharply with the plans of Eva, a 33-year-old headhunter for Audi, which is looking for experts to automate some of its logistics.

Eva's goal is to earn as much money as possible now so that she can escape this modern world of work as soon as possible and buy a property on the beach in the Caribbean with her partner.

"It's interesting to see how differently both women view their job. For Eva, work is only a means to an end. For Sedanur, her job is partly her identity," director Jonas Heldt said.

But even Eva with her well-paid, highly specialized job in headhunting sometimes fears that it is not 100 percent safe as improved algorithms one day could do her work as well.

"What I wanted to show with my documentary is how, sooner or later, everyone might be replaceable. And this poses important questions about the role and importance of work in the future,"

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Some of the more than 80 women who have accused Harvey Weinstein of sexual misconduct said on Tuesday they are looking to the disgraced producer's trial in Los Angeles to build on what they called a seismic shift in attitudes signaled by his conviction in New York.

A day after a New York jury found Weinstein, 67, guilty of rape and sexual assault - in a watershed moment for the #MeToo movement - a dozen women held an emotional news conference in Los Angeles.

"Now we know that if we dare to speak, there is a far greater chance we will be heard and our abusers will be punished," said actress Rosanna Arquette.

"It is a historic shift that I never thought I would see in my lifetime," added Arquette, one of a group of Weinstein's accusers called the Silence Breakers.

Weinstein, who plans to appeal his New York conviction, was led away in handcuffs on Monday prior to sentencing on March , when he faces up to 29 years in prison.

Weinstein, who reportedly experienced chest pains or palpitations after the verdict, was taken to a New York hospital as a precautionary measure, his lawyer said.

Weinstein, once one of the most powerful producers in Hollywood, was the key force behind acclaimed films such as "The English Patient" and "Shakespeare in Love.'

In January, he was charged in Los Angeles with raping one woman and sexually assaulting another in the city in 2013. Weinstein has denied having nonconsensual sex with anyone; no date has been set for



Lauren O'Connor speaks with "The Silence Breakers", a group of women who spoke out about Harvey Weinstein's sexual misconduct during a news conference outside Los Angeles City Hall in Los Angeles, California, U.S. February 25, 2020. (Reuters/Mike Blake)

upcoming trial here in Los Angeles. We have an opportunity to build on this momentum," Canadian actress Larissa Gomes told the news conference on Tuesday.

The women praised their six peers for their bravery in testifying at the New York trial, where the accusers were grilled by Weinstein's lawyers, who sought to portray them as using the movie mogul to advance their careers.

"Harvey, you messed with the wrong women," said former actress and screenwriter Louisette Geiss. "We will see you here in Los Angeles, where hopefully

our conviction will leave you in jail for life. The women reported mixed emotions on hearing about Weinstein's conviction on Monday. For some, the verdict came more than 20 years after they say they were abused by the producer.

"Many of us didn't think this day would come," said television reporter Lauren Sivan. "We were actually really nervous and holding our breath because there was a very good chance he would walk."

the Los Angeles case to begin. "Now we can turn our attention to the