



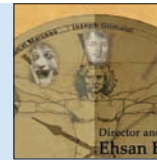
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Iran-EAEU trade exceeds \$1.2b in 11 months

TEHRAN — The value of trade between Iran and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)'s member states reached \$1.244 billion during the first eleven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019-February 19, 2020), according to the spokesman of Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

Rouhollah Latifi said the figure shows 105 percent growth from \$550 million value of trade between Iran and EAEU in the same period of time in the past year, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

The official further appreciated the role of private sector in trade exchange between the two sides, specially under the sanctions condition. **→ 4**

Ban on Iran flights to go down in history as disgraceful: envoy

(Press TV) — Iran's ambassador to France Bahram Qassemi has lambasted certain European governments for imposing restrictions on Iranian flights into the continent, saying the move would go down in history as shameful given that Iran is currently fighting a serious epidemic almost on its own.

Qassemi wrote on the Twitter account of the Iranian Embassy in France that instead

of helping Iran, certain governments in Europe have decided to follow the United States and pile more pressure on Iran.

The envoy said it was a historic disgrace that Iran, a country already grappling with harsh U.S. sanctions, is being denied of help in its fight against coronavirus.

"Instead of understanding the situation and helping the Iranians, some people, **→ 3**

Saudi-coalition violates Stockholm ceasefire over 170 times

Staff & agencies

Number of violations of the Stockholm agreement by the Saudi mercenaries in Hudaydah governorate reached 176 on Monday, a source in the liaison officers' operations room confirmed on Tuesday.

The source added that among the violations, they fired 21 missiles and artillery shells and 144 live bullets on various fronts, Almasirah reported.

On Sunday, Saudi mercenaries also

violated the ceasefire 155 times in Hudaydah, the source added.

Yemeni forces have repeatedly accused Saudi Arabia of violating the UN-backed agreement. They say such infringements have led to the death and injury of hundreds of civilians.

The airstrikes are in breach of an agreement reached between the warring sides during a round of UN-sponsored peace negotiations in Sweden in December 2018. **→ 10**



PERSPECTIVE

Hossein Amiri
Journalist

U.S.-Taliban pact: Agreement on a new war in Afghanistan

After months of ups and downs, finally, a peace deal was signed between the Taliban and the United States in Doha on February 20, 2020.

It was struck at the presence of representatives of about 30 countries, mostly U.S. allies in the Afghan war. However, no representatives from the Afghan government were present at the signing ceremony.

At the time of the signing ceremony, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper also traveled to Kabul and met Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, both claiming victory in the recent presidential election. They released a statement reaffirming their commitment to the Afghan government.

The Afghan authorities, who considered the agreement as a step towards peace in the country, couldn't ignore the numerous ambiguities and shortcomings surrounding the agreement.

Several fundamental issues have now come to the attention of Afghan experts and politicians regarding the agreement.

First, the United States has given concessions to the Taliban that are not essentially within Washington's authority. 5,000 Taliban prisoners are in the custody of the Afghan government, and the United States, as a foreign country, has no right to make decisions about them.

In his first speech since signing the agreement, Ashraf Ghani stressed that the release of Taliban prisoners was not part of the U.S. authority.

Second, the U.S., while claiming not to recognize the Taliban as a government, explicitly and implicitly disparages the current Afghan establishment and recognizes the Taliban as a government. The peace document underscores the U.S. government's cooperation with the Islamic state which will be formed following an agreement in the wake of inter-Afghan talks. This part of the agreement means that there have been conversations behind the scene between the two sides regarding restructuring the system and unwritten agreements. **→ 10**

Plan to trigger entrepreneurship globally

By Salman Parviz

TEHRAN — Hadi Safakish graduated in several academic institutions in various fields, including public administration, financial management, handmade carpet, painting and graphic arts. He is also a master of calligraphy with teaching experiences in universities and higher educational centers. He is appointed as director of Calligraphy Association of Iran for Zahedan, in Sistan Baluchestan Province for the last eighteen years. In the past he has been a member of Committee for Beautification of Zahidan Municipality.

Recently he has dedicated his time in research and development for a project which can financially support United Nation's World Intellectual Property Organization. WIPO promotes innova-

tion and creativity for the economic, social and cultural development of all countries. It provides Intellectual Property services that encourage individuals and business to innovate and create and register patents for an investor's innovation.

Through this project, explains Safakish that "all the people who are in the process of inventing and lack the financial means to implement their project will be able to get help from WIPO." Safakish plans to register this project at WIPO for the inventor to be able to access the financial help that can be made available.

WIPO encourages individuals and businesses to innovate and create through a balanced international intellectual property (IP) system. The worldwide IP system — which covers patents,

copyright, trademarks and industrial designs — protects inventors, businesses, designers and artists for their original ideas and efforts. For example, the international patent system, known as the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT), empowers inventors to gain a temporary monopoly on their invention in return for disclosure of technical know-how. The global IP system is administered by WIPO.

Safakish plans to submit this project to WIPO for registration and approval. The project has the following goals:

1. Financially develop WIPO and transforming it into one of the largest international organizations;
2. Material and spiritual support of inventors by introducing and utilizing the plan; and **→ 7**

'IAEA main weaknesses are reliance on information provided by its members'

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Marc Finaud, the former French Foreign Ministry spokesman, says that one of the main weaknesses of the IAEA is not to have any means of collecting its own intelligence and relying on the information provided by its Member States.

Former Senior Resident Fellow at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) adds "The only way for the IAEA to check the validity of such information is to conduct on-site inspections and report on its findings."

A senior member of Geneva Centre for Security Policy also says that "The fact that Israel, as a non-party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), is not subject to inspections and possesses

nuclear weapons of course does not grant Israel any particular rights but fuels the feeling of double standards in the Middle East and worldwide."

Following is the full 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 Vienna Agency has the legitimacy and the mandate of inspecting Iran's nuclear activities and facilities, including undeclared ones, in application

of the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, the Additional Protocol, and the JCPOA. Despite Iran's announced suspension of implementation of five provisions of the JCPOA, it has been the practice of Iran to continue cooperating with the IAEA. It is in Iran's interest to do so.

■ 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? **→ 7**



Iran's NPC plants sapling in honor of Siamand Rahman

TEHRAN — Iran's National Paralympic Committee planted a sapling in memory of super heavyweight powerlifter Siamand Rahman on Monday.

Iran's chef de mission for the 2020 Paralympic Games Hadi Rezaei was in attendance.

Rahman passed away at the age of 32 on March 1 due to a heart attack in his homeland Oshnavieh, West Azarbaijan Province. **→ 11**



ARTICLE

Ebrahim Fallahi
Tehran Times journalist

Saudis' price war or a Russian plot against U.S. shale?!

Since early Monday, the announcement of a "price war" between Saudi Arabia and Russia, two biggest OPEC+ allies, hit the headlines of almost all of the world's news agencies and outlets and released a wave of panic across the markets all around the world.

Following the two sides' bitter break up on Friday, oil markets started the week with a free fall; prices plunged nearly 30 percent on Monday to record the sharpest one-day fall in the past 29 years when the first Persian Gulf War was started in 1991.

Brent crude futures fell to nearly \$30 on early Monday, the prices, however, bounced back later that day as the impacts of the event faded.

