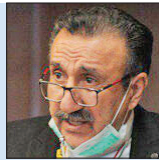




**70,000 inmates get prison furlough in Iran amid COVID-19 outbreak** [2](#)



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# Uncertain future

## Ghani and Abdullah sworn in as Afghan president



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## IMIDRO identifies 760 new promising mineral zones

**TEHRAN** — Head of Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) announced that his organization has managed to identify over 760 new promising mineral zones across the country, IRIB reported on Monday.

"With the new discoveries, the total area of IMIDRO's exploration zones has reached

650,000 square kilometers," Khodadad Gharibpour said.

In addition to pursuing its own exploration programs, IMIDRO is also cooperating with the private sector in several exploration projects, he added.

According to the official, IMIDRO has registered license requests for 270 areas of the new exploration zones, [→4](#)

## NGOs, students write to UN on anti-Muslim violence in India

**TEHRAN** — In a letter to UN Human Rights Council chief Michelle Bachelet, a large number of citizens, students, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have denounced the anti-Muslim cruelty in India, urging the international body to take urgent action to stop the brutalities.

In a report on its website on March 1, The Guardian reported that the vio-

lence against Muslims raged across the northeast of India's capital for four days as mosques were set alight, Muslims were burned alive in their homes or dragged out into the streets and lynched.

It also said Muslim businesses and property were also set alight. According to the paper, the police have been accused of enabling, encouraging or even joining in with Hindu mobs. [→2](#)

## Saudi princes' detentions sent a message: don't block my path to the throne

Saudi Arabia's crown prince meant to send a strong message to critics within the royal family by detaining senior princes this weekend: Don't you dare oppose my succession to the throne.

The main target in the crackdown, sources said, is King Salman's brother, Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz, one of only three members of the Allegiance Council, the royal body that endorses the line of succession, to oppose Mohammed bin Salman becoming crown prince in 2017

in a palace coup.

Four sources with royal connections said the move aimed to ensure compliance within the ruling Al Saud family, in which there have been rumblings of discontent, ahead of an eventual succession upon the king's death or abdication.

One of the sources described the detentions as a preemptive effort to ensure Prince Mohammed's "ascent will be rubber stamped by the Allegiance Council when the time comes". [→10](#)



**PERSPECTIVE**  
**Mohammad Hashemi**  
Journalist

## Iran coronavirus crisis: Who is telling the truth?

In the aftermath of the current coronavirus outbreak, it can be said with certainty that today the world public opinion is less likely to think of anything else rather than the spread of this deadly virus and its dangerous dimensions and Iran is no exception.

Today the fear of the fast spreading deadly virus is rife everywhere in Iran and it would not be an overstatement to say that people are seriously obsessed with this epidemic even when they are asleep.

Iran officially reported its first infections and two deaths from the virus in the shrine city of Qom on Feb. 19 and the disease is believed to have spread to the country from China.

For the first two weeks, Iran's response to the outbreak was similar to other countries. Iranian authorities were slow to take necessary measures to fight the epidemic such as closing of schools and universities and canceling of public gatherings. Not to mention numerous Iranian officials and their relatives that have tested positive for the virus and several others who have died. Despite some operational and statistical ambiguities, according to the Iranian Health Ministry, so far there have been more than 7,160 confirmed cases and 237 declared deaths while there have been 2,394 cases of recoveries.

All this as we have not seen countries like Turkey or Russia declaring any cases of the coronavirus infections until this moment which is very surprising given the fact that both countries are major tourist hubs.

While the novel coronavirus has dominated global headlines and the brutal U.S. sanctions have deprived Iran from accessing essential medical supplies, such as testing kits, to timely identify potential cases of the virus and save lives, much of the media attention has been focused on whether the Islamic Republic has adequately managed the outbreak and provided the true numbers of the coronavirus fatalities.

### Media tug of war

The news coming from unofficial and even semi-unofficial outlets have constantly been different from the official media version, causing more concerns among the public about the extent of the spread of the coronavirus outbreak in different cities of Iran. [→3](#)

## Israeli documents about Iran's nuclear program cannot be confirmed: Nephew

By Javad Heirannia

**TEHRAN** — Richard Nephew, who served as the lead sanctions expert for the U.S. team negotiating with Iran, is of the opinion that "It is the IAEA's responsibility to investigate information that it receives."

The fellow at the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University, says that "If it finds that information credible, it is its responsibility to ask the questions that result from that information of the country in question."

Following is the text of the interview:

■ IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi, has said that he wants Iran to clarify about the "undisclosed location" in Tehran where uranium particles were found last year. Iran has also stated that such requests should be based on clear

reasons and principles consistent with relevant Agency documents, which do not apply to the two recent requests for additional access. What is your assessment of the Agency's recent report?

A: The IAEA has made reasonable requests to the Iranian government for access necessary to clarify questions about possible undeclared nuclear material in the country. Iran has a responsibility to provide such access, consistent with the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement it accepted in 1974 and confirmed it would implement after the revolution.

■ The dispute that the Agency has recently stated is based on Israel's claim and espionage of Iran's nuclear documents. Although the PMD has been shut down by the IAEA, Israel and the US have been trying to get it under the new IAEA

director general because they were not able to do so under the late IAEA secretary general, Yukiya Amano. Why has the military dimension of Iran's nuclear program been raised again?

A: Well, the issue has been raised because the IAEA investigated reports of further undeclared nuclear material in Iran, found traces of said material, and has asked for clarification.

When the PMD issue was completed in 2015, the IAEA never said that it would never ask questions again about possible undeclared nuclear material. It said that it was closing down that part of the investigation, but the IAEA maintains its responsibility to provide assurance as to the nondiversion of nuclear material to weapons programs. If it finds such indications, it is responsible for investigating them. [→7](#)

## 'Primary purpose of arresting Saudi's princes is consolidation of power by MbS'

By Javad Heirannia

**TEHRAN** — Mehran Kamrava, a professor of the Middle East Studies in Georgetown University of Doha, said that "The primary purpose of the arrest of Saudi princes appears to be further consolidation of power by Mohammed bin Salman."

Director of the Center for International and Regional Studies at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Qatar also adds "If current trends continue as they have evolved over the last couple of years, Mohammed bin Salman is likely to emerge as Saudi Arabia's undisputed leader after his father leaves the scene."

Following is the text of the interview:

■ What were the reasons for the arrest of the Saudi princes, including the brother of King Salman, by the Saudi government?

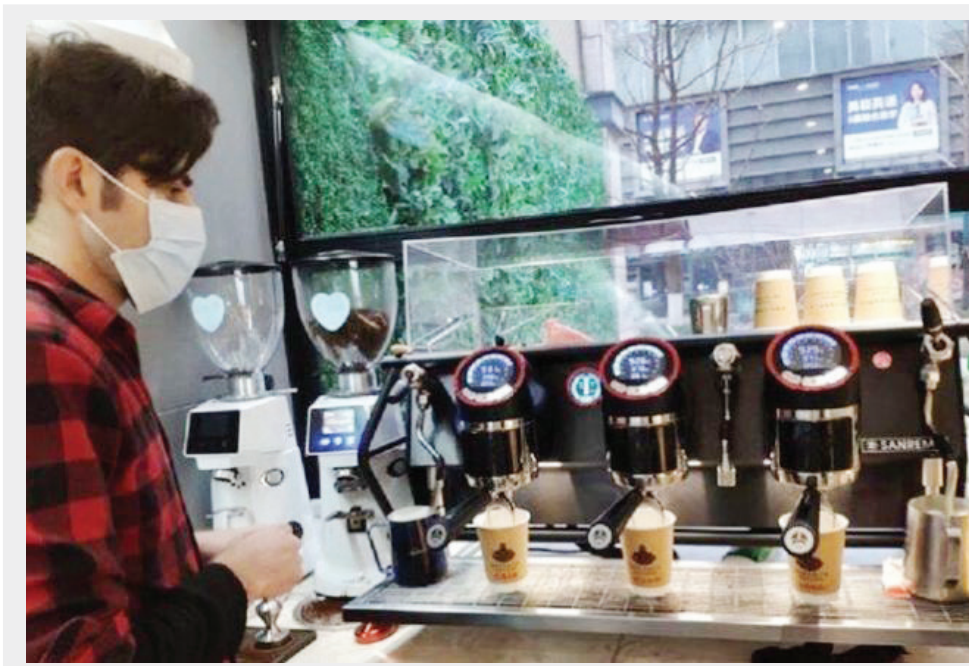
A: Given the opaqueness of the Saudi system, it is difficult to determine what exactly prompted the latest arrests. The primary purpose of the arrests appears to be further consolidation of power by Mohammed bin Salman, further dismantling the Saudi deep state that is comprised of princes and other senior members of the ruling family, and frightening anyone who may entertain any thoughts of ever opposing MBS.

■ The physical condition of King Salman seems to be inadequate and this has led to a

power struggle in Saudi Arabia. How do you foresee the power equations after King Salman's eventual death?

A: Saudi Arabia has been changing so drastically, and in such unprecedented ways, that it is really difficult to predict how the political system may turn out once the current king is out of picture. But, if current trends continue as they have evolved over the last couple of years, Mohammed bin Salman is likely to emerge as Saudi Arabia's undisputed leader after his father leaves the scene.

■ Is Muhammad bin Salman also an American and Western option for the kingdom in Saudi Arabia? [→7](#)



## Wuhan café appreciates Iranian employee for his helping hand amid COVID fight

**TEHRAN** — A coffee shop in the Chinese city of Wuhan has appreciated its 29-year-old Iranian employee, Sina Karami, for his commitment to stay in the city and help people during the coronavirus outbreak.

He turned down an offer to return to his home country on a chartered flight, saying: "Consider myself Chinese now, and I will stay here. Like the Wuhan locals, this is my home now, and I will be with the people of China." [→9](#)



**ARTICLE**  
**Ali A. Jenabzadeh**  
Journalist

## Iranians under attack by "Bad News Virus"

Sadly, 1398 (mid-2019 to early-2020) was a hard year for Iranians; different incidents from the very beginning and now, coronavirus. But our people have been under attack by a much more powerful force: the bad news. During recent months, domestic and foreign media have been broadcasting black and white news about these events at a staggering pace.

Iranian society begins its day with bad news which every one of them individually can be a huge shock, but it appears we are getting used to confronting bad news daily.

This phenomenon is analyzable only through inter-disciplinary studies within humanities and our academic circles seem to be ignoring to discuss it. Even most academicians and intellectuals of the country are falling into the same trap. They not only intake bad news but some of them also account for providing such news. As bad news broadcasting inflates, the political controversy around it escalates.

The elites, instead of informing the society of the psychosocial menaces such a trend imposes, are provoking concerns about sometimes unnecessary issues themselves. The media, in this campaign, has also taken sides with bad news without rethinking the harmful impacts of such an approach on the psyche of citizens.

Today, those involved in keeping themselves updated with news, have an insatiable appetite for the bad news. Sad headlines, misleading revelations, journalistic tumults and bad news about strange misfortunes are still favorable to them. Press readers, TV watchers and users of social media, totally unmindful of the risks, have exposed themselves to a brand new virus by improper consumption of the bad news to the extent that even if scientific studies precisely remind them of the hazards such a trend bears, they may suspect there is a conspiracy to keep them from knowing the truth.

This is a completely wrong assumption. The truth is many media activists and those who extract a catastrophe out of merely a piece of bad news, are practically destroying the nervous system of their societies, only to entertain themselves and mainly to earn money and fame. [→7](#)



## Iraq's security is important for Iran, Shamkhani says

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), has said that security and stability in Iraq are important for Iran. "Stability, security and well-being of the Iraqi people are very important for us. We see no reason to interfere in Iraq's domestic affairs," he told IRNA in an interview on Sunday.

He added that the Iraqis are able to manage their country and control the situation and there is no need for Iran's mediation.

"In view of the regional situation, we decided to pay a two-day visit to Iraq and held meetings with the president, prime minister, political figures and health minister," the top security official stated.

Situation in the region and common interests were discussed in the meetings, he added.

He also attached great importance to expansion of relations.

## Army ready to set up field hospitals to contain coronavirus outbreak

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Head of the Army's Health and Treatment Department has voiced the ground force's preparedness to set up field hospitals in the regions hit by COVID-19 to render urgent services to the infected citizens. "For instance, we set up a 50-bed field hospital in Qom based on the mentioned center," Second Brigadier General Behzad Moazeni said.



He added, "No case of infection has thus far been reported in the army's garrisons and bases."

In relevant remarks on Saturday, Iran's Air Force commander hailed the sacrifices by the medical staff in their relentless work to contain the coronavirus outbreak, saying their sacrifices remind about the armed forces' sacred defense against the invading Saddam Hussein's army against Iran in the 1980s.

Brigadier General Aziz Nasirzadeh said defending the nation had no border and was not restricted to a "special uniform".

"We appreciate you and pray for you," the commander said in a message to the medical staff.

Parliament speaker Ali Larijani said on Monday that according to an approval by the Supreme National Security Council all bodies are tasked to obey the decisions of the National Headquarters for Campaign in containing the coronavirus.

In remarks on Friday, Larijani also hailed people for cooperation with the Health Ministry in the fight against the novel coronavirus.

"I express my gratitude to the Iranian people, especially the provinces of Qom, Gilan and Tehran, for their great hope and unity in the battle against coronavirus," Larijani wrote on his Instagram post.

The parliament speaker appreciated the selfless endeavors of the health officials and personnel to contain the virus outbreak, expressing hope that the situation would improve in the near future.

He also expressed commiseration with the families of the victims and wished a speedy recovery for those suffering from the disease.

By Monday, the death toll from the coronavirus outbreak, officially known as COVID-19, rose to 237. 7,161 cases were also confirmed to have contracted the virus. According to the Health Ministry's Monday statistics, 2,394 have also recovered.

## Iran's ambassador meets Sultan of Oman

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Iran's Ambassador to Muscat, Mohammad Reza Nouri Shahroudi, met on Monday with Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, the new Sultan of Oman. At the meeting, in which Ambassador Nouri Shahroudi submitted his credentials to the Omani Sultan, both sides vowed to do their best to reinvigorate mutual cooperation in different fields.

The Iranian envoy also conveyed greetings of President Hassan Rouhani to Bin Tariq Al Said and expressed Iran's readiness to develop friendly relations with Oman and expand bilateral cooperation in all fields.

Yusuf Bin Alawi bin Abdullah, the Sultanate of Oman's Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs, also attended the meeting.

In January, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif discussed bilateral cooperation regarding security in the Strait of Hormuz with his Omani counterpart in Tehran.

The two ministers confirmed their countries' intention to continue cooperation and consultation to ensure maritime and energy security for all.

The Omani foreign minister's visit to Tehran was the third in less than a month. He had visited Iran in early January to participate in the "Tehran Dialogue Forum".

During Barack Obama's presidency, Oman acted as an intermediary between Iran and the United States.

Analysts say Oman is still trying to deescalate tension between Tehran and Washington.

Tension between Iran and the U.S. started unfolding after U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally and illegally withdrew the U.S. from the 2015 nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) and put the harshest ever sanctions in history against Iran under his "maximum pressure" strategy against Tehran.

Analysts have called Oman the Switzerland of the Middle East. The country has also been mediating between Yemen and Saudi Arabia which have been at war since March 2015.

In their December meeting, Zarif and bin Alawi conferred on key international and regional issues, particularly the Tehran-initiated Hormuz Peace Endeavor (HOPE).

# UN atomic watchdog: Iran still providing nuclear site access

*By staff and agency*

Rafael Grossi, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said on Monday that Iran continues to provide international inspectors access to its nuclear facilities, even after its announcement it was no longer bound by "any restrictions" of the landmark 2015 deal with world powers, known as the JCPOA.

"The agency has not observed any changes to Iran's implementation of its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA in connection with this announcement, or in the level of cooperation by Iran in relation to agency verification and monitoring activities under the JCPOA," AP quoted Grossi as telling board members in Vienna.

In his speech to the board members, Grossi called on "Iran to cooperate immediately and fully with the agency, including by providing prompt access to the locations specified by the agency."

"The agency has identified a number of questions related to possible undeclared nuclear material and nuclear-related activ-



ities at three locations that have not been declared by Iran," Grossi said, according to his prepared remarks. "The agency sought

access to two of the locations. Iran has not provided access to these locations and has not engaged in substantive discussions to

clarify the agency's questions."

Behrouz Kamalvandi, the spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, said on Wednesday that Iran has "strong reasons" not to respond to "unprincipled questions and demands" by the IAEA.

Kamalvandi also said no country in the world has had cooperation with the IAEA as much as Iran, adding Iran has provided "the most detailed" reports to the agency.

The remarks by Kamalvandi came one day after the IAEA issued two reports about Iran's nuclear program. In one of its reports, the agency said it had sent questions to Iran in three separate letters but received no answers.

Kamalvandi said, "Questions and access- es demanded by the International Atomic Energy Agency must have legal basis."

Kamalvandi and Iran's ambassador to the Vienna-based international organizations Kazem Gharibabadi have said the IAEA is using bogus intelligence by the Israeli spy services as the basis for its reports.

## Former MP dies of coronavirus

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Mohammad Reza Rahchamani, a former Iranian MP, passed away on Monday of the coronavirus disease.

Rahchamani, 64, died at the Masih Dane-shvari Hospital.

He was a reformist politician and represented Sabzevar in the Parliament from 1984 to 2000.

During the early 2000s, he headed Iran's State Welfare Organization.

Rahchamani was born in 1952 in Sabzevar and studied medicine.

Rahchamani, the secretary general of the National and Cooperation Party, was a candidate in the Feb. 2 parliamentary election.

Farzad Tazari, a former official at the IRGC's

political bureau, also died of the coronavirus on Monday.

Fatemeh Rahbar, a conservative female politician who was elected to the parliament in the Feb. 2 election, also died of coronavirus on Saturday.

Rahbar was among the top principlist candidates who won all the 30 seats in the Tehran constituency. She had served as a lawmaker for three consecutive four-year terms.

Hossein Sheikholeslam, Iran's former ambassador to Syria, former advisor to current Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, and former MP, also died from coronavirus on Thursday.

On March 2, Mohammad Mirmohammadi, a member of the Expediency Council and

former parliamentarian, also died due to the same infection.

In late February, Mohammad Ali Ramezani, who was re-elected to parliament from Astaneh Ashrafiyeh in northern Gilan province, also died due to respiratory problems caused by coronavirus.