Energy experts and analysts are suggesting two completely different scenarios to explain the series of events that led to the Friday decision.

In one scenario, the one that is broadcasted globally, Saudi Arabia which wanted higher prices or at least wanted to maintain the current price levels asked for more cuts but Russia was OK with the current prices and even was ready for lower ranges so they didn't agree and the OPEC+ deal ended.

The second scenario, which is more intriguing and more controversial, says that there is no "price war" between Saudi Arabia and Russia, and what we are witnessing is, in fact, Russia declaring war against the U.S.'s "global energy dominance".

To learn more about the issue, the Tehran Times conducted an interview with Mahmoud Khaqani, an international energy expert. What follows is a summary of the expert's views on the matter.

*** Saudis and Russia

Obviously, these days Saudi Arabia is not experiencing its best days. The Kingdom is under pressure both economically and politically.

According to Khaqani, the plunge in oil prices due to the sharp decline in global demand following the spread of coronavirus and its impact on the global economy and transportation has added significantly to the crown prince's problems causing the young prince to call for deepening of the current 1.8 million cuts. **→ 5**

Medical staff who have lost lives while trying to contain coronavirus declared martyrs

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Health Ministry announced on Tuesday that Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has agreed to a proposal by the ministry to consider “as martyrs” the medical staff, including physicians and nurses, who have lost their lives in the efforts to contain the COVID-19 outbreak.

So far, 13 doctors and nurses have died from the virus. In a news briefing on Tuesday, the Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour announced that the number of people who have died from the coronavirus in Iran has risen to 291 and the confirmed cases contracted the virus to 8,042.

At least 2,731 people have also recovered from the disease so far, the spokesman added.

Iran facilities return of Bahraini nationals amid coronavirus outbreak

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Foreign Ministry spokesman announced on Tuesday that relevant bodies in Iran have facilitated return of the first group of Bahraini nationals to their country after Manama stopped flights to and from Iran amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

Abbas Mousavi said, “Following continued coordination between Iran and the Sultanate of Oman, the first group of the Bahraini citizens left Iran for Bahrain on Tuesday morning.”



“The move was done in line with the ministry’s humanitarian efforts to return foreign nationals to their own countries,” he added.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman further appreciated the Omani government’s humanitarian approach and cooperation in transferring Bahraini nationals to their homeland.

Mousavi expressed hope that the Manama government would take a positive interaction with Tehran to enable Iran to pave the way for the remaining Bahraini nationals to return to their country according to a proposed program.

The Bahraini nationals could not return to their country after Manama halted flights to and from Iran in fear of the virus outbreak.

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

The virus first emerged in China in December last year and is now spreading in North America, Europe and across the Middle East, sparking fears of a global pandemic. The virus is spreading rapidly in the region, with cases recorded in many countries.

Until Tuesday, the deadly virus killed over 291 Iranian citizens and infected 8,042.

At least 2,731 people have recovered from the disease in Iran so far.

Rouhani: Orders to contain coronavirus must be resolutely implemented

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Tuesday that protocols of the National Headquarters for Fighting Coronavirus must be implemented determinedly.

In separate phone talks with governors of Qom, Mazandaran and Gilan provinces, Rouhani said that a “serious, precise and determined implementation” of the headquarters’ protocols is essential.

Qom and Gilan have hit with coronavirus more than other provinces in Iran.

According to statistics released by the Health Ministry on Tuesday, so far 751 persons in Qom province are confirmed to have been infected with the virus. Gilan and Mazandaran also with 524 and 886 cases respectively.

Rouhani also said that it is necessary to seek the help of the Armed Forces’ medical personnel for treatment of the coronavirus patients.

It is also necessary to seek the cooperation of the Armed Forces for establishing field hospitals, he said.

The president also called on the governors to advise the people against inter-city trips or unnecessary commuting.

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 sitting on the Majlis Health Committee.

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, 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 short-term 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 Tuesday 881 new cases of infection across the country.

The record-breaking increase in the number of new infections raises the total number of confirmed cases to 8,042 and the overall death toll to 291.

Iran’s Justice Ministry condemns anti-Muslim violence in India

Assembly of Experts urges India to prevent Hindu extremists to fan flames of divisions

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian Justice Ministry Department for Human Rights and International Affairs issued a statement on Tuesday condemning the anti-Muslim cruelty in India.

“The Human Rights and International Affairs Department of the Justice Ministry condemns these brutal crimes and urges the Indian government to take action in reforming discriminatory law and stopping violence against the Muslims in India by the extremist Hindus,” the statement said.

The Justice Ministry also urged the international community to take a transparent stance and condemn such crimes which are being taken in line with “Islamophobia and annihilation of the Muslims”.

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.

Critics insist the law is discriminatory, coming in the wake of other severe government measures against the country’s Muslim population such as withdrawal of autonomy for Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir province that has intensified discord across India about the future of its 200 million Muslims.

The Assembly of Experts also issued a statement on Tuesday condemning violence against Muslims and warned against communal conflicts in India.

“...it is necessary that India take prompt and proper measure to end this issue and stop a further flames of division by a number of extremists,”



part of the statement said.

In a tweet on March 2, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif condemned violence against Indian Muslims.

“For centuries, Iran has been a friend of India. We urge Indian authorities to ensure the wellbeing of ALL Indians and not let senseless thuggery prevail,” Zarif said.

“Path forward lies in peaceful dialogue and rule of law,” he added.

During a meeting with Indian Foreign Ministry director general for political affairs, Iranian Ambassador to New Delhi Ali Chegeni said India is famous among Iranians as the land of peaceful co-existence and expressed hope

that all Indian citizens would enjoy “peace and friendship” through wise decisions by the Indian government and officials.

Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi has supported Zarif’s stance on the wave of organized violence against Indian Muslims.

“Fully share the concerns expressed by my brother Javad Zarif on safety and well-being of Indian Muslims facing naked violence from RSS mobs. India is in throes of grave communal violence. Their sinister and systematic killing of Muslims is inhuman and dangerous for whole region,” Qureshi tweeted on March 3.

Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh, a member of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy

U.S. policies starting in early 2017, and not coronavirus, are chief headaches: Iran

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, in his official Twitter on Tuesday, reacted to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s remarks in naming coronavirus as Wuhan virus, saying the real problem bothering nations worldwide started in early 2017 when Donald Trump took office as the U.S. president.

“#COVID19 is a global challenge, not exclusive to any specific region or nation. For three years, though, the whole humanity has

been suffering from #HLVS (Hatred & Lie & Violence Spreading) Syndrome-2017. This is a high time that the world stands up against this malign infection,” Abbas Mousavi said.

In the Fox and Friends live program released by the Mediamatters network on Friday, the host asked Pompeo that many Americans are deeply concerned about the spread of the virus and want to have confidence that the administration is taking it seriously, taking proper steps. Can you reassure the public in any way on that?

Pompeo replied, “So, it’s a complicated challenge. The Wuhan virus that began at the end of last year is something that this administration is taking incredibly seriously. State Department’s been very involved from the beginning when we worked diligently to get hundreds of Americans out of Hubei province, out of Wuhan and get them back to the United States safely. We continue to work around the world. We’ve provided assistance to the Chinese government, not just what the CDC and our

technical healthcare officials are doing, but trying to make sure they have the medical supplies they need to stop the spread of this globally. That’s my mission at the State Department. The Vice President has got the con on all of the missions but we’ve got an important role too, to make sure we get travel restrictions right, that we get travel advisories right so that we know who is coming across our border and who is coming into the country that may present risks to Americans here at home.” A

Larijani urges lift of U.S. ‘inhuman’ sanctions on Iran amid coronavirus crisis

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani has urged the international community to help lift the “inhuman” sanctions, against Tehran by the United States as Iran is in the midst of the campaign to contain the deadly coronavirus outbreak.

In separate letters to president of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, secretary general of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, secretary general of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly and also parliament speakers of the Asian and Islamic countries, Larijani expressed regret over the United States’ “inhuman” sanctions against Iran which is creating impediments in the battle against the coronavirus’s spread.

He urged the international community to adopt “principled” stance for immediate removal of sanctions against Iran, especially medical sanctions.

According to a report released on Friday by the Intercept, despite a massive coronavirus-related public health crisis,

an anti-Iran pressure group with close ties to the Trump administration is urging major pharmaceutical companies to “end their Iran business,” focusing on companies with special licenses — most often under a broadly defined “humanitarian exemption” — to conduct trade with Iran.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif reacted sharply to the move on Saturday, saying U.S. President Donald Trump is intensifying unilateral sanctions on Tehran amid COVID-19 outbreak across Iran.

Zarif said the move is nothing but “medical terrorism”. “Donald Trump is maliciously tightening U.S. illegal sanctions with aim of draining Iran’s resources needed in the fight against COVID19—while our citizens are dying from it,” Zarif tweeted.

The foreign minister added, “The world can no longer be silent as U.S. Economic Terrorism is supplanted by its Medical Terrorism.”

Tehran, Moscow discuss latest developments in Syria’s Idlib

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergei Vershinin held a meeting on Tuesday to discuss the latest developments in Syria, especially issues surrounding the northwestern province of Idlib.

According to ISNA, the diplomats attached great importance to close cooperation between Iran, Russia and Turkey within the framework of the Astana talks to silence guns in Syria.

In a phone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin on February 29, President Hassan Rouhani urged revitalization of the Astana process on Idlib.

In the phone call, Putin said that the Astana peace process has been “effective”.

In line with their security cooperation, Iran, Turkey and Russia - three power brokers in Syria - launched the Astana peace talks on the Syrian crisis. The talks were launched in January 2017 with the aim of putting an end to the Syrian conflict.

Kazakhstan has hosted multiple rounds of talks on Syria since January 2017 most of which involved delegations from the Syrian government and opposition.

Ankara is directly involved in the clash against Syrian forces as part of a bid to help armed opposition groups, who have formed a military alliance with the terrorist groups, to halt advance of Syrian forces in Idlib.

However, Turkey and Russia announced a cease-fire in Idlib that came into effect

at midnight on Thursday.

According to Press TV, Turkish-backed militants on Saturday violated the ceasefire 19 times over a period of 24 hours and shelled the villages of Hazaren and Dar al-Kabira in Idlib’s southern countryside.

“Over the past day, 19 violations of the cessation of hostilities by illegal armed groups have been recorded,” SANA quoted head of the Russian Defense Ministry’s Coordination Center Rear Admiral Oleg Zhuravlev as saying.

U.S. repeats ex-FBI’s disappearance, despite having no information of his fate

TEHRAN — Despite repeated announcements by Iran that it has no information about former FBI agent Robert Levinson’s fate, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo addressed his disappearance in a White House press release on Monday, calling on Iran to work with the U.S. for Levinson’s return.

“Iran must honor the commitment it has made to work with the United States for Levinson’s return,” Pompeo said 13 years after the disappearance of the former FBI agent.

“Returning all Americans held hostage or wrongfully detained abroad is President Trump’s top priority. We will work until Bob Levinson and all U.S. hostages and wrongful detainees come home,” Pompeo added.

Levinson reportedly visited Iran’s southern Kish Island on March 9, 2007. He later went missing and his whereabouts have remained unknown ever since, the Mehr news agency reported.

The U.S. State Department insisted that Levinson was a private citizen who had traveled to Kish on private business.

Nevertheless, six years after Levinson’s disappearance, the Associated Press revealed that he was recruited by the CIA to run unauthorized spying operations.

According to the AP, the CIA paid \$2.5 million to Levinson’s family in a bid to preempt a revealing lawsuit.



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in 2013 that the retired FBI agent, who reportedly went missing in Iran in 2007, is not imprisoned in the country.

“We know that he is not incarcerated in Iran. If he is, he is not incarcerated by the government and I believe the government runs a pretty much good control of the country,” said the Iranian foreign minister at the time.

Zarif assured that if Iran finds any trace of him, it will then discuss his return.

In early November 2019, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Abbas Mousavi dismissed an earlier report by the Associated Press, saying that Levinson does not have any legal case open in Iranian courts.

“According to the latest information that I obtained from the revered officials of the Judiciary, Mr. Levinson does not have any legal or criminal case in any of courts of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” Mousavi explained.

He further explained that when Iran was asked for help with regard to his case it opened a case for him based on humanitarian issues, as it usually does for missing people.

Mousavi also stressed that his case is not a criminal or legal case as the AP has claimed.

He went on to say that Iran is pursuing the issue based on humanitarian grounds and as it has done so on different occasions. However, Mousavi said, the country has no information on Levinson’s fate.

The spokesman further expressed Iran’s readiness to help with the issue, while stressing that Iran’s readiness to cooperate on his case does not necessarily mean he has an open case in Iranian courts.

Iran dismisses Saudi claims over safety at Bushehr plant

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's ambassador to the Vienna-based international organizations, has dismissed Saudi Arabia's claims about safety standards at Iran's Bushehr power plant.

Speaking at a meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors on Monday, Gharibabadi warned against attempts at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to politicize technical issues.

He described the Saudi envoy's allegations as "too far from reality and highly misleading."

"The problem arises when technical issues turn political," he added, according to Press TV.

Riyadh had in the past claimed that potential radioactive leakage from the nuclear power plant could endanger the Persian Gulf region, including the kingdom's air, food and water desalination stations.

The Bushehr facility sits 17 kilometers southeast of the port city of Bushehr along the Persian Gulf.

The Iranian diplomat further outlined the safety status of the 1,000-megawatt Bushehr power plant — the first operational nuclear facility in Iran constructed by Russia's Atomstroyexport company.

He said Iran, as a state receiving technical assistance from the Agency, recognizes the importance of such support in strengthening its national nuclear safety infrastructure.



Gharibabadi underlined that the IAEA had conducted an "Integrated Regulatory Review Service" mission at the Bushehr plant in February and March 2020, which was assessed as satisfactory.

The IAEA delegation "concluded that Iran's nuclear safety system has the competence, capacity, and capability to monitor nuclear power activities," he said.

Unlike Iran, Saudi Arabia, as a newcomer, has been developing and advancing a "non-transparent" nuclear program, said Gharibabadi.

"It should be emphasized that the main responsibility in the area of nuclear safety lies with the member state itself and this is

not a commodity that could be imported."

He further referred to Saudi plans to dig a canal along the border with Qatar, part of which will reportedly serve as a nuclear waste facility.