Iran has been scrambling to contain the rapid spread of the infection.

Iran has closed schools and universities, suspended major cultural and sporting events and reduced working hours across the country to slow the contagion, which has spread to all of its provinces.

Iranian authorities also ordered the closure of the gyms and sports events by the end of winter.



The coronavirus is spreading in the Middle East, Europe, the U.S. and other parts of the world, while parts of China begin to lower their emergency response level as the number of new cases reported there continues to slow.

## 70,000 inmates get prison furlough in Iran amid COVID19- outbreak: Raeisi

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Iran's Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raeisi said around 70,000 prisoners across the country have been granted leave in the wake of the novel coronavirus outbreak.

Addressing a Monday session of the high judicial council, Raeisi said courts across the country have permitted the eligible inmates

to get furlough as part of precautionary measures to contain the coronavirus, according to Tasnim.

He said prisoners with underlying illnesses have been prioritized in getting furlough, urging that more permissions for prison leave be granted while considering precautions to avoid social security harms.

The top judge further said courts are rapidly handling the cases involving hoarders of medical supplies amid the growing need for such equipment, adding that court sessions on trial of the hoarders are held out of turn.

Raeisi also called on the related officials to make up for the shortcomings in the fight against coronavirus and immediately support

the country's medical staff "who are the soldiers at the forefront" of the battle with the disease.

Iran's Health Ministry announced on Sunday that the number of people who have died from the coronavirus in the country has risen to 194 and the total number of confirmed cases to 6,566. At least 2,134 people have recovered from the disease in the country so far.

## Larijani: All bodies must obey the center tasked to contain coronavirus

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Monday that all bodies must follow the decisions taken by the National Headquarters for Fighting Coronavirus.

"It has been approved by the Supreme Council of National Security that all sectors must follow decisions of this headquarters," he said during a meeting with Minister of Health Saeed Namaki and a number of lawmakers in Majlis.

Larijani noted that all efforts must be made to help the headquarters succeed in its effort to contain the virus.

During a meeting of the headquarters on Saturday, President Hassan Rouhani attached great importance to transparency and public trust in campaign against the coronavirus outbreak.

He said that "trust and empathy" between the people and the government are very important in such a situation that the virus has spread to all across the country.



"Success in the fight against the coronavirus in the shortest period of time is contingent upon the people and also executive bodies' cooperation with the national headquarters for fighting coronavirus," he said.

Iran is currently battling the world's deadliest outbreak of the coronavirus outside China, where it originated.

Iran's Health Ministry confirmed on Monday 595 new cases of infection.

The record-breaking increase in the number of new infections raises the total number of confirmed cases to 7,161 and the overall death toll to 237.

Ali Nobakht, the chairman of the Majlis Health Committee, on Monday called on the heads of the three branches of government to get directly involved in the effort to contain the spread of the deadly virus.

Nobakht also warned about the downplaying the issue.

## NGOs, students write to UN on anti-Muslim violence in India

**1 →** Anti-Muslim violence started in India amid widespread protests over the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government introduced in December, offering a path to Indian citizenship for six religious groups from neighboring countries, specifically excluding Muslims.

In their letter, according to Fars, the Iranian signatories said, "We hope and request that through effective and serious actions by the United Nations Human Rights Council, the main purpose of this letter, which is to help achieve a peaceful life for the people of India with different religions and ethnicities, will be fulfilled and it also becomes a positive role model for others."

The full text of the letter, signed by 1,140 Iranian citizens, 146 NGOs and student organizations, is as follows:

Mrs. Michelle Bachelet Jeria, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

As your Excellency well know, in the contemporary era paying attention to human rights issues as one of the chief matters to governance and international relations has an important place. Also, one of the main principles of human rights is to provide and preserve the human dignity. In the present time this topic has become a peremptory norm in the governance of the states and international relations. An inherent, God-given blessing to human kind that governments are obliged to provide it.

Unfortunately, however, in recent years there has been an increase in organized violence against Muslim minorities in India, particularly with the ratification of the CAA law in a discriminatory way in the Parliament of India and the support of the Government of India for this discriminatory legislation in December 2019, in recent months we have witnessed the spread of organized violence by extremist Hindus against the Muslims of India

It should be noted that the aforementioned law discriminates in granting citizenship of the Government of India to the people's religions and seeks even more pressure on Muslims in this country.

This is while the constructing body of India's society has for long been a diverse and multi-cultural one in which the factor of unity has been for being Indian not for having a specific religion. The CAA discriminatory law, however, has led some organized extremist groups to carry out destructive and anti-human dignity measures against Muslims and their sanctities.

In this regard, some Hindu extremists' insults including the burning of the Farukiyah Mosque in India can be considered a disgrace to all Muslims in the world as in the past there have occurred similar cases various times such as mass beatings and injuring of defenseless Muslims, including women and children, whose images and news have deeply touched the hearts of free humans around the world. According to international

reports, thousands were injured and 43 were killed and there is concern that the death toll will rise if the process fails to be stopped.

As an example, a group attacked a 37-year-old Muslim young man, Mohammad Zubair, repeatedly hit him with a baton and stabbed him in the middle of the street, while he couldn't do anything but to incur the hits, with his face beaten severely damaged.

The killing of a 30-year-old Muslim named Musharraf is yet another case. Musharraf was with his family at home located in Northeast Delhi when suddenly a group of 30 people who have covered their faces casket raged into his house and attacked him by cold weapons, his wife calls the police but the police aren't there. Eventually they took Musharraf to the street and killed him in front of her 11-year-old daughter.

These are only few examples of such organized extremism, all of which have been committed in the face of the constant neglect of the Indian government and police, who are responsible for securing the lives and sanctities of the Muslims of India.

To this end, explaining the followings seems necessary:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 (General Assembly resolution 217 A), "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

Again, according to article 3 of the same document, "everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

Especially article 7 of this universal declaration is notable here as it declares that: "All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination."

The above-mentioned content has explicitly been emphasized in articles 26 and 27 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the Government of India is a party.

Therefore, while strongly condemning these extremist behaviors against defenseless Muslims of India and the neglect of the Indian government and police who are tasked with securing the lives of all the Indian people, we believe that the solution to this crisis is to avoid discrimination and respect for basic human rights and dignity.

Hence, we call for an end to these kinds of violence and extremism against Muslims in India as soon as possible and we also request the Human Rights Council to address this issue by forming a fact-finding committee.

We hope and request that through effective and serious actions by the United Nations Human Rights Council, the main purpose of this letter, which is to help achieve a peaceful life for the people of India with different religions and ethnicities, will be fulfilled and it also becomes a positive role model for others.



# Iraqi PM: U.S. pressing Baghdad to cut ties with Tehran

**POLITICAL DESK** **TEHRAN** — Iraq's caretaker Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi says the United States is pressuring Baghdad to sever ties with Tehran, stressing that Iraqis will never let their country become a venue for the settlement of conflicts or clashes between other countries.

Abdul-Mahdi, who has remained in office as the caretaker prime minister of Iraq since his resignation in November, made the comments in a meeting on Sunday with Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani in Baghdad.

"By withdrawing from the JCPOA and putting pressures on Iran and Iraq, the U.S. further complicated the regional situation, and is now mounting pressure on us and urges the severance of ties between Iraq and Iran," the prime minister said, according to Tasnim.

Praising the Iranian government and nation for their genuine support for Iraq in the difficult years of the war against terrorism, he expressed gratitude to Tehran for offering assistance in containing a novel coronavirus epidemic.

"The geopolitical logic dictates that we employ the potential of our neighbors to



fulfill our national interests and security," Abdul-Mahdi stated.

Shamkhani had traveled to Iraq to exchange views with Iraqi officials on security and political issues. He visited Baghdad on Saturday night, heading a high-ranking

delegation.

On Sunday evening, Shamkhani held talks with Iraqi President Barham Salih. At the meeting, Shamkhani stressed the need for joint campaign against terrorism.

In his two-day visit to Baghdad, Iran's

top security official also held talks with other senior Iraqi officials including the parliament speaker, political leaders, and health minister.

In a meeting with Chief of Iraq's Intelligence Service (IIS) Mustafa al-Kazemi in Baghdad on Sunday, Shamkhani said countdown has begun for the expulsion of U.S. forces from the region.

"Assassinating generals of the Axis of Resistance, Marty Haj Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, was the result of a strategic mistake by Trump and the evil team in the White House. The countdown for the expulsion of America from the region began the early morning of Friday, Jan. 3," he said.

Shamkhani's trip to Baghdad comes in the wake of the U.S. assassination of Iran's top anti-terror commander General Qassem Soleimani and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in Baghdad.

General Soleimani was in Baghdad at the invitation of the Iraqi government when he was targeted in Baghdad's international airport on January 3.

The terrorist act led to a crisis in diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Iraq, which demanded that the American troops leave the country.

## Ex-Rouhani aide slams India for cruelty against Muslims

**POLITICAL DESK** **TEHRAN** — Former presidential aide for civil rights Shahindokht Molaverdi has criticized the Indian government's cruelty against Muslims, saying Iran should put aside political considerations and give priority to humanitarian issues.

"Given the position taken by our country's foreign minister with regard to the killing of Muslims in India, it becomes apparent that this matter is on the agenda of our foreign policy apparatus," Molaverdi told Mehr on Monday.

She emphasized that Iran should play an active role in order to prevent such crimes.

"With this regard, we should define a specific policy at both regional and international levels," she added.

Last month, in the worst communal violence in decades in New Delhi, nearly 50 people were killed and over 100 wounded as groups chanting Hindu nationalist slogans torched mosques and dozens of Muslim houses, Press TV reported.

The worst anti-Muslim violence by Hindu nationalists began on the eve of a state visit by U.S. President Donald Trump, infamous for his anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies.

On Thursday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned the government of India against continued massacre of Muslims, saying that the current pogrom going on against Muslim people in the South Asian country

will lead to isolation of New Delhi in the Islamic world.

The Leader made the remarks in a statement tweeted in Urdu, English and Persian on Thursday.

"The hearts of Muslims all over the world are grieving over the massacre of Muslims in India," Ayatollah Khamenei remarked. "The govt. of India should confront extremist Hindus & their parties & stop the massacre of Muslims in order to prevent India's isolation from the world of Islam."

Last week, Foreign Minister Zarif wrote a tweet urging "Indian authorities to ensure the well-being of ALL Indians & not let senseless thuggery prevail." He added that the "path forward lies in peaceful dialogue and rule of law."

India summoned the Iranian ambassador to New Delhi afterwards to protest the comments. The Indian Foreign Ministry spokesman Raveesh Kumar said a "strong protest was lodged against the unwarranted remarks," which he called "not acceptable."

Anti-Muslim violence started in India amid widespread protests over the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government introduced in December, offering a path to Indian citizenship for six religious groups from neighboring countries, specifically excluding Muslims.

A large group of Iranian student organizations, non-



governmental organizations (NGOs) and individuals have penned a letter to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, asking her to take decisive action to end the ongoing wave of violent attacks and brutality against Muslims in India.

In their letter, the Iranian signatories said, "We hope and request that through effective and serious actions by the United Nations Human Rights Council, the main purpose of this letter, which is to help achieve a peaceful life for the people of India with different religions and ethnicities, will be fulfilled and it also becomes a positive role model for others."

## IRGC establishes permanent base to fight COVID-19

**TEHRAN (MNA)** — the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps has established a permanent base to combat the novel coronavirus in Iran, IRGC Deputy Commander Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi said on Monday.

"A permanent base has been established in the Guards under the name of 'Shafa' that is cooperating with the national Coronavirus Combat and Prevention Headquarters headed by the health minister," said Fadavi on the sidelines of a local event in Tehran.

He said that the base will decide on all the measures required to be done by the IRGC to contain the outbreak.

"The Guards will provide a large number of beds to specialized centers in Tehran so that those patients who have got through the disease in hospitals would be transferred to these centers for eventual recovery without possibly trans-



mitting the virus to others," he said.

He went on to say that a meeting was held on Sunday chaired by IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Sala-

mi which resulted in adopting "good" decisions, including Mostazafan Foundation's nod to not collect rents of its states for two months. He also said that efforts are underway to compensate for the losses of some businesses that have been affected by the virus.

IRGC has been cooperating with the Health Ministry to contain the virus since the early days of the outbreak. The force has helped the anti-corona fight with disinfecting public places, deploying field hospitals, and offering medical services, among others.

IRGC commander Major General Hossein Salami held a phone conversation with Health Minister Saeed Namaki on Feb. 24, expressing readiness to combat the outbreak. Salami said that all the medical facilities and crews of the IRGC are ready to provide medical services to all people.

## Iran coronavirus crisis: Who is telling the truth?

**1→** In fact, there seems to be a tug of war between the official and unofficial media on the extent of the coronavirus outbreak. Contrary to the Iranian officials who keep insisting that they have been dealing with the epidemic in a transparent manner, unofficial outlets have left no stone unturned to stage an extensive psychological war against the government in the midst of an evolving crisis.

Their touch on the number of the coronavirus infections and death toll as a sign of secrecy and accuse the government of being incapable of handling the crisis. That would obviously spread pessimism and extreme skepticism among the public, when more than any other time, there is a need for closer cooperation between various government bodies and the public in the fight against the deadly virus.

Hadi Khaniki, a professor at Department of Social Communication at Allameh Tabataba'i University, believes "what threatens the Iranian society more than the coronavirus is the risk of mistrust, mental, psychological and social turmoil, a sense of helplessness and lack of self-determination."

Naturally, in any society, the official media should serve as true source of news for judgment, but the ongoing decline of trust in Iran's state-owned media has given its place to unofficial news outlets to feed their audience with sensational, false or misleading reports and rumors.

For example, the London based Farsi language channel Manoto on February 26 as part of its Iran coverage quoted some advice by a highly respected Shia cleric in Iran Ayatollah Mohammed Taghi Behjat about

fighting the coronavirus. The major blunder was that Ayatollah Behjat passed away in 2009. That program turned into a huge embarrassment for the channel; however Manoto didn't apologize.

**■ Video from inside a morgue!**

On February 28, BBC Persian reported based on medical sources that deaths in Iran are six times higher than what Iran has been saying in public. The BBC said there were 210 deaths when Iran was reporting 34 at the time. It accused Iran of underreporting and undercounting the number of nonlethal infections.

Due to the shortage of essential medical supplies like testing kits, Iranian medical staff were unable to diagnose less severe cases, share information and efficiently track cases of infection in the country in the early days of the outbreak. That is likely to do with the higher mortality rate compared to that of other countries. Nevertheless, after receiving essential medical supplies thanks to shipments of humanitarian aid from WHO, the UK, France, Germany and China, there was a rise in detection of the new cases and at the same time the number of recoveries among positive patients.

Just a few days later, BBC Persian published unverified videos recorded inside a morgue in the shrine city of Qom, claiming to show corpses of coronavirus victims awaiting burial.

Regardless of many questions surrounding the authenticity of those video clips, one wonders what purpose such coverage serves other than adding to the public fears and anxieties over an epidemic that has already

affected all parts of Iranian lives. Because anyone watching the videos would be convinced that the number of fatalities from the virus is much higher than what the government has announced. In addition, how showing corpses in a morgue meets professional, moral or legal standards in other countries?

All this come as the World Health Organization's director has already said there is no evidence of Iranian cover up in virus crisis. The WHO director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, on Sunday (March 1) told CNBC's Hadley Gamble that the WHO has its "own mechanism" for checking facts and has not seen problems with Iran's reported figures.

Hassan Soleimani, the chief editor of the conservative Mashregh News, says when you compare the media coverage over the coronavirus outbreak in Iran with other places, you realize that "an all-out war has been staged against Iran with certain aims to cause maximum panic among Iranian people, shut down the country and create waves of economic bankruptcy to create a social crisis."

**■ Lies in media tantamount to criminal acts**

Contradictory and confusing reporting about Iran didn't stop there. On February 27 it was reported on many online platforms that Elham Sheikh, 23, a prominent athlete from Isfahan and member of the woman's national team in futsal, a form of soccer, had died after contracting coronavirus. A day later, a video of her was released showing she was alive and healthy. But the rumor of her death was enough for some so-called Iran experts, even after the denial of her death, to tweet

about it in order to attract more followers and perhaps win another opportunity to appear on foreign media outlets to give their highly inaccurate and one-sided views about Iran.

Political and social scientist Mohammad Mehdi Mojahedi believes "engineered spoofs and lies like those we have seen in the media are tantamount to criminal acts. Because by engineering, producing, and disseminating such false and illusory information about the origin of the disease and the extent of its casualties and the magnitude of its risks, people are discouraged to consider the true story and the real threats and solutions."

In crisis communication it is impossible to ignore social, political, cultural and even economic contexts that have contributed to the creation of a crisis in the first place. It is also not fair to attribute the public fears and frenzy about the crisis solely to foreign media coverage and their efforts to magnify it.

But for now, as the severity of the crisis becomes clearer for Iran and the number of Covid-19 cases is expected to increase, the excessive emphasis on the Iranian government's mishandling of the crisis is more harmful than helpful.

"Contagious and epidemic diseases are external threats that could be contained and cured with national and personal care. However, if one could sow the seeds of these atrocious conspiracies in the depths of people's minds and make them believe in such conspiracies, they will deprive the public of their mental and psychological security, and could paralyze a nation from within," Mojahedi noted.

## Majlis committee holds emergency session on coronavirus

**POLITICAL DESK** **TEHRAN** — The Majlis Health and Treatment Committee held an emergency meeting on Monday over ways to curb the coronavirus outbreak in Iran.

Ali Nobakht, chairman of the committee, told Tasnim on Monday that the emergency meeting was attended by Health Minister Saeed Namaki and Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani.

Nobakht said that during the session, various aspects of the novel coronavirus outbreak in the country and ways to combat the infectious disease were discussed.



The health minister also briefed the lawmakers on the latest measures taken by the ministry to combat the virus, known as COVID-19, he added.

First detected in Wuhan city in central China in December, the virus has spread to more than 100 countries.

The global death toll is around 3,500 with more than 100,000 confirmed cases, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Iran's administration on Thursday extended the closure of all schools and universities nationwide until the end of the current Iranian year (March 20) as the country is struggling with the outbreak of the coronavirus.