Saudi Arabia is "adopting an irresponsible approach towards not only its own people and environment, but also the safety of the region and its neighbors," the ambassador pointed out.

The Iranian diplomat also pointed to the construction of two nuclear power reactors in Saudi Arabia, calling on the kingdom to provide the IAEA with a "transparent" and "comprehensive" plan on ensuring nuclear safety at the facilities.

He also urged foreign service providers to

Saudi Arabia to guarantee that the kingdom would meet the highest levels of environmental and safety requirements.

Earlier this month, Gharibabadi said Iran is countering a "bad and dangerous precedent" in the IAEA which tries to "give credibility to fake reports by spy services" run by the U.S. and Israel.

"Unfortunately, once again the United States and the regime of Israel, by putting pressure on the Agency, are trying to undermine the relations and active and constructive cooperation between Iran and the Agency" in order to derail the UN body from its professional task, he told reporters on March 3.

Gharibabadi made it clear that any request from the IAEA for additional verification or access on the basis of fake reports of the spy agencies, including the Israeli spy services, not only will be in contradiction to the IAEA's founding documents and to the verification system, but also do not commit Iran to agreeing to those requests.

"If countries do not take fundamental measures against these plots, their national sovereignty will be undermined," he warned.

Iran has repeatedly warned the Agency against attempts by the U.S. under President Donald Trump and Israel — a staunch opponent of diplomacy with Iran — to put pressure on the IAEA with the goal of killing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal.

MP calls on authorities to speak out on condition of India's Muslims

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Alaeddin Boroujerdi, a member of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, has called on Iranian authorities to be more sensitive to the circumstances of India's Muslim community.

"The country's authorities should be sensitive toward the condition of India's Muslims and take measures beyond summoning India's ambassador," Boroujerdi told Mehr on Tuesday.

Pointing to that fact that there are at least 200 million Muslims in India, the veteran politician said the current fire-brand government of India has tried to change the country's constitution against the Muslim community.

On the United States' role in the violence committed against Indian Muslims, Boroujerdi said Washington's policies with regard to developing countries such as India is to do anything it can to prevent their success.

In spite of their so-called support for human rights, the American rulers are witnessing the cruel treatment of India's Muslims but they have remained silent.

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."

On Monday, former presidential aide for civil rights Sha-



hindokht Molaverdi 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.

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

IRGC's field hospital for coronavirus patients operational in northern Iran

TEHRAN — A field hospital whose construction was underway in the Northern city of Rasht in Gilan province in the past few days by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) is now ready to be used for treatment of patients infected with COVID-19 virus, the commander of the IRGC Navy's medical unit said on Tuesday.

The commander was quoted by the FNA as saying that the field hospital is equipped with 74 beds for now and it can be increased to 120 beds if needed.

Also, the deputy head of the medical center of the IRGC Qods Base in Gilan province said that all clinics of the base in the province are ready to give services to people in coordination with Gilan's University of Medical Sciences.

In relevant remarks on Saturday, Commander of the IRGC Ground Force's Medical Unit Brigadier General Ahmad Akhavan had underlined preparedness to send 10 field hospitals to the coronavirus-hit areas across Iran, saying that the country ranked first in West Asia in launching mobile treatment centers.

"The IRGC Ground Force ranks first in the country and even West Asia in area of mobile treatment systems and centers," General Akhavan said at the time.

He added that Iran's IRGC Ground Force plans to stand among the 5 pioneering states in the world in rapid and precise launch of treatment systems by 2026.

General Akhavan said that at present, the IRGC, upon a demand raised by the health ministry, has established a field hospital in the Central city of Qom, one of the epicenters of coronavirus in Iran, with 100 beds, noting that a similar treatment center with 60 beds is due to be set up in the Central city of Kashan.

"In addition to normal hospitals, we



have 10 field hospitals which are ready to be dispatched (to COVID-19 virus-infected regions)," the IRGC medical official said.

He added that all modern war units of the IRGC Ground Force are now at the service of the health ministry to disinfect the contaminated areas, including Qom city.

Also last week, Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Ground Force Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour announced that the IRGC had formed a biological defense base to fight against the epidemic of COVID-19 virus infection in Iran.

"All modern warfare units of the ten bases of the IRGC Ground Force are standing on full alert and a biological defense base has been set up," General Pakpour said.

He added that the microbiology and virology experts and specialists of the IRGC Ground Force have also been sent on missions in areas contaminated with coronavirus.

General Pakpour also said that the IRGC has mobilized several teams to supply sterilizing materials and disinfect hospitals and streets.

Globally, more than 114,000 people have

been diagnosed with COVID-19 with over 4,000 deaths so far, the vast majority of them in China where the virus originated late last year.

The coronavirus is spreading in the Middle East, Europe, US 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.

Authorities across the United States reported over 700 cases of coronavirus and 26 deaths as of Monday.

On Monday, the death toll from the coronavirus outbreak in Iran rose to 237 with 7,161 confirmed cases.

Some 2,394 patients infected by the coronavirus have so far recovered from the disease.

As the death toll from the virus surges, Iran intensifies its preventive safety measures. Closures of schools and universities have been extended for the next two weeks.

The government also imposed travel restrictions, specially on Iran's north, which is among the red zones. The country has also adopted strict digital health control

procedures at airports to spot possible infections.

Iranian Health Minister Saeed Namaki announced last week that a new national mobilization plan would be implemented across the country to fight against the coronavirus epidemic and more effectively treat patients.

Namaki said that the plan will include all the 17,000 health centers and the 9,000 medical and clinical centers in all cities, suburban areas and villages.

He added that the plan will include home quarantine, noting that infected people will receive the necessary medicines and advice, but they are asked to stay at home.

Namaki said that people with a more serious condition will stay at the hospitals, adding that the public places will be disinfected, the entries of infected towns and cities will be controlled to diagnose and quarantine the infected cases.

He added that the necessary equipment and facilities have been provided, expressing the hope that the epidemic would be curbed.

Namaki said that the number of medical laboratories to test coronavirus infection has reached 22, and will increase to 40 soon.

The World Health Organization (WHO) says Iran's response to the virus has so far been up to the mark. Still, it says the US sanctions are a big challenge, and Washington would be complicit in the rising death toll in Iran if it would not remove its sanctions.

The World Health Organization has considered priorities in combating coronavirus and Islamic Republic of Iran obeys and follows up priorities as defined by WHO.

The WHO is dispatching separate delegations to all countries.

Leader's New Year speech canceled over coronavirus outbreak

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's annual New Year speech at the Imam Reza holy shrine in the northeastern city of Mashhad will not be held due to the coronavirus outbreak in the country.

According to a statement by Ayatollah Khamenei's office, the event has been canceled as a result of recommendations given by health officials to prevent further spread of coronavirus.

"Hereby, the honorable Iranian people are informed that due to the spread of coronavirus and strict recommendations given by health officials and specialists to avoid any form of gathering and refrain from traveling and getting out of cities to prevent the spread of the disease, the Leader's speech ceremony, which is held every year on the first day of the new (Iranian calendar) year at the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS) will not be held this year, and the Leader will not travel to Mashhad," the statement read.

The Leader's office voiced hope that people's full compliance with the instructions given by health officials will lead to final eradication of the disease.

The virus first emerged in China in December last year and is now spreading in North America, Europe and across the Middle East, sparking fears of a global pandemic. The virus is spreading rapidly in the region, with cases recorded in many countries.