Iran has been the worst hit country in the Mideast, with a total of 7,161 infected cases and a total of 237 deaths on Monday. At least 2,394 people have also been released from hospitals after recovering from the illness.

Meanwhile, a senior official at the WHO says he has been impressed to see how Iran is fighting the spread of the coronavirus that has infected thousands of the people across the country.

Richard Brennan, WHO's Director of Emergency Operations, said on Sunday that he was specifically satisfied to see efforts to contain coronavirus in Qom, a city some 120 kilometers to the southwest of the capital Tehran where the outbreak of the disease began less than three weeks ago.

"Very impressed by the dedication and hard work of the doctors and nurses and health workers here in Qom," said Brennan at a briefing with reporters, adding, "The people of Qom should be very proud of their health workers."

Brennan said he had personally seen in a hospital in Qom how the patients were receiving "very good care".

That comes as reports have claimed that Iran, a country currently under a series of harsh economic sanctions by the United States, has been failing to provide proper treatment to people infected with coronavirus.

Iran has been using all its resources to fight coronavirus despite the fact that U.S. sanctions have hampered the government's access to certain medicines and medical gear.

Brennan said that the Iranian government and local authorities in Qom had done their best to inform the public about the disease and how to prevent its spread.

"We've seen good efforts at educating the population," said the WHO official who has been leading a delegation from the global health body to Iran to monitor the country's efforts to contain the virus.

## FATF blacklisting has no impact on Iran's economic transactions: MP

**TEHRAN** — A member of THE Iranian Parliament's economic commission says the move by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to place Tehran on its blacklist has no impact on the country's economic ties with others.

Speaking to Mehr on Monday, Mohammadreza Pourrahimi said "even before the FATF blacklisting, there were practically no open economic transactions between Iran and other countries; therefore, the move had no actual impact on our exchange rate system; the announcement only left a psychological impact on the market."

"When the Americans signed the nuclear deal with Iran, the FATF had no exchange cooperation with the Islamic Republic. They did not even allow Iran to carry out the smallest financial transactions through official channels," he added.

"The FATF's recent move confirms European and the U.S. measures against Iran," he stressed.

"Even before the decision, the Islamic Republic was able to bypass the sanctions, and it will continue the same path," he added.

On Feb. 21, the Paris-based 39-member task force blacklisted Iran, claiming the country has failed to take measures against money laundering and the financing of terrorist groups.

In October 2018, the purported global finance watchdog gave Iran four months "for the sixth and last time" to ratify bills relating to the campaign against money laundering and funding terrorism.

Out of the four bills required by the FATF, Iran has already accepted two, but the other two bills have been stalled amid worries that they may expose the country to financial spying and new sanctions on Tehran.

In October 2018, the Iranian Parliament passed a bill on combating the financing of terrorism as part of the country's implementation of international standards set by the FATF.

The Foreign Ministry has said the FATF blacklisting of Iran was a politically-motivated decision, emphasizing that the Islamic Republic can never be labeled with money laundering and financing of terrorism.



STOCK MARKET

|        |         |
|--------|---------|
| TEDPIX | 534,376 |
| IFX    | 6.893   |

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

|     |              |
|-----|--------------|
| USD | 42,000 rials |
| EUR | 47,409 rials |
| GBP | 54,801 rials |
| AED | 11,437 rials |

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

|             |               |
|-------------|---------------|
| Brent       | \$36.68b      |
| WTI         | \$33.14/b     |
| OPEC Basket | \$51.74/b     |
| Gold        | \$1,668.40/oz |
| Silver      | \$16.96/oz    |
| Platinum    | \$878.00/oz   |

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Stocks plummet on Monday

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iranian stock markets faced some sharp decline on Monday, IRNA reported.

As reported, TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), fell 14,808 points to 534,376.

Some 3.951 billion securities worth 29.81 trillion rials (about \$709.7 million) were traded at TSE. The first market's index dropped 12,269 points and the second market's index went down 23,404 points.



Also, IFX, the main index of Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), declined 147 points to 6.893 on Monday, the same report confirmed.

Some 1.848 billion securities valued at 20,283 trillion rials (about \$482.9 million) were traded at this market.

Virus outbreak to further dent S. Korea's economic growth

The outbreak of the new coronavirus here may further undermine South Korea's economic growth if it is lasts for a significant amount of time, reports suggested Monday, while some said the virus may already have nearly halved the country's economic growth.

"Household spending in Japan and Korea are set to weaken further and slower growth in the U.S. and Europe will add to external headwinds," S&P Global Ratings said in an article titled "COVID-19 Now Threatens More Damage to Asia-Pacific."

The credit ratings agency said the economic damage from the virus outbreak may reach as high as US\$211 billion in the Asia-Pacific region alone.

"Local coronavirus transmission in Japan and Korea add a new, highly uncertain dimension to problems in these economies ... We now anticipate Japan's economy to contract 0.4 percent and Korea's growth to slow to 1.1 percent," the report said.

The 1.1 percent growth estimate marks a sharp, second downward revision by S&P in less than a month, following its downward revision from 2.1 percent to 1.6 percent for South Korea on Feb. 19.

Such an outlook apparently reflects a view the COVID-19 outbreak in China will again limit South Korea's exports.

Seoul's outbound shipments dropped for 14 consecutive months between December 2018 and January amid a prolonged slump in global chip prices and the trade dispute between the United States and China — the world's biggest economies and the largest importers of South Korean goods.

Another global ratings agency, Moody's Investors Service, also reduced its growth outlook for South Korea on Monday to 1.4 percent from the previous 1.9 percent.

It also marked the second downward revision in less than a month. The global ratings agency had slashed its growth estimate for South Korea from 2.1 percent on Feb. 16.

"Since the publication of our last Global Macro Outlook update in mid-February, the coronavirus outbreak has spread rapidly outside China to a number of major economies, including Korea," Moody's said in its report, titled Macro Global Outlook, released Monday.

"Previously, we assessed the effects of the virus mainly on aggregate demand in China, global travel and global factory output resulting from disruptions in supply chains through East Asia," it added.

"It is now clear that the shock will additionally dampen domestic demand globally, which will affect a wide range of non-traded activities across countries and regions simultaneously."

Many agencies too have cut their growth outlooks for the local economy.

The Bank of Korea has slashed its growth estimate for the local economy to 2.1 percent from the previous 2.3 percent.

Others, however, paint a much gloomier outlook for Asia's fourth-largest economy.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has claimed South Korea's gross domestic product (GDP) may shrink by up to \$16.5 billion this year in the worst possible scenario.

The amount accounts for nearly 1 percent of the country's GDP. The ADB said the worst possible scenario is when the outbreak lasts more than three months here and causes a downturn in China's consumption for more than six months.

(Source: Yonhap)

IMIDRO identifies 760 new promising mineral zones

**ECONOMY** and so far exploration licenses have been issued for 52 areas which include mining zones for lead, zinc, gold, copper, iron, coal, brine, chromite, antimony and other rare earth elements.

"Of course, some of the areas that we have awarded to the private sector have also reached the licensing stage, and some will become certified in the upcoming [Iranian calendar] year (starts on March 20)", Gharibpour added.

He noted that in the framework of the

country's Sixth National Five-Year Development Plan (2016-2021), efficiency, productivity and maximum utilization of the capacities of the country's mining industry have been given great importance and so should be considered in every step from exploration up to the production processes.

Back in September 2019, IMIDRO held a conference on Iran's mining exploration development, opportunities, and challenges in Tehran to encourage



the private sector to contribute more to the country's mining sector.

In August 2019, the IMIDRO head had announced that exploration operations were underway in 300,000 square kilo-

meters of land.

Gharibpour said the new exploration operations were being conducted by a consortium of IMIDRO and the country's major mining companies.

Industry Ministry to facilitate imports of healthcare products

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry has released a statement offering companies active in the field of importing hygiene and healthcare products facilitative services, IRIB reported on Sunday.

All the companies active in the field of hygiene and healthcare products that need to import such products can refer to the Industry Ministry, as well as the Food and Drug Administration of the Health Ministry to benefit from special services and support, the statement said.

Earlier on Sunday, Deputy Industry Minister Abbas Qobadi announced that the ministry has sent the list of 17 companies authorized for importing healthcare products to the Health Ministry.

According to Shata news, Qobadi sent the list to the head of the Health Ministry's Medical Equipment Department



in order for the Health Ministry to announce their required equipment to the mentioned companies to be imported into the country.

Iran's Industry Ministry has been taking serious steps in collaboration with other government bodies and institutions in order to facilitate the supply of necessary healthcare commodities in the face of the coronavirus outbreak in the country.

In late February, Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani had held a meeting with the producers of health and hygiene products to discuss the supply of such products amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Coronavirus, known officially known as COVID-19, appeared first in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December and has since spread globally. The World Health Organization has declared it a global health emergency.

Govt., private sector hold talks on coronavirus containment

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Head of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA), Masoud Khansari, met with the

Head of Coronavirus Combat Operations Headquarters, Alireza Zali, in Tehran on Monday to discuss ways of collaboration between the private sector and the government for containing coronavirus.

As reported by the TCCIMA portal, the meeting was attended by some of the TCCIMA board members and the head of the chamber's health committee as well as representatives of some government organizations and institutions at the TCCIMA building.

In the meeting, Zali expressed the government's appreciation for the private sector's cooperation and efforts in the battle against coronavirus.

Khansari for his part noted that TCCIMA is taking all necessary measures to play its role as a mediator between the country's private institutions in order for them to collaborate in containing the virus.



TCCIMA Head Masoud Khansari (middle) meet with Head of Coronavirus Combat Operations Headquarters Alireza Zali (1st R) in Tehran on Monday.

The official further called for closer coordination and cooperation between the government and the chamber as a private

sector representative body, in order to help the country pass through this crisis as quickly as possible and at a lower cost.

World stocks sink on coronavirus shock, oil price crash

Global share markets plunged on Monday as panicked investors fled to the safety of bonds and the yen to hedge the economic trauma of the coronavirus, while oil plunged more than 30% after Saudi Arabia opened the taps in a price war with Russia.

Saudi Arabia had stunned markets with plans to raise its production significantly after the collapse of OPEC's supply cut agreement with Russia, a grab for market share reminiscent of a drive in 2014 that sent prices down by about two thirds.

The shock in oil was seismic as Brent crude LCOc1 futures slid \$12 to \$33.20 a barrel in chaotic trade, while U.S. crude CLc1 shed \$11.80 to \$29.48. [O/R]

In Asia, stocks tumbled, the safe-haven yen surged and emerging market currencies with exposure to oil tumbled in volatile trade. [FRX/]

Heavy selling was set to continue, with European futures sharply lower and U.S. futures hitting their down limit.

Investors drove 30-year U.S. bond yields beneath 1% on bets the Federal Reserve would be forced to cut interest rates by at least 75 basis points at its March 18 meeting, despite only just having delivered an emergency easing.

"Wild is an understatement," said Chris Brankin, Chief Executive at stockbroker TD Ameritrade Singapore.

"Not just us, but across the globe you would

have every broker/dealer raising their margin requirements...trying to basically protect our clients from trying to leverage too much risk or guess where the bottom is."

MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan. MIAPJ0000PUS lost 4.4% in its worst day since August 2015, while Shanghai blue chips .CSI300 fell 2.9%.

EuroSTOXX 50 futures STXEc1 last traded down 6%. German DAX futures FDxc1 dropped 5.6% and FTSE futures FFIc1 fell 6.5%.

Japan's Nikkei .N225 dropped 5.1% and Australia's commodity-heavy market closed down 7.3%, it's biggest daily fall since the 2008 global financial crisis.

E-mini futures EScv1 for the S&P 500 .SPX hit their lower limit of 2,819 in Asia morning trade, pointing to Wall Street's rout deepening as investors priced in growing risks of a U.S. recession.

The number of people infected with the coronavirus topped 107,000 across the world as the outbreak reached more countries and caused more economic carnage.

Italy's markets are sure to come under fire after the government ordered a lockdown of large parts of the north of the country, including the financial capital Milan.

There were also worries that U.S. oil producers that had issued a lot of debt would be made uneconomic by the price drop.

Not helping the mood was news North

Korea had fired three projectiles off its eastern coast on Monday.

"After a week when the stockpiling of bonds, credit protection and toilet paper became a thing, let's hope we start to see some more clarity on the reaction," said Martin Whetton, head of bond & rates strategy at CBA.

"Dollar bloc central banks cut policy rates by 125 basis points, not as a way to stop a viral pandemic, but to stem a fear pandemic," he added, while noting many had little scope to ease further.

Bond bubble

A tectonic shift saw markets <0%FF:> fully price in an easing of 75 basis points from the Fed on March 18, while a cut to near zero was now seen as likely by April.

The European Central Bank meets on Thursday and will be under intense pressure to act, but rates there are already deeply negative.

"The onus is falling, perhaps inevitably on the actions of governments to abandon budget surpluses and reinvigorate the demand side of the economy," said Whetton.

Urgent action was clearly needed with data suggesting the global economy toppled into recession this quarter. Figures out from China over the weekend showed exports fell 17.2% in January-February, from a year earlier.

Analysts at BofA Global Research estimated the latest sell-off had seen \$9 trillion in global equity value vaporized in nine days, while the

average 10-year yield in the developed world hit 16 basis points, the lowest in 120 years.

"The clearest outcome of the exogenous COVID-19 shock is a collapse in bond yields, which once panic fades can induce huge rotation to 'growth stocks' and 'bond proxies' in equities," they wrote in a client note.

The yield on 10-year U.S. Treasuries US10YT=RR last sat at 0.4900%, after having plunged to a once-unthinkable 0.4690%, having halved in just three sessions.

Yields on the 30-year long bond US30YT=RR dived 35 basis points on Friday alone, the largest daily drop since the 1987 crash, and slid under 1% on Monday to reach 0.96%.

The fall in yields and Fed rate expectations has pulled the rug out from under the dollar, sending it crashing to the largest weekly loss in four years =USD. [USD/]

The dollar extended its slide in Asia to as far as 101.60 yen JPY=, depths not seen since late 2016. It was last down 2.4% at 102.80 in wild trade.

The euro likewise shot to the highest in over 13 months at \$1.1492 EUR=, to be last at \$1.1406.

Gold initially cleared \$1,700 per ounce XAU= to a fresh seven-year peak, only to fall back to \$1,669.93 amid talk some investors were having to sell to raise cash to cover margin calls in stocks. [GOL/]

(Source: Reuters)

2020 pound to euro exchange rate forecast

The pound to euro exchange rates have opened on a steady footing despite the significant market turmoil surrounding the biggest single-day fall in oil price since the first Gulf war. The GBP/EUR rate is quoted at 1.15092 on Monday, March 9, with both the Sterling and the Euro buoyant in comparison to other majors.

The collapse in the oil prices on market open have severely pressured the US dollar, Australian and Canadian dollars.

As the coronavirus outbreak continues to dominate the outlook for all major currencies, FX markets saw some sizable moves in early trading.

With safe havens strong, the US dollar weakness continues and the euro maintains its strength.

Pound Sterling fell at the beginning of last week, with the

GBP/EUR exchange rate dipping to lows of around €1.144 after the Bank of England (BoE) announced that it would 'take all necessary steps to protect [the UK's economic] stability'.

Monday saw the publication of February's UK Market Manufacturing PMI, which fell below forecasts from 51.9 to 51.7 and left some GBP traders feeling jittery about the outlook for the British economy going forward.

Duncan Brock, Group Director at the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply, was downbeat in his analysis:

"With no clear end to the disruption in sight, the gains made by manufacturing at the beginning of the year could soon be lost. A vortex of poor UK weather conditions, underlying remaining Brexit fears and now the Coronavirus will strip the sector of any significant wins if supply chains continue to disintegrate

in the coming months.'

The GBP/EUR exchange rate stabilized early on Tuesday after the UK Construction PMI for February emerged from contraction territory at 52.6, providing a lifeline for the British economy amid rising coronavirus (COVID-19) fears.

Samuel Tombs, UK Economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, said that the Pound Sterling remained 'sensitive to global investors' appetite for risk'. Consequently, rising COVID-19 fears left Sterling in a volatile position for the rest of the week.

Midweek saw the Pound to Euro (GBP/EUR) exchange rate begin to struggle after the UK Services PMI dipped from 53.3 to 53.2, leaving Sterling traders jittery as the UK's largest sector showed signs of slowing down in 2020.

(Source: exchangerates.org.uk)



# Iran's oil rig operations ongoing despite coronavirus outbreak

**ENERGY** **TEHRAN** — Head of National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) says despite the coronavirus outbreak, all operations in the country's oil and gas rigs are ongoing in full compliance with safety and healthcare standards, Shana reported.

"Our priority is, of course, maintaining the health and safety of employees and increasing the level of health services in order to prevent the spread of the virus and containing it," Abdullah Mousavi said at the 18th meeting of the company's Crisis Management Committee which focused on coronavirus.

Emphasizing the necessity of complying with personal and public health and hygiene principles in the workplace, the official added that continuous efforts at oil and gas rigs are also a necessity to meet the needs of the oil industry and in order to maintain the production.

Mousavi further noted that all drilling rigs and support camps in operating regions are equipped with clinics and medical equipment and doctors and technicians are stationed



in the mentioned sites.

"With the coronavirus outbreak, these

centers have increased their healthcare facilities for conducting routine screening

and safety tests to ensure the workforce's health and safety when entering and leaving the workplace," he added.

NIDC, a subsidiary of National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), undertakes most drilling operations across the country and has drilled 4,489 onshore and offshore oil and gas wells in the past four decades after the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

Holding 70 onshore and offshore drilling rigs, as well as equipment and facilities for offering integrated technical and engineering services, the company plays a major part in drilling exploration as well as appraisal/development wells in the country.

In Late February, NIDC's deputy head for drilling operation announced that the company had dug and completed the digging operation of 100 oil and gas wells during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019-February 19, 2020).

Hamidreza Khoshayand said the drilled wells consisted of two exploration wells and 35 development/appraisal wells as well as 63 workover ones.

## Oil crashes after Saudi Arabia starts price war amid slumping demand

Oil prices plummeted around 30 percent on Monday after Saudi Arabia slashed its official selling prices and set plans for a dramatic increase in crude production next month, starting a price war even as spread of the coronavirus erodes global demand growth.

Prices fell by as much as a third following Saudi Arabia's move after Russia balked at making a further steep output cut proposed by OPEC to stabilize oil markets hit by worry over the economic impact of the coronavirus.

Brent crude futures were down \$12.23, or 27 percent, at \$33.04 a barrel by 0552 GMT, after earlier dropping to \$31.02, their lowest since Feb. 12, 2016. Brent futures are on track for their biggest daily decline since Jan. 17, 1991, at the start of the first Persian Gulf War.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude fell by \$11.88, or 29 percent, to \$29.40 a barrel, after touching \$27.34, also the lowest since Feb. 12, 2016. The U.S. benchmark was potentially heading for its biggest decline on record, surpassing a 33 percent fall in January 1991.

"I think all forecasts are out the window," said Jonathan Barratt, chief investment officer at Probis Securities in Sydney. "It seems like a race to the bottom to secure order(s)."

The disintegration of the grouping called OPEC+ - made up of OPEC plus other producers including Russia - ends more than three years of cooperation on supporting the market, most recently to stabilize prices under threat from the economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak.



Saudi Arabia plans to boost its crude output above 10 million barrels per day (bpd) in April after the current deal to curb production expires at the end of March, two sources told Reuters on Sunday.

The world's biggest oil exporter is attempting to punish Russia, the world's second-largest producer, for not supporting the production cuts proposed last week by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Saudi Arabia, Russia and other major producers last battled for market share like this between 2014 and 2016 to try to squeeze out production from the United States, which has grown to become the world's biggest

oil producer as flows from shale oil fields doubled its output over the last decade.

"The prognosis for the oil market is even more dire than in November 2014, when such a price war last started, as it comes to a head with the sign?cant collapse in oil demand due to the coronavirus," Goldman Sachs said.

Saudi Arabia over the weekend cut its official selling prices for April for all crude grades to all destinations by between \$6 and \$8 a barrel.

### ■ Virus impacts demand

Meanwhile, China's efforts to curtail the coronavirus outbreak has disrupted the world's second-largest economy and curtailed shipments to the biggest oil importer.

And the spread of the virus to other major economies such as Italy and South Korea and the growing number of cases in the United States have increased concerns that oil demand will slump this year.

Goldman Sachs and other major banks such as Morgan Stanley have cut their demand growth forecasts, with Morgan Stanley predicting China will have zero demand growth in 2020. Goldman sees a contraction of 150,000 bpd in global demand.

Goldman Sachs cut its forecast for Brent to \$30 for the second and third quarters of 2020.

In other markets, the dollar was down sharply against the yen, Asian stock markets sharply lower, and gold rose to its highest since 2013 as investors fled to safe havens. (Source: Reuters)

## Oil price war spells danger for U.S. junk bonds

U.S. junk bonds face a day of reckoning when markets open on Monday, with the unfolding price war in oil set to knock energy companies buckling from the outbreak of coronavirus.

Saudi Arabia is set to raise oil production next month, in an apparent attempt to put pressure on Russia after Moscow refused to join other nations in curbing output to support the price of oil.

As well as squeezing Russia, the aggressive move is likely to threaten the U.S. shale industry and imperil companies that are teetering on the brink of collapse.

"This was literally the last thing U.S. high-yield energy producers needed," said John McClain, a portfolio manager at Diamond Hill Capital Management, referring to the effects of the move from Riyadh on junk-rated companies. "There will be blood in the market on Monday."

Energy companies are the biggest issuers of junk bonds, accounting for more than 11 percent of the U.S. high-yield market. Such issuers have credit ratings of BB or below, indicating that they are at higher risk of default than "investment-grade"



issuers, rated BBB and above.

A Saudi-led price war could usher in the worst rout for junk-rated energy debt since the rise in U.S. shale production and subsequent collapse in the oil price in late 2015.

The average U.S. high-yield energy bond closed in "distressed" territory last week, defined as a cost of borrowing of 10

percentage points or more above Treasury yields. The spread was almost 11 percentage points on Friday, according to an index run by Ice Data Services.

The prices of bonds issued by heavily indebted oil and gas producers have dropped sharply in recent weeks.

Laredo Petroleum's \$600m bond maturing in 2025, for example, fell 10 cents

to 58 cents on the dollar on Friday, while struggling Chesapeake Energy's \$2.2bn bond maturing in 2025 also tumbled about 10 cents to trade at 40 cents.

A recently issued \$550m bond from Range Resources has slipped to 65 cents on the dollar, having been sold to investors at face value in early January.

A warm winter and falling global demand have also sent natural gas prices lower, compounding the fallout from the declining price of oil. Bond markets have been closed to new sales from low-rated energy companies in recent weeks, cutting off a vital source of additional financing.

"If this persists for any meaningful period of time you could see a wave of restructurings," said Mr McClain. Higher-rated companies may also suffer.

Just over 11 percent of the investment-grade corporate bond market sits within the energy sector, with a host of companies rated BBB, the lowest rung. More pressure on cash flows caused by lower oil prices could result in downgrades, further weighing on junk debt. (Source: Financial Times)

## Global oil demand to plunge 2.5m bpd in Q1 on coronavirus, says IEA

Global oil demand is set to fall 2.5 million bpd in the first quarter compared with a year earlier due to the coronavirus outbreak, with the "call" on OPEC producers falling to 25 million bpd, 3.5 million bpd below their assumed output level, the International Energy Agency said Monday.

In its monthly oil market report, the IEA forecast a full-year reduction in demand of 90,000 bpd in 2020, the first annual fall since 2009, based on "close to normal" demand in the second half of the year, but acknowledged high levels of uncertainty.

Setting out alternative high and low scenarios, it said global oil demand could drop by 730,000 bpd this year in a "pessimistic" low-case scenario.

Its estimate of the "call" on OPEC in Q1, or need for OPEC crude, was 4.7 million bpd lower than for Q1 2019. For 2020 as a whole, it put the call on OPEC at 27.3 million bpd.

"The coronavirus crisis is affecting a

wide range of energy markets, including coal, gas and renewables, but its impact on oil markets is particularly severe because it is stopping people and goods from moving around, dealing a heavy blow to demand for transport fuels," IEA executive director Fatih Birol said. "This is especially true in China, the largest energy consumer in the world, which accounted for more than 80 percent of global oil demand growth last year."

Based on reduced expectations resulting from the coronavirus outbreak, as well as stagnating transport demand, the IEA also cut its five-year oil demand growth estimate out to 2025 to 950,000 bpd annually, as it published its separate medium-term oil market report, titled 'Oil 2020'.

It now assumes total oil demand growth between 2019 and 2025 of 5.7 million bpd, compared with a forecast of 5.8 million bpd in demand growth between 2019 and 2024 in last year's medium-term report.



"The impact of the coronavirus on oil markets may be temporary, but the longer-term challenges facing the world's suppliers are not going to go away, especially those heavily dependent on oil and gas revenues," Birol said.

Referring to climate pressures on companies, he added: "The coronavirus crisis is adding to the uncertainties the global oil industry faces as it contemplates new investments and business strategies."

(Source: Platts)

## Shale in crisis as oil prices collapse

It feels 2014 all over again, or 2008. The OPEC+ meeting broke up without a deal on Friday, sending oil prices into a freefall. Brent was down by about 9 percent during midday trading, rapidly heading to the low-\$40s. Oil prices could test the 2016 lows before all is said and done.

Russia has resisted cutting production deeper. On Thursday, on the eve of the final day of talks, OPEC more or less issued an ultimatum. They proposed 1.5 million barrels per day (mb/d) of additional production cuts, and suggested that OPEC would not cut alone without Russia's participation. "There will be no deal" without Russia, Iran's oil minister said.

Moscow called their bluff. On Friday, everyone walked away and there was no deal. As of midday on Friday, WTI plunged to \$42 and Brent fell to \$46, down 9 percent, the lowest level in nearly three years. The entire OPEC+ arrangement is now in doubt.

Even worse for oil prices, the existing production cuts, agreed to only a few months ago, expires at the end of the month. As it stands, members of the OPEC+ coalition could conceivably raise output beginning in April, exacerbating the global glut.

But Russia's resistance rested on some reasonable logic. Global demand is contracting by the largest amount in history — a worse demand shock than what occurred even during the global financial crisis.

It's not clear that this can be fixed by supply cuts. The Russian argument seems to be: a demand-side problem has to be met with a demand-side response — via lower prices. Or, put another way: let the market sort it all out. As a result, oil prices nosedived on Friday.



It may not be the end of the story. OPEC+ members said that consultations will continue, but negotiators need time to cool down, according to Iran's oil minister.

There are echoes of the 2014 OPEC meeting, when then Saudi oil minister Ali al-Naimi preferred to let the market fix the growing supply/demand imbalance. That led to a steep drop in oil prices, a downturn that did not turn a corner until 18 months later. The plunge in prices ground U.S. shale supply growth to a halt.

This time could be much worse. Not only is the oil market facing a disaster, but this time it's a demand-led crisis. The global economy is facing real questions about a recession, and the coronavirus continues to spread. The airline industry, for instance, could lose more than \$100 billion. The worse may yet lie ahead. In that sense, the analog could be more 2008 than 2016.

"It is the most severe decline since Q4 2008, the height of the 2008-2009 global economic crisis, which saw demand tumble by 2.8 million b/d year-on-year," Ann-Louise Hittle, vice president, Macro Oils, at Wood Mackenzie, said in a statement. The consultancy sees demand contracting by 2.7 mb/d in the first quarter. "If the impact the coronavirus has had on global oil demand is sustained, then by the second half of the year we'd expect to see weaker GDP. This will have a far greater impact on oil demand than just temporary reductions in jet fuel and gasoline demand."

For U.S. shale, a disaster lies ahead. The industry has been largely unprofitable to date, but had received several rounds of huge injections of capital in the last decade, most recently following the 2016 downturn. But by last year, investors had begun to sour on unprofitable shale drilling. Energy stocks collapsed and access to capital became increasingly scarce.

That was all true before the coronavirus and before the failed OPEC+ meeting. Now, U.S. shale will likely find itself in a state of true crisis.

Unlike a few years ago, recapitalization in any meaningful way is off the table. Capital markets have turned off the spigot. Also, the twice-a-year credit redetermination period is getting underway, and the most recent slide in prices will likely mean an immediate cut to credit lines from lenders.

Worse, the wave of debt taken out during the 2014-2016 downturn is about to come due. North American oil and gas companies have more than \$200 billion in debt maturing over the next four years, with \$40 billion due this year.

Peak shale may have finally arrived.

(Source: oilprice.com)

## Oil's historic meltdown provides relief for LNG importers

The rout in oil prices may well put a smile on the faces of liquefied natural gas buyers.

Most of the world's LNG is still sold under long-term contracts indexed to oil, which has remained a widespread practice since its inception in the 1960s. That means that some of the biggest importers -- including Japan, China and South Korea -- largely missed out from record low spot prices triggered by a milder winter and the startup of new supply.

Oil's collapse in the wake of an all-out price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia has changed the picture. An LNG contract with a 12% slope to Brent crude is currently at a premium of about \$1.17 per million British thermal units to Asian spot prices, down from more than \$4 just three weeks ago.

To be sure, the premium is based on the Friday close of Japan/Korea Marker futures. The Asian spot price, which hasn't been assessed yet on Monday, is expected to fall -- albeit at a smaller rate than oil -- as a knock-on effect.

The wide price discrepancy had triggered some importers to rethink long-term contracts. State-owned Pakistan LNG Ltd. is weighing the possibility of exercising termination clauses in contracts signed with Eni SpA and Gunvor Group Ltd. in 2017, while Japan's Osaka Gas Co. entered into arbitration last year with the marketing unit of Exxon Mobil Corp.'s PNG LNG project after a dispute during a price review.

(Source: Bloomberg)



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# Iranians under attack by “Bad News Virus”

**I →** The bad news which has occupied the top position among other domestic and foreign news today is rooted deep and old in “events” pages of newspapers. News about crimes, treasons and dreadful deaths with different causes are being publicized every day more revolting than before.

Despite recent changes in form and mater, events pages of papers and pop-magazines in Iran have never given a break to the brains of Iranians for the last several years. The roaring flood of bad news has now turned to a very serious threat here in Iran.

So, it is true to say the real contagious virus which has prevailed over our society long ago and accounts as being the most fundamental menace to the mental well-being of citizens is the “bad news virus”! This virus directly targets the sense of confidence and safety within the public and that is why specialists are constantly emphasizing the perils of social panic caused by coronavirus rather than the virus itself. The bad news virus convinces people that they are always imperiled by grave dangers. Addiction to bad news is so severe among some people that renders their lives unbearable if they would not start their days with reading bad news in event pages of the press.

## ■ The Digestion Pace of the Bad News

As American writer Rolf Dobelli points out in “The Art of Thinking Clearly”, during recent decades “man has found out that improper diet comprises many dangers for life and yields various diseases like stroke and diabetes. However, most of us do not realize that news for the brain is like sugar for the body! Digesting news is as easy for the brain as digesting sugar is for the body.”

Sugar can be absorbed very easily in the body and yet, it is harmful. Media feeds our brains with quite small pieces of news. These pieces are so tiny that if you consider them individually they will cause no worries and do not need much thinking for absorption. This is exactly why we never feel satiety when consuming news. The counter side of this condition can be found in reading books and articles. Reading and digesting books and long articles needs thinking. The propositions and news press give you, resemble colorful candies for the brain. As Dobelli puts it, “today, in dealing with data and news, we have reached the same place as we did 20 years ago about dealing with the foods.”

The bad news is absorbed far faster than other kinds of news and leaves a deep effect in one's subconscious. The main reason for this pace is the possibility of identification with those involved in the incident. The media knows well about this. For example, imagine the story of a car that falls into a deep valley while passing a bridge because the bridge collapses. In this instance, the media focuses on issues that attract your attention like the type of car, people inside it, where they were coming from, where they were heading to, what they have been through while falling the valley (if any of them survives) and things like this because you tend to put yourself on their shoes. None of these issues is the main subject. The main subject in this story is the structural strength of the bridge, the danger which was long hidden inside that bridge and irresponsibly disregarded by authorities and might also be hidden in many other bridges. But issues like this are not attractive to the media.

The news media broadcasts about certain aspects of incidents draw a map from dangers sneaking and hiding around us but the selective taste of the media and their particular angle in viewing incidents, make us walk through dangers of life while holding a misguiding map in hand and having no sense about what are the real risks of life. Things media highlights for us are not real dangers of life (for example, news about terrorism is propagated all over the world daily but we don't hear much news about chronic stress.)

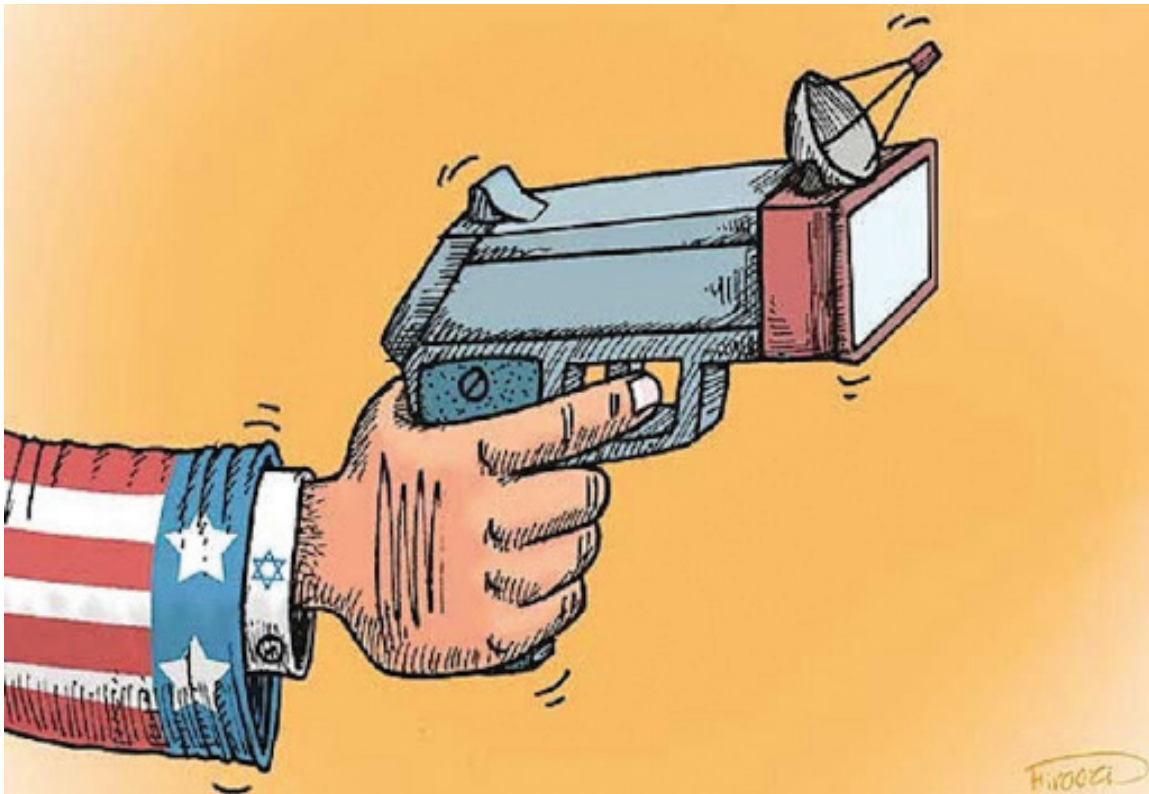
## ■ News Consumptionism: What is RELEVANT?

Among enthusiasts of bad news, no one pays much attention to the important question of what is the real benefit of the tendency to consume bad news? If you ask any of them to point only 1 out of 10,000 pieces of news they have read in recent years that has helped them to make a better decision about a serious issue in their lives, none can. Indeed, as Alain de Botton argues in “The Difficulties of Consuming News” (Huffington Post), consuming news is irrelevant to you and “we are the first generation to search for information irrelevant to our lives. For many, it is a hard task to realize what is relevant to them and what is not. On the contrary, they easily understand what is NEW and what is not”.

reforms have been very popular with the Saudi youth. Saudi clerics and other conservative elements in society appear to have been effectively sidelined and silenced. At this point, they do not pose a challenge to Mohammed bin Salman and his efforts to consolidate power.

■ In your opinion, what economic and social impacts of a fall in oil prices will have on a country such as Saudi Arabia, whose economy is dependent on oil?