Until Tuesday, the deadly virus killed over 290 Iranian citizens and infected more than 8,000.

Last week, Ayatollah Khamenei said it is essential that citizens follow health guidelines to help boost the country's battle against the coronavirus outbreak.

"These guidelines must not be disobeyed, because God has made us duty bound to feel responsible for the health of ourselves and others," he said on March 3 after he planted two saplings, an annual tradition in honor of National Arbor Day and Natural Resources Week.

He added, "Anything that helps prevent the spread of coronavirus is a good deed and anything that helps spread it is a sin."

The Leader also said that all sectors of the country must fully cooperate with the Ministry of Health, which is at the forefront of the campaign to contain coronavirus.

"The Armed Forces and the sectors related to the Office of the Leader have also been ordered to do the same," he added.

Elsewhere, Ayatollah Khamenei said, "Coronavirus has affected many countries. Our officials have reported with sincerity and transparency since day one. However, some countries where the outbreak has been more serious have tried to hide it. Of course, we ask God to heal the sick in those countries too."

Ban on Iran flights to go down in history as disgraceful: envoy

1→ willingly or unwillingly and through vague excuses and in line with America's maximum pressure, are adding to these pressures," read part of Qassemi's statement.



"Let's avoid getting shamed by history," he said.

The envoy was referring to recent restrictions imposed on Iran's flag carrier Homa forcing the airline to suspend all its flights to European destinations.

Homa announced on Sunday that it was trying to find a way out of the "unknown restrictions" imposed by European authorities.

That comes as Iran has dismissed claims that banning flights to Europe was related to the outbreak of coronavirus in the country.

For the past two years, the United States has been trying to persuade European governments that they should stop processing flights by Iran's Mahan Air.

That comes as Homa, known internationally as IranAir, has introduced new routes to compensate for Mahan Air's cancelled flights to European destinations.

The recent restrictions on Homa's flights to Europe mean that no Iranian airline is currently servicing any flights to Europe.

That leaves many Iranians stranded in European countries where the number of people infected with the new coronavirus keeps surging.

Second round of Iran's parliamentary elections may be held in September

TEHRAN — Jamal Orf, the deputy interior minister in charge of elections, said on Tuesday that the second round of the parliamentary elections may be held in September.

"The interior and health ministries will study the issue next month. The situation is not suitable to hold gatherings due to the coronavirus outbreak, therefore we may change the date [of the elections] if the Guardian Council confirms it," he told ISNA.

The first round of the parliamentary elections was held on February 21.

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Commander of Sistan-Baluchestan Province's border guards announced on Tuesday that 1,560 kg of drugs have been seized in the Saravan border region.

Second Brigadier General Mohammad Mollashahi said, "The border guards of the Saravan border regiment, tipped off by the intelligence, ambushed a convoy of drug traffickers and managed to seize 1,488 kg of opium."

He said the seizure took place after heavy clash with the drug traffickers. Mollashahi added, "In another operation, our forces arrested a drug trafficker and seized almost 73

kg opium in the province."

In late January, Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organizations, said that Iran seized totally 814,477 kilograms of different types of narcotic drugs in 2019.

In a statement published by the website of Iran's permanent mission to the UN office in Vienna on Friday, Gharibabadi said that 656,258 kg (more than 80 percent) of the seized narcotic drugs were opium.

"Other major drugs seized by Iran, include Hashish (73,928 kg), morphine (18,185 kg), heroin (17,414 kg), and

methamphetamine (13,570 kg)," the ambassador explained.

"Through 2319 clashes with drug traffickers, Islamic Republic of Iran dismantled 1,886 rings and networks involved in the transit and supply of narcotic drugs in 2019. Five brave and courageous Iranian anti-drug agents were martyred in 2019 while fighting with traffickers," he added.

Eskandar Momeni, chief of Iran's drug war commander, said in December that Iran had been fighting against illicit drugs on behalf of the world. Iran, which has a 900-kilometer border with Afghanistan, has been used as the main conduit for smuggling Afghan drugs to narcotics kingpins in Europe.

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	519,913
IFX	6.744

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	\$37.93b
WTI	\$34.37/b
OPEC Basket	\$48.33/b
Gold	\$1,665.70/oz
Silver	\$17.20/oz
Platinum	\$894.70/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

TEDPIX, IFX fall on Tuesday

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian stock markets witnessed some more decline on Tuesday, IRNA reported.

As reported, TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), fell 14,465 points to 519,913.

Some 5,323 billion securities worth 40.852 trillion rials (about \$972.6 million) were traded at TSE. The first market's index dropped 8,216 points and the second market's index went down 39,668 points.

Also, IFX, the main index of Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), declined 149 points to 6,744 on Tuesday, the same report confirmed.

Some 1.93 billion securities valued at 21.629 trillion rials (about \$514.9 million) were traded at this market.

Asian shares emerge from rout as stimulus hopes calm panic

Asian stocks bounced, and bond yields rose from record lows on Tuesday on hopes that global policymakers would introduce coordinated stimulus to cushion the economic impact of a coronavirus outbreak.

U.S. and European markets were expected to follow the Asian lead with major stock futures trading up more than 2%.

Oil similarly clawed back some of its massive losses from Monday, rallying 7% and offering hope that markets had found a floor, although sentiment was still fragile a day after prices plunged.

Yields on benchmark U.S. 10-year Treasury debt more than doubled to 0.70% as investors pared some of their heavy safe-haven holdings.



Supporting the mood was a pledge from President Donald Trump on Monday to take "major" steps to protect the economy and float the idea of a payroll tax cut with congressional Republicans.

"Talk of coordinated fiscal and monetary support is getting louder," said Rodrigo Catril, a senior FX strategist at National Australia Bank.

U.S. stock futures, the S&P 500 e-minis, were up 3.43% at 2,842.

In early European trades, the pan-region Euro Stoxx 50 futures were up 2.72% at 3,056, German DAX futures were up 2.41% at 10,943.5, FTSE futures were up 3.14% at 6,178.5.

The gains in the U.S. and European futures come on the back of a 1.36% rise in MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan, having dropped more than 5% on Monday.

Despite the bounce, analysts warned it was too early to call a trough in equity markets.

"In fact, very high volatility in equities will persist in the coming weeks as the viral outbreak accelerates outside of China and policy makers race to find a concerted response to get ahead of the curve in markets," Michael Strobaek, global chief investment officer at Credit Suisse, wrote in a research note.

Asian gains

Japan's Nikkei ended the day up 0.85%, after touching its lowest level since April 2017 earlier in the day. Japan will unveil a second stimulus package later on Tuesday to offset the impact of the outbreak.

Australia closed up 3.1% as some went hunting for bargains in beaten down stocks.

China's benchmark Shanghai Composite Index was trading up 1.7% as new domestic coronavirus cases tumbled and President Xi Jinping's visit to the epicenter of the epidemic lifted sentiment.

Headlines on the coronavirus, however, were still no brighter with Italy ordering everyone across the country not to move around other than for work and emergencies, while banning all public gatherings.

"Although uncertainty is very high, we now expect similar restrictions will be put in place across Europe in the coming weeks," warned economists at JPMorgan.