A: Declines in oil prices are likely to curb some of the developmental projects of Mohammed bin Salman. And levels of unemployment are likely to rise slightly. And, if the economic difficulties continue, his popularity is likely to decline somewhat. However, the Saudi economy has healthy reserves, and rentier arrangements are likely to remain intact. Unless the economy hits serious turbulence, I do not foresee major political difficulties arising in Saudi Arabia because of economic problems.



And this is how media stimulates you: by giving you what's new rather than relevant.

The battle between being relevant and being new is the substantial conflict of our age. This is a war the media embarked against mankind. Media organizations, by inducing the sense that they are providing you with new information, try to foist these pieces of news as a competitive advantage in your life. They try to convince you that not knowing such news puts you off life's pace because despite being irrelevant, they are new. Therefore, most people feel anxious once they fall short of new information because, in their minds, it means falling behind life.

## ■ The Virus of Bad News

There are numerous physical and mental diseases incorporated with persistent exposure to bad news. Bad news stimulates the limbic system (an interwoven system of nerves and networks) in the body severely. Exposure to bad news and horrible stories unleashes a flood of cortisol inside your body. This weakens your defensive mechanism and ceases the discharge of somatotropin (human growth hormone). In other words, your body stumbles into chronic stress. Extra cortisol in the body causes the digestive disorder, body growth cessation, anxiety and vulnerability against viruses. Other side effects of constant exposure to bad news are panic, violence, and reduction of sensibility. A 2012 research conducted by a group of psychologists proved that, in case of exposure to bad news, women are much more at the risk of chronic stress than men and such news will leave a more lasting and deeper effect on them because of their good memory.

Another bad effect of exposure to bad news is cognitive errors. A cognitive error happens once a person is incapable of thinking thoroughly and making the right decision. Various factors are incorporating cognitive errors from which, the most important factor is “confirmation bias”. Confirmation bias is the tendency to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms or strengthens one's prior personal beliefs or hypotheses. Once an individual is convinced that the improvement of relationships with others depends on their confirmation of one's behaviors and personality, the confirmation bias is empowered. In fact, as the American business magnate and philanthropist Warren Buffet puts it, “what man can do best is interpreting new data and information. Man can do this interpretation in a way that the primary conclusion of new data and information is left intact.”

This means we can interpret information in a way that our primary conclusions which have long been seated in our brains about that information would not change a bit. News, as a whole, intensifies this error. Such a process will end in hyper-self-esteem and pushes us towards making unwise decisions and misjudgment of our opportunities. It also reinforces another built-in mental disorder called “the

narrative bias”. In sum, as a result of this mental condition, our brain believes whatever APPEARS RATIONAL is right, although it might be incorrect or even fictional.

## ■ The Vulnerability of the Perception and Focus Power

Exposure to news, especially bad ones, is also harmful to the thinking process. Thinking needs focus and focus needs an uninterrupted and non-intersected period that is not disturbed or disrupted by anything. Such a focus is too vulnerable. The pieces of news are deliberately designed to cut through the chain of thoughts and attract your attention instantly. Therefore, hearing or watching the news, because of the constant disturbance of the thinking process, turns people into superficial and shallow thinkers.

News also negatively impacts memory. The structure of the brain consists of two types of memories: long-term memory which is almost endless and short-term or active memory which has a limited capacity to contain data. To move from short-term to long-term memory, data should pass through a gate in the brain and the only way to pass through this gate is concentration and focus. If something would intrude on your concentration, you cannot understand or perceive data. As Dobelli concludes, “by disturbing the process of focusing, news weakens one's perceptive and cognitive power.”

Things are even more dreadful about online news. As the number of hyperlinks increases in a text, your perception and cognition power decreases because once a link appears, your brain has to choose between clicking or not clicking. This generates a lack of focus. News is a system intentionally developed to rip the chain of thoughts apart.

## ■ Who Benefits?

Every society needs journalism but the world is far away from the ideal utopian journalism. A journalist, by looking at issues from the right angle and with the right purpose, can make a positive change within the society. Investigative journalism has always been functional in societies because it informs the public of the facts. But the facts a journalist attempts to publicize should be useful for the society, not disturbing or confusing. Everybody knows how dangerous coronavirus is. But broadcasting news about this virus in the way we are doing now is of no benefit for the society other than ceaseless anxiety and pessimism towards others.

The owners of certain foreign news agencies and their domestic partners benefit the most from turbulence and instability in Iran, be it social or psychological. So yes, coronavirus is important, but we may lose the war to the panic and instability this virus can create. The most essential precautionary measure to take in any stage of any social crisis is to avoid hyper-exposure to the bad news of any kind. This is a long-term but yet achievable goal.

## Israeli documents about Iran's nuclear program cannot be confirmed: Nephew

**I →** Perhaps more important as a question: why, if Iran believes the investigation is based on false intelligence, was nuclear material found? If Iran believes it has answered all of the IAEA's questions, why won't it provide access to confirm its claim that its nuclear program is completely civil? Iran has the ability to finish the IAEA's work and, if there is no weapons program connection, it can do so quickly.

■ It seems that one of the goals pursued by the Agency is to introduce Iran in violation of the IAEA safeguards in order to bring the Iranian nuclear file back to the UN Security Council. What is your assessment?

A: This is a ridiculous charge. The IAEA's responsibility is to investigate undeclared nuclear material. It has found some. It is now Iran's responsibility to satisfy the IAEA's questions about it. The IAEA's job is to ask the questions about such material; Iran's job is to answer them.

If Iran refuses to answer the questions, then it may indeed be found in noncompliance. But, this problem begins and ends with Iran's refusal to help the IAEA complete its investigation.

■ Overall, 5% of inspections carried out by the Agency are carried out worldwide in Iran, with an average of 6 inspectors in Iran every day. However, there have always been allegations of Israeli claims against Iran's nuclear program. Is Israel having a nuclear bomb fundamentally entitled to these claims?

A: In my view, this has nothing to do with Israel. Israel's nuclear program is completely immaterial to the very simple question: is Iran's nuclear program in compliance with its obligations under the NPT and the IAEA Safeguards Agreement, as amended by the Additional Protocol?

And, the answer is “no,” if Iran is refusing the IAEA's reasonable requests for clarification and access.

Iran's responsibilities in this regard are contained in the 1974 Safeguards Agreement; a careful reading of that document will show that it does not say anything about Israel. It has much to say about Iranian responsibilities.

■ IAEA is a regulatory body, not a research body. That is to say, no allegation by any country is to be raised by the Agency as a question to Iran. Suppose Israel tends to ask numerous questions based on documents that allegedly spy on Iran. Is it the Agency's duty to ask Iran any questions? (Because the Agency's questions should be based on solid, not Israeli claims that Iran's number one enemy is)

A: It is the IAEA's responsibility to investigate information that it receives.

If it finds that information credible, it is its responsibility to ask the questions that result from that information of the country in question.

It is the responsibility of the country to answer those questions. If there are no problems in that country, the answers can be easily answered and the issue will be finished.

The problem with Iran today, as it has been since 2002, is that it refuses to answer these questions and then the IAEA finds more about what happened, asking more questions.

It is Iran's fault, not Israel's, that it is unable to satisfy perfectly reasonable, legal requests for information and access.

■ You are probably aware of the Harvard University team's report and their assessment of Israeli documents about Turkuz Abad. The report emphasized that they could not confirm the documentary evidence provided by Israel. On the other hand, they have stated that Israel has not provided all the documents. You understand the technical aspects of this issue, of course. My argument is that the documents that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has decided on are those that Israel has made. Israel is also Iran's number one enemy. Has Israel delivered all the necessary documents? Isn't Israel oriented in presenting documents?

A: Well, to be clear here: Harvard said that they could not confirm the documentary evidence. They didn't say it wasn't true. They just couldn't confirm it. But that is also not its job. That's the IAEA's job. The IAEA undertook that confirmation exercise immediately, I understand.

And, now, the IAEA has confirmed that some of what's in those documents IS true. The question is: how much? Only Iranian cooperation can tell that full story.

As for your contention that the documents are frauds, that might have been reasonable to argue prior to the IAEA confirming the presence of undeclared nuclear material. Now, that contention looks pretty disproven.

■ The other question is, if the IAEA is purely technical, why doesn't it respond to Saudi nuclear purchases from the US? Because of the sensitive nuclear technology purchased, the IAEA should also enter into new agreements with Saudi Arabia. This was stated by “Olli Heinonen” in an interview with me, criticizing that the IAEA's inspections of Saudi Arabia were inaccurate:

“I would have also expected from the IAEA a bit stronger scrutiny to the Saudi Arabian plans. It is true that the current safeguards agreement puts limitations to the IAEA activities in Saudi Arabia, but investigations and follow-ups on intentions of Saudi Arabia, in the light of the statements of its leadership, calls for a tighter monitoring using other tools such as analysis of open source information and satellite imagery. When the safeguards reports show that the IAEA expenditures for Saudi Arabia have in last five years been about same order of magnitude as spent, for example, for Vatican, some intensification of monitoring is required. If this is not done, concerns of countries regarding the true intentions of Saudi Arabia will prevail, and may contribute to a proliferation cascade in the region.”

<https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/434397/Saudi-has-not-really-demonstrated-nuclear-transparency-Heinonen>

I am not going to link Iran issue to Saudi Arabia case, but I mean the IAEA is sometimes political entity. On the other hand, the Israeli documents are by no means convincing, and Israel maybe want to submit to the IAEA every week. Would you like to know your opinion?

A: As you say, the issues are not linked at all nor should they be. Saudi Arabia is a different country, with different obligations. Proving Saudi Arabia should do something does not mean Iran shouldn't or vice versa. Iran has obligations. They are spelled out in the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement freely entered into by Iran in 1974 and confirmed after the revolution. It should fulfill those responsibilities regardless of what other countries do.

Are you allowed to not pay rent if your neighbor does not? Can you evade taxes if your brother does not? Can you steal if your cousin does? Of course not.

■ Yes Iran should be responsible and has showed this issue according to several IAEA reports. About your argument “Can you steal if your cousin does?” Yes, if I steal it has nothing to do with my cousin and vice versa. But if I'm a thief, I expect the police (IAEA) to deal with the same look when my cousin steals. In that case, the police will be neutral. I don't think the police is neutral and its political approach is clear.

A: ..... Unanswered!!

## ‘Primary purpose of arresting Saudi's princes is consolidation of power by MbS’

**I →** A: The West and the United States use the rhetoric of human rights in their foreign policy pursuits. But, just as they did with Saddam Hussein, they see in Mohammed bin Salman a highly useful figure that serves several purposes for them ranging from the massive purchase of weaponry to being a staunch opponent of Iran, securing Western interests in the Persian Gulf region and the broader Middle East, and being a source of what the West calls regional stability. On top of all of this, especially for the US, Mohammed bin Salman has struck an implicit strategic alliance with Israel. All these combine to make him a favorite of the West and the United States.

■ Given Mohammed bin Salman's actions in domestic politics, including music concerts and sidelines on social and cultural reforms, will the clergy and traditionalists tolerate his actions?

A: Mohammed bin Salman's social





## Domestic flights restricted to Iran's Kish Island

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — Domestic flights have been restricted to Iran's Kish Island as coronavirus cases have mounted in the country.

Restriction on flights from and to the Kish Island started on Monday based on an agreement reached between the Kish Free Zone Organization, Transport and Urban Development Ministry, Civil Aviation Organization, and the Kish Air.

Air services, until further notice, are only provided to transfer local people and executive authorities as well as emergency measures connecting the Persian-Gulf island to the five cities of Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, Bandar Abbas, and Mashhad.



Earlier this week, the country announced that it wants to limit intercity travel particularly between major cities in an effort to halt the virus spread.

The KFZO is in charge of handling the infrastructure affairs, development and economic growth, creating job opportunities, attracting local and foreign investors, regulating the good and labor market and ultimately utilizing the Island's tourist potentials.

Over the past couple of decades, Kish has become a beach resort where visitors can swim, shop and sample a laid-back and relatively liberated local lifestyle. It is home to free-trade-zone status, with ever growing hotels, shopping centers, apartment blocks and retail complexes.

## Coronavirus fears have left tourist hotspots empty worldwide

The Japanese city of Nara, a 45-minute train journey from Kyoto, has an unusual calling card: approximately 1,000 free-roaming deer that greet tourists (and ask for treats) with a polite bow.

But with Covid-19 on travelers' minds, their benefactors are suddenly absent, leaving the animals with no alternative but to scavenge for food, according to Japanese reports.

All over the world, it's the same story: Tourists scared off by the threat of the new coronavirus have cancelled or postponed their trips. Ordinarily over-trafficked destinations are bereft of visitors—even in countries barely affected by the crisis, such as Egypt, which has had less than two dozen cases of the virus.

Without a steady stream of visitors from China, the European Union's tourism industry is facing a deficit of around €1 billion (\$1.1 billion) a month, Thierry Breton, the EU's internal market commissioner, told the Wall Street Journal this week.

The tourism sector in Italy, where Covid-19 cases have soared of late, has been profoundly affected by the outbreak: Rome's piazzas are empty, while Venice's iconic Bridge of Sighs and other hard-to-photograph spots are suddenly wide open for shooting. If the situation continues, the Confturismo-Concommercio tourist lobby estimates losses of €7.4 billion (\$12.5 billion) between March and the end of May. In Venice, the Carnival closed two days early last month, on the say-so of the regional president, while the architecture biennale has been postponed from May to August.

(Source: qz.com)



## ROUND THE GLOBE

### Pre-Hispanic city of Teotihuacan

Teotihuacan and its valley bear unique testimony to the pre-urban structures of ancient Mexico.

Human occupation of the valley of Teotihuacan began before the Christian era, but it was only between the 1st and the 7th centuries CE that the settlement developed into one of the largest ancient cities in the Americas, with at least 25,000 inhabitants.



A view of the Avenue of the Dead and the Pyramid of the Sun, from the Pyramid of the Moon in Teotihuacan, Mexico

The city's urban plan integrated natural elements of the Teotihuacan Valley, such as the San Juan River, whose course was altered to cross the Avenue of the Dead.

This north-south oriented main reference axis of the city is lined with monumental buildings and complexes, from which the Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon, as well as the Great Compound with the Temple of Quetzalcoatl (also known as Temple of the Plumed Serpent) stand out.

One characteristic of the city's civil and religious architecture is the "talud-tablero", which became a distinctive feature of this culture.

Furthermore, a considerable number of buildings were decorated with wall paintings where elements of worldview and the environment of that time were materialized. The city is considered a model of urbanization and large-scale planning, which greatly influenced the conceptions of contemporary and subsequent cultures. The city was razed by fire and subsequently abandoned during the 7th century.

(Source: UNESCO)

# Online campaign launched to protect handicrafts as virus fears hurt sales

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — An online campaign has been launched in Iran to protect handicrafts as fears of coronavirus outbreak have left shops and stores empty countrywide.

Artisans, craftspeople and retailers could join the campaign that aims to boost online sales making the best use of social media services, CHTN reported on Sunday.

Organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, the campaign also aims to maintain sales of handicrafts in the face of coronavirus pandemic which has called off many crafts exhibits and marketplaces across the country.

"The web-based campaign is launched to let Iranian craftspeople introduce their works to people free of charge," one of organizers said.

Traditionally, sales of handicrafts surge on the verge of the Iranian new year (Noruz) that falls on March 20 this year. Moreover, a large number of handicrafts are bought as souvenirs during the new year vacations and travels, which have widely been restricted this year in an effort to halt the coronavirus spread.

Iran's National Coronavirus Combat on Friday urged the nation not to travel to certain provinces due to the closure of schools and universities in the country to prevent the spread.

Iran's handicrafts exports reached \$289 million in the past Iranian calendar year 1397, showing three percent growth year on year, based on data released by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts. Traditional ceramics,



pottery vessels, handwoven cloths as well as personal ornamentations with precious

and semi-precious gemstones are among Iranian exports to Iraq, Afghanistan and

Germany, the U.S., the UK, and other countries.

## A glimpse of The Met's excavations at Neyshabur once home to many Iranian scholars, traders and artisans

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — Beginning in 1935, a team from the Department of Near Eastern Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, colloquially "The Met", excavated for several seasons at Neyshabur (Nishapur), which is one of flourishing towns of medieval times now situated northeast of modern Iran.

Situated some 70 km west of Mashhad, Neyshabur was founded around the third century CE. Experts say, that "Nishapur" derived its name from its alleged founder, the Sasanian king Shapur I (d. 272).

It grew to prominence in the eighth century, and was ruined by invasions and earthquakes in the thirteenth century. After that time, a much smaller settlement was established just north of the ancient town, and the once bustling metropolis lay underground—until a team of excavators from the Metropolitan Museum arrived in the mid-twentieth century.

According to Metropolitan Museum of Art's website, the team worked at Neyshabur between 1935 and 1940, returning for a final season in the winter of 1947–48.

The excavators had been drawn to the city because of its fame in the medieval period, when it flourished as a regional capital and was home to many religious scholars. It was also known as an economic center—Neyshabur was located on the trade route known as the Silk Road, which ran from China to the Mediterranean Sea, crossing Central Asia, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey along the way.

In addition, Neyshabur was a source of turquoise and a center for growing cotton, producing cotton textiles as well as several types of fabric incorporating silk, called 'attabi, saqlatuni, and mulham. One of the most unusual products of Neyshabur, however, was its edible earth, which was believed to have curative properties. At its peak between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, Neyshabur had a population of approximately 100,000 to 200,000 people, and development covering an area of approximately six and a half square miles.

The Museum's team of researchers, Joseph Upton, Walter Hauser, and Charles Wilkinson, worked at Neyshabur under a cooperative agreement with the Iranian government that permitted them to excavate so long as half of the material found was shared with the Iran Bastan Museum in Tehran, according to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Their trenches were located throughout the medieval city, sited where significant finds had already been made by locals or where they could obtain permission to dig (as much of the site was under cultivation). They gave each site a name based on its local nickname or a



"Bowl with a Figure and Birds"; 10th century CE; excavated from Neyshabur, northeast Iran.

distinguishing topographical feature.