"We are now expecting a rolling 1H2o global growth contraction and a powerful global disinflationary wave to take hold," they added. "We expect the Fed to cut to zero at or before its March 18 meeting."

Benchmarks Brent crude futures and U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude bounced back after having recorded their biggest one-day percentage declines since January 1991 on Monday. [O/R]

(Source: Reuters)

Iran-EAEU trade exceeds \$1.2b in 11 months

1 → A promising future is prospected for the EAEU, specially given that some countries like India has started negotiations to join the block, and now it is a good time for Iran to take its transit advantage to expand ties with this union, according to another IRICA official, Hossein Kakhaki.

Making the remarks during a conference titled "Exports-Transit and Eurasia" held in IRIB Conference Hall on February 9, Kakhaki, who is the director general of International Affairs Department of IRICA, emphasized

that IRICA attaches high significance to trade with EAEU and offers the most facilities to the exporters of commodities to this union's member states.

After several years of negotiations, Iran and Eurasian Economic Union finally reached a free trade agreement in 2018 based on which about 862 commodity items are subject to preferential tariffs.

The interim agreement enabling formation of a free trade area between Iran and the EAEU was signed on May 17, 2018 and



officially came into force on October 27, 2019.

Iran is a very important market in the region and development of ties with this country is of high significance for the EAEU members (Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan).

The free trade agreement between Iran

and this union has laid the ground for the expansion of trade ties between the two sides.

Iran's signing the agreement with the bloc has increased the country's exports to the EAEU member states significantly, which is a turning point for the Islamic Republic to boost its export under the sanctions time.

Iran to set up pavilion at Syria's BUILDEx 2020

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran plans to set up a pavilion at Syria's 17th International Exhibition for Construction (BUILDEx 2020), which is going to be held during June 10-14, Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) published on its website.

To be held at Damascus Fairground, BUILDEx is a specialized exhibition in construction, building technologies, and construction materials.

The international exhibit succeeded over its past 16 editions in enforcing its presence amongst the most successful international exhibitions in the construction sector.

It is recognized as a major event in the Middle East and North Africa region that cater to the industry, where it became, before the war in Syria, the main gateway for many international companies targeting Syrian and neighboring markets.

TPO also announced last week that Iran plans to set up a pa-

vilion at Syria's 17th International Medical Exhibition (MEDICARE 2020), which is going to be held at Damascus Fairground during June 2-5.

As previously reported, TPO held the first meeting of its Country Desk on trade with Syria in mid-January.

Farzad Piltan, the director general of TPO's Office of Arabian and African Countries, said that the meeting was participated by the representatives from related governmental and private organizations aiming at investigating the hurdles in the way of exporting constructional materials, plastic products, and minerals to Syria and finding the ways to boost exports to the Syrian market.

The participants explored the latest status of trade between Iran and Syria, mentioned the extant problems and it was decided that the related organizations take necessary follow-up measures to remove the discussed barriers.

Iran and Syria have been taking major steps for expansion of

Coronavirus: China's risky plan to revive the economy



President Xi Jinping (center) wears a protective face mask as he speaks with a medical staff member during his visit to the Academy of Military Medical Sciences in Beijing last week.

the party-state has not strengthened its capacity to act in order to pre-empt a crisis. [Instead] it has made it easier for a crisis to emerge as it all depends on Xi understanding the situation properly and making the right call at critical moments."

An adviser to senior officials in Beijing agrees. "This virus crisis was really 70 percent human error [attributable to] the leadership," he says.

Some economic projections make sober reading for China's leadership. Bert Hofman, director of the East Asian Institute at the National University of Singapore, predicts that "first-quarter growth year on year may well be negative, between -2.0 and -6.5 [percent]".

Such a sharp downturn, if it continues beyond the first quarter, could in turn imperil what the Chinese government has long seen as the raison d'être for strong GDP growth — urban job creation, targets for which are typically set at 10m or more new jobs each year. "Services and consumption now contribute more than half of China's GDP," says Mr. Hofman, a former China country director for the World Bank.

"The economy is therefore more sensitive to a drop in domestic demand resulting from the epidemic and the government's control measures. It is harder to make up lost grounds in services than it is in manufacturing."

Some spending never be recouped

In a short-term downturn, capital expenditures are only delayed. But some spending, such as lost box office revenues over the Chinese new year period — \$3.9m this year compared with \$1.5bn in 2019 — will never be recouped.

Amid signs that Beijing's public health measures are beginning to contain the outbreak, officials from Mr. Xi down are accentuating the positive.

"The fundamentals of the economy will remain strong in the long run," Mr. Xi assured the presidents of Chile and Cuba during recent phone calls.

When the National Bureau of Statistics released a record low figure for its official purchasing managers' index on February 29, it added — in an unusually political aside — that "under the party's firm leadership with Xi Jinping at the core, the virus is coming under control and market confidence is steadily recovering".

In a widely circulated report on Chinese social media, Zhang Anyuan, chief economist at Citic Securities, criticized analysts who have projected that first-quarter growth might only fall to 4 or 5 percent year on year.

"They look at the heavens to divine the future and assert that [the economy's] medium and long-term outlook is still good," Mr. Zhang wrote.

"If such head-slapping political declarations become the basis for strategic decision-making, they will cause as much harm as the early misjudgments [about the seriousness] of the

epidemic." "How is it possible," Mr. Zhang added, "for the economy to achieve positive growth in the first quarter when more than 1bn people stayed at home for nearly a month?"

Aside from the NBS's February PMI figure, and a 17 percent annual fall in the value of January-February exports reported by China's customs administration on Saturday, most official data for the period will not be released until later this month.

Until they are, optimists and pessimists alike can pick and choose from a host of contradictory anecdotal information — as well as various ad hoc indicators of economic activity — to bolster their arguments.

Government officials typically cite data suggesting that the vast majority of companies have returned to work. But analysts caution that the figures reflect only the number of companies who have approval to operate, meaning that many businesses may still be operating at far below their normal rates.

Just 60% of major industry sites resume operation

According to a China Merchants Bank index that uses satellite imagery to track night-time activity, as of Monday just under 60 percent of 143 major industry sites across the country had resumed operations.

G7 Networks, a start-up that collects GPS data from about 20 percent of China's cargo vehicles, has been releasing a daily tally that shows a rapid recovery in full-truck deliveries usually made by major companies, but only a gradual uptick for shared consignment shipments, which tend to be used by smaller businesses.

Compared with early February when this data looked "extremely bleak", big deliveries to factories and construction sites have rebounded to about 60 percent of peak November levels.

But smaller shipments are only running at about 26 percent "not because there are no drivers, but because there are no orders", says Sun Fangyuan, a G7 market director, adding that consumption had started to pick up in the past week.

In the face of languishing commercial activity, southern Guangdong province last week expanded its 2020 development plan to include Rmb100bn (\$14bn) worth of new public health, rural development and shantytown reconstruction projects, while eastern Zhejiang province added 100 new railways, roads and disaster relief programs.

Seven other provinces have recently announced investments worth Rmb25tn, although analysts at brokerage Everbright Sun Hung Kai estimate that only about Rmb3.5tn will be allocated this year.

Linda Liu, who runs a kitchenware manufacturer in Yiwu near Shanghai, sources stainless steel from domestic suppliers and says things are improving, in part because of local government subsidies to pay migrant workers' transport costs for their journeys back to work.

"My factory restarted operations [in] February and Yiwu's international trade market [a major wholesale center] has also reopened," she says.

"So far half of our workers and salesmen are back at work. My suppliers haven't returned to their previous production levels, but we have orders and inventory from late last year so we've still got something to do."

Traditionally when Chinese demand slumps, steelmakers simply export more. But that might not be an option when markets such as South Korea are contending with their own virus outbreaks, says Sebastian Lewis, an analyst at S&P Global Platts.

"Margins at mills are going to take a hit," he adds, but downstream industries like property are a bigger concern.

"In the past, the government might have let some companies go to the wall to help industry restructuring, but it's now got to the point where employment, stability and getting the economy going again comes first."

Shen Jianguang, chief economist at JD.com's financial services subsidiary, believes the initial hopes of a rebound after the first quarter are fading as the epidemic's impact on supply chains and on consumption becomes clearer.

"Quarter on quarter, there will for sure be a [second quarter] rebound, but for [annual economic growth] to be above 6 [percent] for the year, there will need to be a coordinated policy of fiscal and monetary support to induce and encourage people to spend," he says.

In an analysis of listed companies' financial statements, Mr. Shen found that about half of the hotel food and leisure groups on specialist technology stock exchanges in China face short-term liquidity risks.

Separately, he estimates that annual earnings for companies on the main stock exchanges will fall by about 30 percent on average.

He predicts that many retail and consumer firms will find it almost impossible to recover: "It's very hard to compensate for tourism. It's hard to have another holiday like Chinese new year."

SMEs could apply for delay debt

On March 1, China's central bank and banking regulator announced that small and medium-sized enterprises could apply to delay debt and interest rate payments due in the first half of the year.

The SMEs' lenders, in turn, will be able to postpone formal designations of the loans as non-performing.

A day earlier HNA, a private-sector aviation and tourism group based in southern Hainan province, said it had failed to "resolve" financial risks exacerbated by the epidemic and effectively declared itself a ward of the state by appointing two provincial officials to key posts.

Wu Hai, a service-sector entrepreneur who runs a chain of 50 karaoke parlours in Beijing, says his company has about Rmb12m cash on his balance sheet.

He believes he could keep the parlours closed until the end of August if necessary without going bankrupt, thanks in part to a five-month government exemption on social insurance payments granted to SMEs.

"The central bank and finance ministry are offering banks' discounted government loans to lower financing costs for SMEs," he says. "But banks cannot just lend to small businesses without assessing risks."

Qin Nan, whose Beijing-based company makes and installs air purifier systems, discovered in February that getting the financial help supposedly on offer to SMEs was not straightforward.

When he asked his bank to delay loan repayments it refused, saying it has a limited quota for repayment delays.

Mr. Qin is now trying to renew the loan but can only do so if he can find a credit company willing to guarantee it.

More ominously for China's cash-strapped local governments, which in 2018 raised almost 40 percent of their total revenues from land sales, house sales across China's 30 largest cities fell more than 80 percent in the first three weeks of February compared with the same period last year, according to official data.

(Source Financial Times)

Iran's installed electricity generation capacity at 83.35GW

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Iran's total installed electricity generation capacity has reached 83,350 megawatts (MW) or 83.35 gigawatts (GW), IRNA reported on Tuesday, quoting the Deputy Energy Minister Homayoon Haeri. Speaking in an inauguration ceremony for several energy projects under the Iran A-B scheme, Haeri underlined the country's advances in the electricity sector noting that most of the projects done in this sector are carried out completely by Iranian experts and engineers.

Iran's total power generation capacity stood at 80,000 MW in the past Iranian cal-

endar year 1397 (March 2018-March 2019), up from the 78,484 MW of its preceding year.

Currently, with a total generation capacity of 25,083 MW (nearly 31 percent) combined cycle power plants account for the biggest share in the country's total power generation capacity followed by gas power plants generating about 30 percent.

The share of hydroelectric power plants is 19.87 percent while hydroelectric plants generate 14.8 percent of the country's total electricity, the share of dispersed generation units is 1.5 percent and finally the renewable power plants account only for 0.79 percent of Iran's total power generation capacity.



In early May, the energy ministry announced that the government plans to inaugurate 22 new power plant units with a total capacity of 3,933 MW in the

current Iranian year along with upgrading and increasing the efficiency of existing power plants to add another 461 MW of new capacity.

Major electricity projects worth \$1.7b inaugurated in 5 provinces

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian inaugurated 25 major electricity projects worth 71.81 trillion rials (about \$1.709 billion) in five provinces on Tuesday, Tasnim news agency reported.

The projects were put into operation by the minister through video conference in Tehran, Fars, Hormozgan, Bushehr, and Sistan-Baluchestan provinces.

Inauguration of these projects came in the last week of A-B-Iran scheme [the acronyms A and B stand for water and

electricity in Persian] under which the Energy Ministry had planned to inaugurate some water and electricity projects across the country every week.

The newly inaugurated projects are related to some combined-cycle power plants, power transmission lines and substations, as well as some gas-fueled power plants and a number of renewable power plants.

Last month, energy minister announced that major energy projects have been inaugurated across the country in

recent months.

Speaking in a ceremony on the occasion of the Ten-Day dawn celebrations which marks the victory of the Islamic revolution in 1979, Ardakanian said more than 194.4 trillion rials (about \$4.6 billion) has been invested in the mentioned projects.

All the mentioned projects have gone on stream as part of the major program called A-B-Iran which the Energy Ministry has been pursuing seriously.

Oil jumps after rout on stimulus hopes but price war weighs

Oil prices jumped by around four percent on Tuesday after the biggest one-day rout in nearly 30 years, as investors eyed the possibility of economic stimulus, although a looming price war weighed on sentiment.

U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday said he will be taking "major" steps to gird the U.S. economy against the impact of the spreading coronavirus outbreak, while Japan's government plans to spend more than \$4 billion in a second package of steps to cope with the virus.

Brent crude futures were up \$1.44, or around 4%, to \$35.80 a barrel by 0903 GMT, after hitting a session high of \$37.38 a barrel.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude gained \$1.52, or around 5%, to \$32.65 a barrel, after hitting a high of \$33.73.

Both benchmarks plunged 25% on Monday, dropping to their lowest levels since

February 2016 and recording their biggest one-day percentage declines since Jan. 17, 1991, when oil prices fell at the outset of the first Persian Gulf War.

Trading volumes in the front-month for both contracts hit record highs in the previous session after three years of cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Russia and other major oil producers to limit supply fell apart on Friday, triggering a price war for market share.

Saudi, the world's biggest oil exporter, plans to supply 12.3 million barrels per day (bpd) in April, well above current production levels of 9.7 million bpd, Saudi Aramco CEO Amin Nasser said on Tuesday.

April's crude supply will be "300,000 barrels per day over the company's maximum sustained capacity of 12 million bpd," Nasser said in a statement received by Reuters.

Price pared gains by over a \$1 on the news.

Russian oil minister Alexander Novak said he did not rule out joint measures with OPEC to stabilize the market, adding that the next OPEC+ meeting was planned for May-June.

"Price wars and pandemics are nothing new to the commodity markets, but both occurring simultaneously is something we have yet to witness in our careers," RBC analysts said in a note.