Two areas provided particularly rich finds. The first site to be excavated, called Sabz Pushan ("green mound" in Persian), had been a thriving residential neighborhood occupied between the ninth and twelfth centuries, with houses of three to four rooms connected by small alleys. Of the large area this neighborhood once occupied, approximately fifteen houses were eventually excavated. One of these houses had particularly well-preserved decoration, with carved stucco panels covering the lower part of the wall, the dado, in several rooms. The panels were

**Hundreds of objects were discovered during the course of the excavations across Neyshabur, once a regional capital on the Silk Road and home to many religious scholars. Each year, the Museum's share was shipped back to New York, where the objects were restored and placed on display.**

## Japan's ancient way to save the planet

reuse, recycle".

As sustainability becomes a global focus, the nuance of mottainai offers an alternative frame for our link to the world and the items we bring into it. While many sustainable efforts focus on the future of the planet as a motivator, mottainai looks closely at the items themselves, believing that if you value an item in the first place, there is no cause for waste at all.

While I had often heard the phrase as teachers chided students for leftover rice at lunch or used as a cheeky excuse by colleagues fishing the final fries from a nearby plate, I had never heard it used with the future of a pristine item in mind.

In the current climate of environmental activism, the reduction of waste — be it single-use plastics, food or energy consumption — is high on the collective conscience. Admired for com-

plex recycling systems and impeccably clean cities, Japan may appear to have succeeded in mastering the art of the three Rs, but this perception has created a mindset of dangerous complacency. In reality, Japan is the second largest per-capita generator of plastic waste in the world, producing more than the entire European Union.

In the face of this global crisis, the value of a single word like mottainai could easily be dismissed, but its continued prevalence in daily life in Japan is seen by some as a powerful tool ready to be re-harnessed.

"The concept of mottainai is rooted in Japanese culture, but recently there is a tendency not to care about it," explained Tatsuo Nanai, chief of the official MOTTAINAI campaign. The NGO was launched following the visit of

originally painted in bright yellows, reds, and blues, with equally colorful murals on the plaster walls above, but once the panels were exposed to the air, the colors that the excavators first saw quickly disappeared.

At a part of the site the locals called Tepe Madrasa, the excavators had expected to find one of Neyshabur's famed institutions of learning, or madrasa. Instead, they uncovered a large residential area with a mosque that had been developed and rebuilt in several phases between the ninth and twelfth centuries. Inside one of the residences, perhaps the palace of the city's ninth-century governors, they found a room with an extraordinary set of wall paintings whose iconography appears unique to the site.

Hundreds of objects were discovered during the course of the excavations. Each year, the Museum's share was shipped back to New York, where the objects were restored and placed on display. Over the past years, the conservators in the Museum's Department of Objects Conservation have re-treated all the excavated objects under a special grant to preserve this important archaeological source.

These objects were significant in providing information on several different artistic traditions. In terms of ceramics, they brought to light several types whose decoration was unique to this part of Iran. These were typically decorated with strong-colored slips, made of diluted clay, in bold patterns. The distinctive ceramics produced in Neyshabur were traded around the region, and have been found at Herat, Merv, and Samarkand.

The evidence from the excavations also revealed much about the development of architectural decoration in northeastern Iran. Walls in residences and public buildings throughout Neyshabur were decorated in many different ways, from frescoes to carved and painted stucco, terracotta panels to glazed ceramic tiles.

Carved stucco decoration, perennially important in Iranian architecture, was represented in examples found throughout the site. The exteriors of large public buildings were clad in baked bricks set in decorative patterns, large terracotta panels carved with multilayered ornament, or glazed tiles, often in shades of bright blue.

"Beautifully decorated spindle whorls were excavated by the hundreds. Smaller items such as toys, game pieces, musical instruments, and beads throw light on everyday activities in Neyshabur and give us a better understanding of daily life for its citizens," Metropolitan Museum of Art says.

Neyshabur was also an important hub for the manufacture of glass, metal, and stone vessels as well as textiles. None of the latter were found in the excavations, no doubt due to their highly perishable nature.

Nobel prize-winning Kenyan environmentalist Wangari Maathai in 2005, with the aim of revitalising the concept. "She knew about mottainai and she was very impressed with the concept," Nanai said, "because it expresses much more than a single word."

Mottainai's potential power lies in its complex meaning, which draws on ancient Buddhist beliefs. "Mottai comes from the Buddhist word that refers to the essence of things. It can be applied to everything in our physical world, showing that objects don't exist in isolation but are connected to one another" Nanai said, adding that, "'-nai' is a negation, so 'mottainai' becomes an expression of sadness over the loss of the link between two entities, living and non-living."

(Source: BBC)



# All-Iranian COVID-19 diagnostic kits to be released within month

**SOCIETY TEHRAN** — Iran desk will commercialize domestically-made COVID-19 diagnostic kits by the Iranian calendar month of Farvardin (March 21-April 22), secretary of biotechnology development of Vice Presidency for Science and Technology announced.

Following a call by the headquarters for the production of COVID-19 diagnostic kits, a contract was signed with five knowledge-based companies and manufacturing process began. ISNA quoted Mostafa Qane'ei as saying on Monday.

Diagnosis is the most important part of coronavirus treatment, he highlighted.

Patients suspected to coronavirus



are currently being identified by diagnostic kits that have entered Iran in the form of assistance and purchases by the World Health Organization, China and UNICEF, he said.

So, the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology decided to manufacture the kits domestically, he noted.

Existing imported kits are sufficient for the next two months but after this period we will be faced with shortages of kits, however, the domestic ones will enter the market, he concluded.

Deputy health minister Kianoush Jahanpour said that at least 7,161 people have so far been infected in the country. Of the total figure, 2,394 have been recovered and 237 have died.

## Iranian students continue education through TV channels amid Corona threat

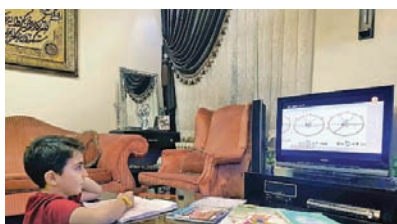
**SOCIETY TEHRAN** — Two state TV channels in Iran are broadcasting educational programs after the closure of schools in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, IRIB news agency reported on Monday.

Amoozesh (Education) Channel started broadcasting programs on Saturday for students all over the country, Masoud Ahmadi, director of Amoozesh channel said, adding that Channel Four is broadcasting educational programs.

Through the first phase, the state TV started to broadcast 10-12 educational programs, which will reach up to 40 programs by the next week, he added.

Also, another channel specifically addresses the health issues for students and families, he highlighted.

Ahmadi further announced the possibility of adding another TV channel after the



new year holidays (Noruz, starting March 21) to the educational networks.

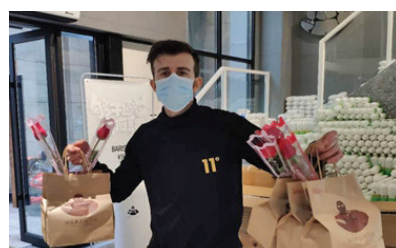
In order to achieve the important goal of education, all educational staff should be in touch with each other on a daily basis, including district administrators, school administrators, as well as teachers and students, to ensure the full implementation of distance education according to each classroom curriculum, Education Minister Mohsen Hajimirzaei wrote on his Twitter account on March 5.

## Wuhan café appreciates Iranian employee for his helping hand amid COVID fight

**1 →** “When the outbreak of the new coronavirus started, we asked ourselves what we should do in these circumstances, then we decided to stay together and do our best to give everything we can to anyone who needs help, like doctors and nurses in the city,” Karami told Xinhua.

While most businesses remain closed in Wuhan, the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak, the cafe named Wakanda Youth Coffee is running at full capacity. Seven baristas race against the clock to prepare some 500 cups of coffee each day and deliver them to three hospitals free of charge, according to alugy.com.

The owner of the coffee shop issued a call to the shop's 21 employees to resume their work. To her surprise, all six baristas who had stayed in Wuhan agreed to her proposal, including Sina Karami.



Iran's Ambassador to China, Mohammad Keshavarzadeh, wrote on his Twitter account on Monday that “Remember Sina Karami, the brave boy who stayed in Wuhan. Now Wakanda coffee shop donated 34,000 face masks and wrote on it: “Sina, when we were in difficult conditions you did not leave but stood up and helped. Now that your motherland, Iran, is in dire straits, we will not leave you and your country alone.”

## Hooded vultures ‘on brink of extinction’ in Africa after mass poisoning

Nearly 1,000 hooded vultures have died in a mass poisoning in Guinea-Bissau, pushing the endangered species towards the brink of extinction in Africa, according to conservationists.

Vultures were seen apparently searching for water and “bubbling from their beaks”, and hundreds were found dead on the outskirts of two towns, Bafatá and Gabú, which are 30 miles apart, over the past two weeks.

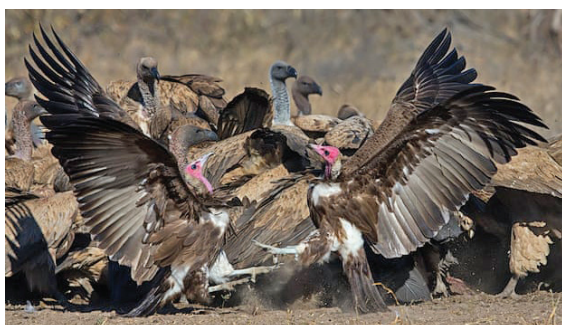
The poisoning is the biggest mass death of vultures for more than a decade, according to the Vulture Conservation Foundation.

The likeliest cause of death is accidental poisoning after strychnine — which is banned in Europe — was used to control the feral dog population around rubbish dumps where vultures, which scavenge on dead animals, also feed.

Guinea-Bissau is in political turmoil, its institutions are paralysed and travel is difficult, so only one vulture carcass has so far been retrieved for a postmortem to determine its cause of death.

Vulture populations have plummeted in Africa in recent years. The birds are often the accidental victims when poisoned baits are used to kill lions, hyenas and other wildlife.

Vultures are also killed in “sentinel poisoning” incidents in which poachers deliberately target the birds because their rapid arrival above animal carcasses can help police and wildlife



rangers identify elephant and rhino poaching.

“The poisoning across Africa has pushed this species to the verge of extinction,” said José Tavares, the director of the Vulture Conservation Foundation. “The hooded vulture is critically endangered at a global level and Guinea-Bissau has one of the best populations in Africa. This mass poisoning will have a significant impact on the species.”

Vulture populations in India have declined by 99% after the birds ingested a toxic veterinary drug, diclofenac, through cattle carcasses it fed on.

In Africa, mass poisoning events largely linked to wildlife

crimes are causing the loss of thousands of vultures each year, with other single incidents killing 600 vultures and 400 vultures in southern and eastern parts of the continent.

Elephant and other wildlife poaching is not widespread in Guinea-Bissau but Tavares said the precise cause of this poisoning would remain unclear until the authorities in Guinea-Bissau could collect more carcasses for toxicology tests. All but one of the dead birds have been incinerated so far to prevent any wider risk to public health.

The Vulture Conservation Foundation is working with agencies in Guinea-Bissau in an attempt to collect and freeze more carcasses, which can then be flown overseas for testing.

While vulture species continue to disappear in Africa and Asia, three of the four species found in Europe are increasing. According to Tavares, vulture populations have been revived with reintroduction programmes and effective EU wildlife regulations, including allowing farmers in regions to leave out parts of dead livestock for the vultures to feed on.

Tavares added: “Vultures provide a unique ecosystem service — they are nature’s clean-up crowd. Vultures are saving millions of euros annually by saving on the need to incinerate every dead livestock animal, and by reducing the need for livestock removal by truck and incineration they save on CO2 emissions too.”

(Source: The Guardian)

### ENGLISH IN USE

#### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → C

## Knowledge-based companies unite to counter coronavirus

All knowledge-based companies in the country have been united to combat the coronavirus and many startups have been activated in this field, said Sourena Sattari, vice president for science and technology.

Some 200,000 nano masks are produced daily in the country, Sattari said, hoping that the output will reach 300,000 by the end of the week, IRNA reported.

He said Iran is one of the few countries that are able to manufacture machinery for producing nano masks which block particles less than three-tenths of a nanometer, including viruses.

## شرکت‌های دانش بنیان برای مقابله با کرونا

### بسیج شده‌اند

سورنا ستاری معاون علمی و فناوری ریاست جمهوری گفت تمامی ظرفیت‌های شرکت‌های دانش بنیان برای مقابله با ویروس کرونا بسیج شده‌اند و استارت‌آپ‌های زیادی در این حوزه فعال شده‌اند.

به گزارش ایرنا، ستاری با اشاره به اینکه در حال حاضر روزانه ۲۰۰ هزار عدد ماسک نانویی در کشور تولید می‌شود، گفت امیدواریم تولید این ماسک‌ها تا پایان هفته به ۳۰۰ هزار عدد در روز برسد.

وی گفت: ایران جزو معدود کشورهایی است که دستگاه‌های تولید کاغذ نانو فیلترهای ماسک را دارد که قادر هستند تا جلوی ذرات کمتر از سه دهم نانومتر، شامل ویروس‌ها، را بگیرند.

### PREFIX/SUFFIX

#### “-bound”

■ **Meaning:** a word ending shows that something is restricted by or confined to

■ **For example:** Deskbound executives can't grasp production problems.

### PHRASAL VERB

#### Hammer away

■ **Meaning:** to keep saying something because you want people to understand or accept it

■ **For example:** I keep hammering away at this point because it's important.

### IDIOM

#### Bring someone to heel

■ **Explanation:** if you force someone to behave in a disciplined manner, you bring them to heel

■ **For example:** The boy had always behaved badly, but the new headmaster managed to bring him to heel.

## Almost 90% of dolphins in Indian Ocean wiped out by fishing industry, study suggests

A damning new report by an international group of scientists indicates the dolphin population of the Indian Ocean has been decimated, with almost 90 per cent of the animals wiped out by industrial fishing since 1980.

The study suggests this extraordinary extermination is due to the widespread use of huge gillnets used to catch tuna.

Gillnets are walls of netting that are hung in the water column and are either allowed to drift from floating buoys, or can be fixed in one place. They range in size from 100m to more than 30km in length, and operate from less than 5m to more than 20m in depth.

Their use is illegal on the high seas, but the laws are routinely ignored.

The size of the holes in the netting are designed so tuna can get only their head through the netting but not their whole body. The fish's gills then become caught in the mesh as it tries to back out of the net. As the fish struggles to free itself, it becomes more and more entangled.

Though the nets are designed to target specific species — as smaller fish can slip through the holes and larger fish are supposedly repelled — in practice the nets, particularly drift gillnets, are deadly to an array of species, including sharks, turtles, sea lions, whales and dolphins.

Dr Putu Mustika, from James Cook University in Australia, who was among the scientists working on the study, said despite much of the official data on bycatch being unreliable, scientists had nonetheless been able to come up with a credible picture of the dolphin catch.

“We combined results from 10 bycatch sampling programmes between 1981 and 2016 in Australia, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan to estimate bycatch rates for cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) across all Indian Ocean tuna gillnet fisheries,” she said.

“The vast majority of the cetacean bycatch is dolphins. Estimated cetacean bycatch peaked at almost 100,000 a year during 2004-2006, but has declined to 80,000 animals a year, despite an increase in the tuna gillnet fishing effort.”

Dr Mustika said the research indicated the gillnets deployed in the Indian Ocean had killed about 4.1 million small cetaceans between 1950 and 2018 as fishers pursued tuna.

But she said the true figures may be “substantially higher” as the available records take little or no account of factors such as delayed mortality of cetaceans which escape from the nets or mortality associated with ghost nets — those nets lost at sea.

“The declining cetacean bycatch rates shown by what we can measure suggest current mortality rates are not sustainable. The estimates we have developed show that average small cetacean abundance may currently be 13 per cent of the 1980 levels,” Dr Mustika said.

She warned the UN's existing ban on gillnets on the high seas is hard to enforce and tuna fishers are allowed to use gillnets within the territorial waters of states bordering the ocean.

“Cetacean bycatch in Indian Ocean tuna gillnet fisheries has been a concern for decades but has been poorly studied, reflecting the political reality that hundreds of thousands of relatively poor fishermen and their families rely on gillnet fisheries,” she said.

The current cetacean bycatch rate may be in the order of 175 cetaceans per 1000 tonnes of tuna, down from an estimate of 600 in the late 1970s, the study suggested.

The countries with the largest current gillnet catches of tuna and likely to have the largest cetacean bycatch are (in order): Iran, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Oman, Yemen, UAE and Tanzania.

Iran and Indonesia have no national monitoring of cetacean bycatch.

The research team was led by Dr Charles Anderson of the Manta Marine organisation in the Maldives. The scientists said there is a need for improvements in monitoring, analysis and governance and for changes to fishing practices if dolphin numbers are to recover. (Source: The Independent)

## WORDS IN THE NEWS

### SARS Beijing

(April 21, 2003)

In China, the World Health Organization says that the number of officially reported cases of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome or SARS has once again risen rapidly. Most of the cases were in Beijing. New figures come only one day after the government admitted that it had not made public the full number of cases. This report from Holly Williams:

Just a day ago people in Beijing thought that their city had SARS under control, with fewer than forty reported infections. Then, in an unusual move in this authoritarian state, the government admitted to **under-reporting** the number of SARS patients. Today's figures take the new official total to well over four hundred. Beijing's SARS **nightmare** has increased more than \*ten-fold\* in just twenty-four hours.

**Belatedly**, after months of **playing down** the epidemic, China has signaled a **drastic** new approach to SARS. **sacking** Beijing's mayor and dismissing the health minister from his Communist Party job as punishment for the **cover-up**. China says it wants health officials to **come clean** about SARS and this sudden new jump in reported infections seems to indicate that the message is **getting through**.

■ **Words**

**under-reporting:** not giving full details of; giving less than the real total of

**nightmare:** frightening situation

**ten-fold:** by ten times; multiplied by ten

**belatedly:** If something happens belatedly, it happens later than it should have done.

**playing down:** If you play something down, you try to make it seem less serious or important than it really is.

**drastic:** sudden and severe

**sacking:** dismissing

**the cover-up:** the attempt to prevent the full details from being made public

**to come clean:** to admit what has been kept secret; to tell the unpleasant truth

**getting through:** being understood. If you get through to someone you succeed in making them understand what you are trying to say.

(Source: BBC)



Saudi princes’ detentions sent a message: don’t block my path to the throne

➔ 1 Ahmed, 78, was detained on Friday along with Mohammed bin Nayef, who was crown prince until he was ousted in 2017 and replaced by Mohammed bin Salman. Ahmed’s son Nayef and Mohammed’s brother Nawaf were also detained, said two other sources with royal connections.

The princes have been held at royal villas in the capital Riyadh and some were allowed to contact their families, those sources said.

Crown Prince Mohammed, who has moved ruthlessly to tighten his grip on power, feared disaffected princes might rally around Ahmed and Mohammed bin Nayef as potential alternatives to take the throne, said two of the sources with royal connections, and a senior foreign diplomat.

“This is a preparation for transferring power,” said one of those sources. “It is a clear message to the family that no one can say ‘No’ or dare challenge him.”

Saudi authorities have not confirmed or commented on the detentions, which have not been covered by Saudi media. The media ministry has not responded to detailed requests for comment.

If Mohammed bin Salman, 34, succeeds his father, it will be Saudi Arabia’s first generational transfer of power since the death of state founder Abdulaziz Ibn Saud in 1953, who was followed by six of his sons in succession.

The Allegiance Council, made up of one member from each house of 34 sons of Abdulaziz, is designed to ensure that the hundreds of princes that make up the royal family’s next generation unite behind the new king.

The senior foreign diplomat said the detentions were another blow to the country’s image abroad just as it appeared to be recovering from the furor over the 2018 killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and criticism of the Yemen war.

Crown Prince Mohammed previously detained senior royals and prominent Saudi businessmen in 2017 at Riyadh’s Ritz-Carlton hotel, unnerving investors at home and abroad. More recently, it seemed those days of unpredictability had been put to rest as Riyadh assumed this year’s presidency of the Group of 20 major economies.

Royal discontent

When sources initially described the latest detentions in recent days, several of them said the detained princes had been accused of plotting a coup to thwart Mohammed’s accession. However, some of those sources, and others who later spoke about the detentions, have since offered milder justifications, describing the arrests as a response to an accumulation of misbehavior rather than a plot against the crown prince.

Two sources used the same phrase, saying the princes were being warned with a “twist of the ear” to stop criticizing the crown prince.

While hosting traditional gatherings known as majlis, Prince Ahmed had raised questions about the crown prince’s stance on several issues, including a U.S. plan for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one of the sources said.

There was no way to contact Ahmed or the other princes to comment on the allegations. Sources said he returned from a trip abroad the night before he was detained.

Ahmed on Saturday asked his family to deliver his bisht, a traditional coat worn at formal occasions, suggesting he might soon make a public appearance, said two sources including one with royal connections.

(Source: Reuters)

Sudan PM Abdalla Hamdok survives assassination attempt

Sudan’s Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok has survived an assassination attempt after a blast near his convoy in the capital, Khartoum.

Hamdok wrote on Twitter he was “safe and in good shape” following Monday’s explosion.

“What happened will not stop the path of change, it will be nothing but an additional push in the strong waves of the revolution,” added the veteran economist, who became prime minister in August, months after a pro-democracy movement forced the army to remove longtime President Bashar al-Bashir.

Hamdok also shared a photo of himself smiling and seated at his desk, while a TV behind him showed news coverage reporting he had survived.

Members of Hamdok’s office told Al Jazeera the attack happened as the prime minister was heading to his office.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

Footage posted online showed two damaged white vehicles used by Sudan’s top officials parked on a street. Another vehicle was badly damaged in the blast.

Terror attempts

Falih Salih, Sudan’s information minister, said an investigation was under way to determine who was behind the attack.

“Terrorist attempts and dismantling the old regime will be dealt with decisively,” he said.

Al-Bashir’s overthrow last April was followed by months of negotiations between the military and the pro-democracy movement.

The two sides reached a power-sharing deal in August which established a joint military-civilian, 11-member sovereign council that will govern Sudan for the next three years, when elections are scheduled to be held.

The prime minister has pledged to work towards ending the country’s economic crisis and establishing peace.

Born in 1956 in south-central Kordofan province, Hamdok has more than 30 years of experience as an economist and senior policy analyst specialising in economic development across Africa.

(Source: al Jazeera)

EU leaders set to hold emergency talks over coronavirus

European Union leaders are set to hold a teleconference “shortly” to discuss a coordinated EU response to the coronavirus outbreak, the president of the European Council Charles Michel said on Monday.

“Following consultations I will hold a EUCO members conference call shortly on COVID-19 to coordinate EU efforts. We need to cooperate in order to protect the health of our citizens,” Michel, who chairs EU summits, said on Twitter.

An EU official said the call was likely to take place on Tuesday.

(Source: Reuters)

Ghani & Abdullah sworn in as Afghan president

Staff & agencies

TEHRAN — Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has taken an oath for a second term but his main rival Abdullah Abdullah has refused to recognise the inauguration, holding his own swearing-in ceremony, landing the country in a new political crisis.

Afghan local news channel TOLONews reported international representatives, including U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, and U.S. and NATO forces commander General Scott Miller, attended Ghani’s inauguration at the Presidential palace in the capital, Kabul.

Meanwhile, there were reports that the inauguration ceremony was temporarily disrupted by the sound of a rocket explosion in Kabul, but that President Ghani was unharmed and continued to address the event.

Presidential candidate and rival in the September 2019 disputed election Abdullah Abdullah held his own ceremony at a similar time.

Abdullah Abdullah rejected the presidential election results announced last month, saying Ghani’s win was invalid because of vote-rigging in a repeat of the 2014 elections marred by fraud.

He held his own ceremony coinciding with Ghani’s, suggesting talks between the two camps and Khalilzad, the U.S. envoy aimed at brokering an agreement had not been successful.

Earlier on Monday, Abdullah agreed to suspend his swearing-in event on the condition that Ghani follow suit. But Ghani, who was declared the winner of September’s election, decided to go ahead with his inauguration.

The two men issued invitations last week to parallel swearing-in ceremonies on Monday, after Abdullah disputed the February 18 decision by the electoral commission and proclaimed himself the winner.

International community sides with Ghani

“It seems the international community has sided with Ghani, legitimising his position as the president,” Faiz Muhammad Zaland, a political analyst based in Kabul, told Al Jazeera.



Zaland however, said that “on the domestic level, Abdullah seems more legitimate as all strong political figures and parties are backing him”.

“Today is the start of a political decision in Kabul which will require both international and domestic approvals to go forward for the intra-Afghan negotiation to happen,” he said. Meanwhile, Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen told Al Jazeera that the political standoff between the top leaders is “not a good sign for prospects of peace in the country”.

Analysts say the latest political crisis is likely to delay the anticipated intra-Afghan talks scheduled for Tuesday as part of Afghanistan’s nascent peace process.

“Not only will this almost certainly delay the intra-Afghan talks, but complications are very likely to follow from this political standoff, when it comes to composing the

pro-government negotiating team - and its positions on critical issues,” Andrew Watkins, a senior analyst on Afghanistan at the International Crisis Group, told Al Jazeera.

“However, many of the difficulties that lie ahead in the peace process would have remained, even had Khalilzad’s mediation efforts succeeded in resolving this political theatre.

“The divide between Ghani and many opposition figures would have remained substantive even under some form of compromise, which would have prompted many of the same hurdles in the peace process that Afghanistan now faces,” Watkins said.

The political infighting in Kabul does not bode well for Afghanistan’s fragile democracy as U.S. troops prepare to leave the country following an agreement with the Taliban armed group, with President Donald Trump

committed to ending the U.S.’s longest war.

U.S. Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad reportedly held meetings with Ghani and Abdullah until late Sunday to convince them to postpone the inauguration.

The crisis comes as the government is meant to be preparing for talks with the Taliban, to follow up on the February 29 pact between the U.S. and the Taliban on the U.S. troop withdrawal after 18 years of war.

Ghani and Abdullah held roles in the previous government under a U.S.-brokered power-sharing agreement that followed the 2014 elections.

A former foreign minister, Abdullah held the specially created post of chief executive in the outgoing government.

Under election law, the swearing-in ceremony for president must be held within 30 days of announcing the winner.

Netanyahu rivals to cooperate on forming new government

Benjamin Netanyahu’s chief rival said Monday that he has agreed with a smaller party to work together to form a new government following national elections last week.

The announcement by Benny Gantz, leader of the Blue and White Party, dealt a new setback to Netanyahu as he struggles to hold on to power ahead of his upcoming trial on corruption charges.

In a statement, Gantz said that he had a good meeting with Avigdor Lieberman, leader of the small Yisrael Beiteinu party.

“We discussed questions of fundamental principle and determined that we will work together to assemble a government that will pull Israel out of the political deadlock and advert a fourth round of elections,” Gantz said.

In last week’s election, Israel’s third in under a year, Netanyahu’s Likud Party emerged as the largest party. But with his smaller religious and nationalist allies, he secured only 58 seats in parliament,

three short of the required 61-seat majority needed to form a new government.

Netanyahu’s opponents, led by Gantz, control a majority of seats. But beyond their shared animosity toward Netanyahu, there are deep divisions between these parties, which include Lieberman’s secular, ultranationalist party and the Arab-led Joint List.

Gantz’s announcement with Lieberman marked a step toward unifying those anti-Netanyahu forces, though it remains unclear whether they can reach a final agreement, much less a deal with Arab politicians. Lieberman has in the past branded Arab political leaders as terrorist sympathizers.

Netanyahu is desperate to remain as prime minister as he prepares to go on trial on March 17.

Israel’s president, Reuven Rivlin, must decide by next week who to choose as the prime minister-designate.

(Source: AP)

N. Korea fires three projectiles into sea; China urges dialogue

North Korea launched multiple short-range projectiles into the sea on Monday as part of firing drills, a week after it resumed missile tests following a three-month break, South Korea’s military said.

The projectiles, including from a multiple-launch rocket system (MLRS), flew up to 200 km and reached 50 km in altitude, South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said.

They were launched from the eastern coastal town of Sondok, home to a military airfield where nuclear-armed North Korea fired missiles last year, the JCS said in a statement.

After a three-month halt in missile testing, North Korea tested an MLRS on March 2.

The JCS expressed “strong regret” over the launch and said it was watching for any more tests.

South Korea’s national security adviser, Chung Eui-yong, held a video conference with the defense minister and intelligence

chief to analyze the North’s latest test and its intent, the presidential Blue House said.

“The ministers once again pointed out that the continued firing drills are unhelpful for efforts to build lasting peace on the Korean peninsula,” the Blue House said in a statement.

Japanese Defense Minister Taro Kono said the projectiles appeared to be ballistic missiles and did not fall into Japan’s exclusive economic zone, though the government was examining details about the launch.

A U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter, said North Korea had fired at least three projectiles towards the eastern sea and a detailed analysis was being conducted.

China’s foreign ministry called for all sides to use dialogue and show flexibility, saying the situation was “complex and sensitive”.

(Source: Daily Star)

Two U.S. troops killed by ‘enemy forces’ in Iraq: Pentagon U.S.-led forces moved from western Iraq base to Ain al-Asad air base

The Pentagon has announced that two U.S. troops have been killed by “enemy forces” while accompanying Iraqi security forces in Iraq.

U.S. Central Command said in a statement on Monday that the service members were killed on Sunday during a mission against Daesh terrorists in a mountainous area of north-central Iraq.

The statement did not publicly identify them with the permission of their families, in accordance with U.S. Department of Defense policy.

The Combined Joint Task Force for Operation Inherent Resolve also issued a statement confirming the U.S. casualties.

“Two U.S. service members were killed by enemy forces... during a mission to eliminate an ISIS terrorist stronghold in a mountainous area of north central Iraq, March 8,” the coalition said in a statement, using an alternative acronym for the terrorist group.

The United States, backed by the United Kingdom, invaded Iraq in 2003 claiming that the former regime of Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. No such weapons, however, were ever found.

The invaders withdrew from Iraq, after nearly nine years of a military campaign that cost tens of thousands of Iraqi lives.

Leading a new coalition of its allies, the United States returned to Iraq in 2014, when Daesh unleashed a campaign of destruction in the Arab country. Widespread reports, however, said the Washington-led operations largely spared the terrorists and led, instead, to civilian deaths and inflicted damage on the Iraqi infrastructure.

Iraq’s army troops, backed by Hashd al-Sha’abi forces, managed to liberate all Daesh-held areas thanks to military advisory assistance from neighboring Iran.

Ain al-Asad

An Iraqi security source says an unspecified number of



soldiers from the U.S.-led military coalition, which is purportedly fighting the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group, has arrived at the Ain al-Asad air base housing U.S. and other foreign troops in the western Iraqi province of Anbar for unknown reasons.

The source, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Arabic-language al-Sumaria television network that the soldiers withdrew from their base at the phosphate train station south of the town of al-Qa’im, located nearly 400 kilometers northwest of the capital Baghdad and near the Syrian border, and landed at the base aboard military cargo aircraft on Monday.

The source added that the soldiers are of Norwegian, Danish and American nationalities, and that their munitions and military equipment have been transported to Ain al-Asad as well.

On January 8, Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) fired a number of ballistic missiles at Ain al-Asad air base. The missile attack was in retaliation for the U.S. airstrike that was authorized by President Donald Trump, and assassinated the deputy head of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), better known by the Arabic name

Hashd al-Sha’abi, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, alongside Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the IRGC, and their companions near Baghdad International Airport early on January 3.

Trump initially reported that “no Americans were injured” but subsequent reports revealed that troops were harmed in the attack, largely with concussions from the missile blasts.

On February 21, the Pentagon raised to 110 the number of U.S. service members, who suffered traumatic brain injuries (TBI) following Iran’s retaliatory strike.

It alleged that all of the wounded in the base attack were diagnosed with mild traumatic brain injury and that 77 of them had already returned to duty.

The Pentagon further claimed that 35 others had been transported to Germany for further evaluation, 25 of whom had been sent on to the United States.

Two days after the U.S. attack, Iraqi lawmakers unanimously approved a bill demanding the withdrawal.

Later on January 9, former Iraqi prime minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi called on the United States to dispatch a delegation to Baghdad tasked with formulating a mechanism for the move.

According to a statement released by his office at the time, Abdul-Mahdi “requested that delegates be sent to Iraq to set the mechanisms to implement the parliament’s decision for the secure withdrawal of (foreign) forces from Iraq” in a phone call with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

The 78-year-old politician said that Iraq rejects violation of its sovereignty, particularly the U.S. military’s violation of Iraqi airspace in the airstrike that assassinated General Soleimani, Muhandis and their companions.

The U.S. State Department bluntly rejected the request the following day.

(Source: agencies)



# FIFA and AFC postpone World Cup qualifiers

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — FIFA has confirmed that the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qualifiers second round ties which were to be held in the months of March and June across Asia have been postponed due to the coronavirus outbreak.

“Following consultation with Asia’s member associations, FIFA and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) have agreed to postpone the upcoming Asian qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022,” FIFA announced on Monday.

“Matches originally scheduled to take place during the international window of March 23-31 and June 1-9 are postponed to later dates. FIFA and the AFC will discuss further details of the postponed matches,” the football governing body said.

“However, in order to support the member associations concerned, and provided that the safety of all individuals involved meets the required standards and that the member associations due to play each other mutually agree, the match(es) may still be played during the international windows of March or June 2020, but always subject to prior approval from both FIFA and the AFC,” FIFA added.

“FIFA and the AFC will continue to assess the situation in relation to COVID-19 and will decide whether further changes to the schedule of Asian FIFA World Cup qualifiers are required, always with the aim of protecting the safety and health of all individuals involved,” it said.

It is expected that the 2022 World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian Cup Joint-Qualifiers that were to be played this month will now be held in October while the matches



which were slated for June will be rescheduled for November 2020.

FIFA and the AFC have also agreed to postpone the AFC

Futsal Championship Turkmenistan 2020, which serves as the qualifiers for the FIFA Futsal World Cup Lithuania 2020, until 5-16 August 2020.

## Afshin Davari elected as head of Iran’s athletic federation



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Afshin Davari has been elected as new president of Islamic Republic of Iran Athletics Federation (IRIAF) on Monday.

Davari has been elected for a four-year term till 2024 by receiving 20 votes out of 88 votes in the presidential elections held at the Iran’s Academy Olympic.

The elections were supposed to postpone but it was held today since the federation needed to know its new president with less than four months

until the opening ceremony of the Summer Olympics.

“First of all, I would like to express heartfelt thanks to the members for their confidence in electing me. They attended the elections amid coronavirus fears. We have a lot of work to do because our athletes have so far secured two quota places and several athletes can secure their places,” Davari said.

Majid Keyhani, the former president of Islamic Republic of Iran Athletics Federation (IRIAF), came second with eight votes.

## Sports Minister Soltanifar asks FIFA to consider Iran’s situation



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Minister of Sport and Youth Masoud Soltanifar has expressed hope that FIFA would agree with the Football Federation of Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) elections to be held on the scheduled time considering the current situation in the country.

Football international governing body has recently sent letters to the Iranian federation, emphasizing that the FFIRI General Assembly, scheduled for 15 March 2020, should be postponed.

FIFA hinted that the current version of the FFIRI statutes contains several particularly problematic provisions such as government interference in the elections.

In a meeting with some sports executives Soltanifar said: “We are facing an emergency, a national emergency.”

“I hope that FIFA considers the current situation and allows the FFIRI to hold the elections, the same as the previous two elections. Iranian football has important days ahead, and the appointment of the new head is crucial for us.” He added.

## Thailand blind football confirmed as Iran’s replacement at Tokyo 2020

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) has confirmed Thailand football 5-a-side as Iran’s replacement at the 2020 Paralympic Games.

Argentina, Brazil, China, France, Japan, Morocco, Spain and Thailand will all go for gold in Tokyo.

Thailand replaced Iran following the return of their slot by the National Paralympic Committee.

Iran’s National Paralympic Committee (NPC) had already announced that it would not send the blind football team to the Paralympics, however the committee later changed its decision but IBSA said the deadline has expired.

Brazil are the defending champions having reigned supreme throughout the history of tournament. The team are unbeaten since blind



football made its Paralympic debut at Athens 2004. They are also the world champions having

collected their third successive title in Madrid, Spain, in 2018.

Argentina line-up as the bronze medalists from Rio 2016 having secured their place at the Lima 2019 Parapan American Games in Peru. Their second place finish to Brazil was enough to secure their ticket to Tokyo 2020.

Thailand received the reallocated slot from Iran, who won the silver medal at the Rio 2016, following their fourth place finish at the 2019 Asian Championships.

The Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games opens on 25 August. The football-5-a-side competition will get underway on Aug. 30 with three days of group play. The semi-finals then take place on Sept. 3 with the medal matches on Sept. 5.

## CAS clears American Lawson of doping, quashes ban

The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) on Monday annulled the four-year ban imposed on Jarrion Lawson by the sport’s governing body World Athletics, following an appeal by the American long jumper and sprinter.

The 25-year-old, who was suspended last year after testing positive for the banned substance epitrenbolone, had denied any

wrongdoing, saying the substance could have entered his body through the consumption of contaminated beef in June 2018.

Lawson said that he ate the tainted meat at a restaurant in Fayetteville, Arkansas. An out-of-competition doping control test the next day indicated the presence of the exogenous anabolic androgenic steroid.

“The CAS Panel found it more likely than not that the origin of the prohibited substance was contaminated beef consumed in a restaurant the day before the test,” sport’s highest court said in a statement.

“Following a careful review and examination of the evidence and expert testimony... the panel was unanimously of the view that

Lawson had established that he bore no fault or negligence for his positive finding.

“As a consequence of such finding, the period of ineligibility was eliminated.”

Lawson captured the long jump silver medal at the world championships in London three years ago.

(Source: Reuters)

## Champions League Football in West Asia postponed over Covid-19

The AFC Champions League was put on temporary hold in West Asia while football officials work out ways to get the remaining group matches played despite the new coronavirus outbreak.

With the competition’s East Asian zone already severely disrupted by Covid-19, delegates from West Asia suspended group play to evaluate a “series of proposals” to complete the pool stage.

“All matches in AFC Champions League match day three were postponed in the West zone,” the Asian Football Confederation said after emergency talks in Doha and Dubai.

“The AFC has now asked for the cooperation of the member associations in producing a plan by which the remaining matches can be played before the round of 16.”

Iran has four teams in Asia’s premier club competition, while Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iraq, Uzbekistan and Qatar, the

2022 World Cup hosts, are also involved.

The tournament’s East zone, kept separate from the West until the final, last week moved back the start of its knock-out rounds to August. China, South Korea and Japan, whose domestic leagues are on hold over the virus, all have teams in the competition.

The West zone’s quarter-finals will be moved to September to accommodate the extended group phase, and the two-legged semi-finals will be on October 14, 15, 28 and 29. The final remains on November 22 and 28.

“As with the East Zone, the MAs (member associations) provided some proposals which will now be considered by the AFC and the various stakeholders, including commercial partners,” the AFC statement said.

This month’s Asian qualifiers for the 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup could also be postponed, FIFA warned



last week after talks with the AFC, as the deadly outbreak wreaks havoc with the sporting calendar.

(Source: AFP)

## FIDE awards Iran’s Aryan Gholami title of Grandmaster

**MNA** — Iranian young chess player, Aryan Gholami, earned FIDE’s the title of Grandmaster.



Gholami has gained the Grandmaster of U-18 category after getting 3 GM norms and passing chess rate 2500.

In late September 2019, Gholami claimed the Open title of Round 9 of 2019 Shanghai Cooperation Organization Chess International.

The 18-year-old chess player, was born in Ghaemshahr and became Iran’s youngest FIDE-ranked chess Grandmaster at the age of eight.

## Alireza Karimi continues individual training following gradual recovery

**MNA** — Iranian freestyle wrestling star Alireza Karimi who injured some three months ago is now continuing his individual training as he hopes to secure his berth to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

He was injured in late December 2019 at the World Wrestling Clubs Cup held in Bojnurd, northeast Iran. Doctors used a non-aggressive PRP therapy combined with special training to treat his injury.

Now as the country is battling with the novel coronavirus outbreak, all the sports events and training have been canceled which includes that of wrestling teams that were preparing for the Olympics qualifying events.

However, Karimi is carrying out individual training in his hometown, Karaj. “Wrestlers have to prepare themselves for the Olympics and should not waste the time; therefore, I’m trying to not abandon training by doing it in Karaj for now,” he told Mehr News Agency.

He said that he is gradually recovering from the knee injury and has just returned to the mat.

“Unfortunately, the virus has messed up everything, including the national team’s camps. We still have not gained the Olympics quota in three weight categories which include my own category (97kg). I hope we can reach the ideal conditions after getting through these days and depart for the Olympics after securing all the remaining quotas.”

Officials of the Iranian Wrestling Federation and coaches of national freestyle and Greco-Roman teams are due to hold a meeting today with the Sports Ministry authorities on required camps and training ahead of the Olympics.

## Esteghlal must pay USD 550,000 to ex-coach Schäfer

**PLDC** — Iranian football club Esteghlal must pay USD 550,000 to Winfried Schäfer.

Esteghlal parted company with the German coach in April 2019 and he was replaced by Farhad Majidi.

Now, after about one year, FIFA has ordered Esteghlal to pay USD 550,000 to the former Jamaica coach.

Esteghlal had been already convicted to pay wages of Server Djeparov and Godwin Mensha.

Esteghlal arch-rivals Persepolis were recently ordered to pay more than one million euros to former coach Branko Ivankovic.

Esteghlal have to pay the above-mentioned amount within two weeks.

## Tractor midfielder Sugita joins Swedish Club Sirius

**Tasnim** — Tractor Japanese midfielder Yukiya Sugita has joined Swedish club IK Sirius.

The 26-year-old player has joined Sirius until the summer for an undisclosed fee.

Sugita joined Tractor in 2018 and played 30 matches for the Iranian club and scored two goals for the Tabriz-based football team.

He was a member of Swedish club Dalkurd Fotbollsörening before joining Tractor.

IK Sirius, more commonly known simply as Sirius, are a Swedish football club located in Uppsala. The club are affiliated to the Upplands Fotbollförbund.

## Iran come eighth at Sabre World Cup

**IRNA** — Iran finished in eighth place at the International Fencing Federation (FIE) Sabre World Cup.

The Iranian team, consisting of Ali Pakdaman, Mohammad Fotouhi and Mohammad Rahbari, lost to USA 45-38 at the seventh-place play-off.

Iran sabre team has already booked its place at the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo.

This is for the first time Iran’s team sabre has secured a berth at the Olympics.



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GUIDE TO  
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

The wealth you have belongs to another before  
you, and will belong to another after you.  
*Imam Ali (AS)*

Rumi’s Masnavi-ye Manavi  
published in Georgian

CULTURE DESK TEHRAN – The first book of the Masnavi-ye Manavi, Persian poet Molana Jalal ad-Din Rumi’s masterpiece, has been published in Georgian.

Translated by Georgian poet and orientalist Giorgi Lobzhanidze, the book has been released by Sulakauri Publishing in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, the Iranian Cultural Office in Tbilisi has announced.



Front cover of the Georgian translation of the first book of the Persian poet and mystic Molana Jalal ad-Din Rumi's masterpiece Masnavi-ye Manavi.

Lobzhanidze is working on the second and third books of the Masnavi-ye Manavi, which will be published in the coming months in collaboration with the Iranian Cultural Office.

Lobzhanidze’s Georgian translation of the Holy Quran was a winner at the 15th edition of Iran International Book of the Year Awards in 2008.

He is also the translator of the Gulistan (The Rose Garden), one of Persian’s classical masterpieces by Sadi, and “The Water’s Footsteps” by Sohrab Sepehri.

Films by female Iranian  
directors to go on screen in  
Strasbourg

ART DESK TEHRAN – Eight short films by female Iranian filmmakers will be screened tonight during a special program at Cinema Star in Strasbourg, France.

Strass’Iran, a France-based Franco-Iranian cultural association will organize the program in collaboration with Iranian director Ghasideh Golmakani to celebrate International Women’s Day.



A scene from “Online Shopping” by Iranian director Ghasideh Golmakani.

“The Toaster I Used to Live in” by Rojin Shafiei, “Online Shopping” by Ghasideh Golmakani, “Personal” by Sonia Haddad and “The Drive” by Tanin Torabi are among the films.

The lineup also includes “Moment and Forever” by Yasaman Hassani, “Icky” by Parastu Kardgar, “Hanged” by Roqayeh Tavakkoli and “Needle” by Anahita Qazvinizadeh.

“Writings of Marcel  
Duchamp” appears in  
Iranian bookstores

CULTURE DESK TEHRAN – “Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp” has recently been published in Persian in Tehran.

Nilufar Aqa-Ebrahimi is the translator of the book, which has been released by Elm Publications.

Compiled by French art historian Michel Sanouillet and American sculptor Elmer Peterson in 1973, the book is a collection of notes, essays and interviews of the French-American painter, sculptor and writer Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968).

Duchamp’s works are associated with Cubism, Dada and conceptual art. He is famous for breaking down the boundaries between works of art and everyday objects.

Iranian writer Amirkhani’s travelogue of North  
Korea released amid coronavirus outbreak

CULTURE DESK TEHRAN – A travelogue of North Korea by Reza Amirkhani, the author of the bestselling Persian novels “Salvation” and “The Good Smell of Oil”, has recently appeared in Tehran bookstores as Iranian people are fighting the new coronavirus.

“At this time as people are dealing with the massive disaster, why should one publish a book?” Amirkhani asked in a statement published after the release of his book “A Half of One-Sixth of Pyongyang” by the Ofoq publishing company on last Tuesday.

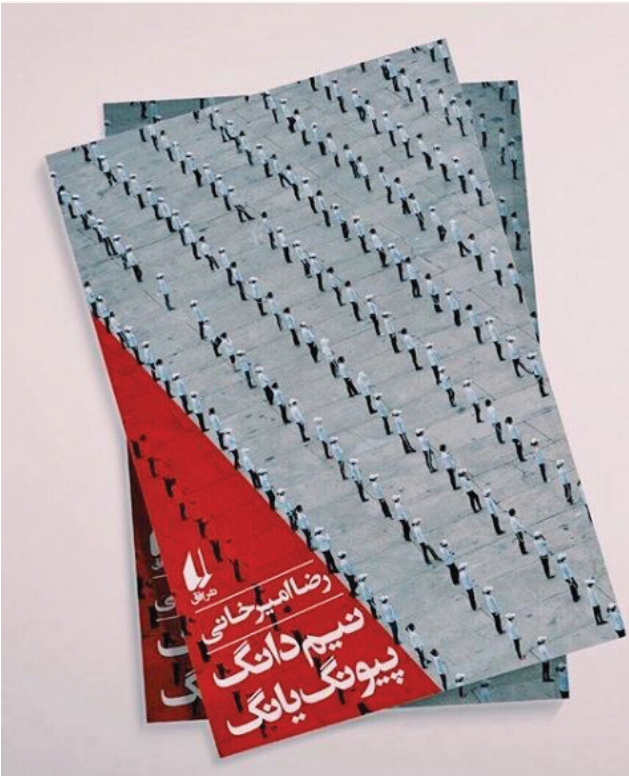
He had received advice from experts suggesting that he not release his new book at present since the Iranian publishing industry is facing a severe recession.

“I was a guest of people and bookstores at the times of boom in the publishing industry, now at the times of depression I should remain with them too,” wrote Amirkhani.

His book “Salvation” about the consequences of urban development for a young couple that live in Tehran, was selected as best novel in 2018 at the 11th Jalal Al-e Ahmad Literary Awards, Iran’s most lucrative literary prize.

Amirkhani visited the North Korean capital of Pyongyang for nine days during June 2018 as a documentarian.

“I traveled to the country as a documentarian along with a political delegation, and the travelogue will likely be my next book, if they [critics] do not bemoan that, once again, I will be concentrating on a bitter story,” he said in an interview



This combination photo shows Iranian writer Reza Amirkhani and copies of his new book “A Half of One-Sixth of Pyongyang”.



with the Persian daily Farhikhtegan in September 2018.

“The key point is that freedom will never

be restricted in our country as much as it is in North Korea. In addition, even if our country is conquered by America we will

never be like South Korea because we are not as disciplined as the South Korean people,” he noted.

Montreal festival to review Iranian  
art films



A scene from Iranian director Sam Kalantari’s “He”.

ART DESK TEHRAN – The International Festival of Films on Art (FIFA) in the Canadian city of Montreal will review a number of Iranian movies in a special program, the organizers have announced.

The program entitled “Spotlight on Iranian Art Films” is a showcase of movies produced over the past few years.

The screenings will take place at the Concordia University on March 21 and 22.

The program is divided into three separate screenings named “The World Is a Stage”, “Double Exposure” and “Kaleidoscope”, in which a selection

of 20 short films, documentaries and animations will be screened.

Among the films are “Reverence” by Sogol Rezvani, “Paper Planes” by Marjan Ansari, “Friday” by Payam Qorbani, “Fading Portraits” by Ali Shilandari, “Sink” by Mahbubeh Kalai, “Whole to Part” by Vahid Hosseini Nami and “Free and Beautiful” by Narges Haqiqat.

More than 240 films, documentaries, interactive works, media works and music videos from more than forty countries will go on screen during the festival, which will be running from March 17 to 29.

Brussels Millenium festival picks  
Iranian films



A scene from “The Marriage Project” co-directed by Hesam Eslami and Atieh Attarzadeh.

ART DESK TEHRAN – A lineup of six Iranian movies will go on screen in various sections of the Millenium International Documentary Film Festival in Brussels, Belgium.

The acclaimed documentaries “Sunless Shadows” directed by Mehrdad Oskui and “The Marriage Project” co-directed by Hesam Eslami and Atieh Attarzadeh will be competing in the official competition of the festival.

In “Sunless Shadows”, Oskui builds a remarkable relationship with a group of adolescent girls who are serving their sentences for the grave crime of murder-

ing their father, their husband or another male family member in an Iranian juvenile detention center.

“The Marriage Project” is about the head of a psychiatric hospital in Tehran, who encourages the patients to form relationships with each other, get married and live as a family.

“No Place for Angles” by Sam Kalantari, “Asho” by Jafar Najafi, “Song Sparrow” by Farzaneh Omidvarnia and “Waterfolk” by Azadeh Bizargiti are also among the films to be screened in other sections of the festival, which will be held from March 27 to April 4.

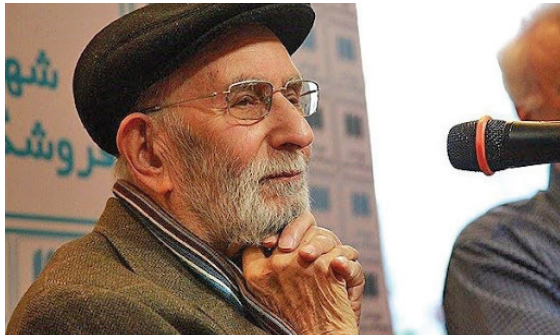
Rumi expert Mohammad-Ali Movahhed consoles compatriots  
on coronavirus outbreak in Iran

CULTURE DESK TEHRAN – Mohammad-Ali Movahhed, a top Iranian expert on Persian poet Molalna Jalal ad-Din Rumi, has consoled his compatriots with his message of hope and comfort over the coronavirus outbreak in the country.

“It is a bad time but I have no doubts that in the battle between death and life, life will win,” he wrote in his message published by some Persian media on Sunday.

“Dear friends, there has been a horrifying war with an enemy which you do not see but it sees you. In a battlefield as wide as the world from east to west, every man, woman, young and old are dealing with this war,” he said.

“Nurses and doctors are the heroes at the frontlines who are honored with the bravery medals and hear words of appreciations from every corner, and absolutely they



Rumi expert Mohammad-Ali Movahhed in an undated photo. deserve such praise and appreciation, however, they are dressed in protective clothing and have learned

how to deal with the disease,” he said.

“I feel the sorrow for those individuals who make livings daily, daily wage earners and workers like those construction workers who work with dust and mud and cement to make a living for their family every day,” he lamented.

“I have no doubts the delay in daily activities will make their lives harder. We must feel for them, we must not forget the honest and hardworking men and women who are going through these hard days. It is a bad time but I have no doubts that in the battle between death and life, life will win,” he added.

“Dear youth, don’t get bored and don’t lose your hope. I think the world is expecting wonderful events. Today that you are alive, do your duties and don’t lose your hope, a bright future is on the way, though I might not see it, others will surely see,” he concluded.

Zimbabwean artist’s dynamic stone sculptures find global acclaim

HARARE (Reuters) — When Dominic Benhura started creating traditional Zimbabwean stone sculptures as a teenager four decades ago, he never imagined that art would bring him fame or fortune.

Born to a peasant family in 1968 in Murewa, 90 kilometers northeast of Harare, Benhura is now a globally acclaimed artist and a leading proponent of the style. Sculptors from Zimbabwe’s Shona ethnic group use basic tools to carve deeply expressive art into heavy blocks of stone, that often weigh several tonnes.

They explore traditional African themes such as motherhood in both realist and abstract forms which periodically catch the eyes of curators in far flung Western

capitals.

The art form traces its lineage to the medieval empire of Great Zimbabwe, founded in the 11th century, whose most renowned artifact is a fish eagle hewn from soapstone.

A Shona sculpture exhibition has been running for the past month at ValleyArts a New Jersey, USA, arts center. Shona sculpture is also on display at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, Chicago’s Field Museum of Natural History, Indianapolis Museum of Art as well as the British Museum.

Benhura learnt the art from other sculptors, including his cousin, after moving to the capital Harare in 1979, the year before

Zimbabwe won independence from Britain.

“I was so fascinated by people creating something out of stone, so I asked them if I could help them polishing and finishing their work,” he told Reuters at his workshop.

Eventually, Benhura found his own niche. His forerunners’ work was mostly static, he says, so he created forms in motion.

“My art celebrates life and I am inspired by my day-to-day life. I do animals, I do plants, I do birds, but I’m more inclined towards women and children,” he says, explaining this was because he was brought up by his mother and aunt after his father died shortly before he was born.

Benhura’s work propelled him out of poverty and early family tragedy to a life he describes as blessed. At 23, he bought his first house in one of Harare’s townships. He now lives and works at his gallery in one of the capital’s more affluent suburbs.

He also has permanent exhibitions in Atlanta, Colorado, Victoria Museum in Melbourne, Australia, and in Siena, Italy. “As much as Zimbabwe is renowned for this stone sculpture .... we do not have many pieces in museums because in Africa we don’t have (enough of) our own museums,” Benhura laments.

“I wish we’d have more so that our work is also retained in Africa for our future generations.”