"Such action will test the market's self-balancing mechanism absent the backstop of OPEC, a mechanism that has not been tested since the U.S. shale boom was in its infancy," they added.

Sentiment was also lifted after Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Wuhan, the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak, for the first time since the epidemic began, and as the spread of the virus in mainland China slows sharply.

China, the world's second-largest oil con-

sumer, is trying to get people in hard-hit Hubei province back to work by using a mobile phone-based monitoring system that will allow people to travel within the province.

Crude was also supported by hopes for a settlement to the price war and potential U.S. output cuts, although analysts warned gains may be temporary as oil demand continues to be hit by the virus outbreak, which has spread beyond China and prompted Italy to implement a nationwide lockdown.

U.S. shale producers rushed to deepen spending cuts and could reduce production after OPEC's decision to pump full bore into a global market hit by shrinking demand.

"When you look at the leverage the industry is in, at prices of around \$30, it's not profitable," said Jonathan Barratt, chief investment officer Probis Group.

(Source: Reuters)

Energy companies feel the pain of Saudi Arabia's price war

From the shale fields of Texas to deepwater projects in the North Sea, the price war launched by Russia and Saudi Arabia sent shockwaves across the entire energy industry and triggered the biggest sell-off since the global financial crisis.

It has left some companies searching for strategies to protect profits and keep paying dividends. Others are fighting for survival.

"The price collapse could be the trigger for a new phase of deep industry restructuring — one that rivals the changes seen in the late-1990s," said Tom Ellacott of the consultancy Wood Mackenzie. "Sustained prices below \$40 a barrel would trigger a new wave of brutal cost-cutting. More highly-leveraged players will be forced to make the deepest cuts to stave off bankruptcy."

Nowhere is that more true than in the shale industry, which helped end U.S. dependence on Middle Eastern oil.

The oil price plunge that started on Sunday night left U.S. benchmark West Texas Intermediate trading at just over \$30 a barrel on Monday, well below the break-even price for most U.S. shale oil wells.

In the market meltdown that came on Monday, even the best-performing shale producers, such as Pioneer Natural Resources and EOG, suffered share price declines of more than 30 percent.

For many industry players, the new price war will trigger bad memories of the 18-month-long depression that followed Saudi Arabia's decision to open the taps in November 2014.

"The biggest difference is that these producers are all in a much weaker position," said Jeff Currie, global head of commodities research at Goldman Sachs. "Their balance sheets are weaker, their stock prices are lower."

Analysts said dozens of smaller shale companies would now go bust.

"This is the financial crisis for oil," said Ian Nieboer, head of macro research at RS Energy Group, part of shale data provider Enverus. "Except the producers aren't too big to fail."

U.S. production hit a record high of 13.1m barrels per day last month, more than double its level before the shale oil boom took off in 2010, and may even rise modestly in the coming weeks as working rigs finish drilling some wells. Many producers have also hedged output for 2020, insulating them from the price shock.

But if current prices persist, activity will collapse by the end of this year as producer companies cancel contracts with oilfield services companies, said Artem Abramov, head of shale research at Rystad, bringing widespread misery in shale-dependent economies in Texas and North Dakota. U.S. shale output could fall more than 2m b/d next year, Mr Abramov added.

Diamondback Energy and Parsley Energy, two of the Permian Shale's leading independent producers, on Monday said they would pare back the number of their working rigs and reduce spending.

Yet even before the latest shock, shale producers' recent focus on generating free cash flow has failed to renew their attraction to lenders, which have tired of a business model dependent on constant spending to the detriment of capital repayment.

Increasingly clear to investors is that the model also depended on OPEC's and Russia's willingness to keep prices high, surrendering market share in the process. That generosity ended



on Friday.

"If you're Russia, you don't want to bankrupt these shale companies, you want to turn them into zombies — don't let them restructure, leave them debt-laden with the inability to invest and inability to grow," said Currie of Goldman Sachs.

Heavily indebted Occidental Petroleum was one of the hardest hit of the larger companies on Monday, with its shares opening down more than 40 percent.

It was another devastating judgment from investors of both the company's resilience in the face of the coming price war and last year's takeover of shale rival Anadarko. Oxy took on \$40bn last year to buy Anadarko — a bet on size and oil prices that was facilitated by Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway, which provided \$10bn of financing.

Neither has come good and shares have trended lower since the deal closed in August. The latest plunge leaves Oxy's market capitalisation now barely above \$15bn, compared with more than \$40bn at the time of the deal.

The largest energy majors, particularly in Europe, are not immune. They have promised their investors they can do it all — from cutting costs and producing oil and gas at higher margins to paying down debt and ramping up shareholder payouts. They are also under pressure to invest in cleaner energies and the low-carbon technologies of the future.

"International oil companies will now need to consider where they can cut capital expenditure quickly. The average break-even in the sector is \$55 a barrel," said Jason Gammel, analyst at Jefferies.

"Buybacks and dividend growth are now almost certainly off the table," he said. In fact, the industry is questioning which companies will be the first to cut their dividends.

BP fell almost 20 percent, while Shell dropped 18 percent. Both companies have the highest debt levels of the majors.

Norway's Equinor and Italy's Eni, which have bigger exploration and production divisions as a proportion of their overall businesses are more tied to the oil price. ExxonMobil in the U.S., meanwhile, has a robust balance sheet but it is in focus because of a large capital expenditure programme.

For many of the independent UK oil and gas companies the new oil price environment means they could be in danger of breaching banking covenants later in the year. North Sea oil producer Premier Oil was the worst hit on Monday, down

more than 53 percent.

Analysts pointed to its significant debt as well as concerns around plans to refinance its \$2.9bn of lending facilities and buy \$871m worth of North Sea assets from BP and Korea National Oil Corporation.

The plans will be challenged in an Edinburgh court next week by Asia Research and Capital Management, a Hong Kong-based hedge fund, which is both Premier's largest lender and holds one of the biggest short positions in UK history in the company's stock.

Premier last week warned in its full-year results that if the refinancing and acquisitions do not complete and "downside [oil] price and or production scenarios materialise" then a breach of "one or more financial covenants??.??.?would arise" in 2020, although the company insisted there were a range of "mitigating actions" it could take to avoid that scenario, including reducing capital expenditure and further asset sales.

Premier on Monday declined to comment.

■ **Where are the winners?**

Amid Monday's carnage a few winners did emerge. Frontline, the Norwegian oil tanker group controlled by billionaire John Fredriksen, jumped more than 8 percent, while rival Euronav advanced 7.4 percent as charter rates soared.

With Saudi Arabia now offering unprecedented price discounts on oil, forward rates for very large crude carriers, capable of carrying at least 2m barrels of crude, jumped sharply on Monday, hitting \$45,000 a day on the route between Saudi Arabia and the Far East, compared with a spot rate of \$27,900 a day on Friday.

Vopak, a Dutch company focused on oil storage, rose more than 5 percent on Monday as traders said it could be a big beneficiary from increased demand for storage tanks.

BASF, one of the world's largest chemical suppliers, said the weakness in oil prices leads to a reduction in raw materials costs and so could "positively impact earnings".

"The extent will depend on how long these lower oil prices will last as well as supply and demand for chemicals," added the Germany-based company.

But many companies that use oil as feedstock — traditional winners from a price decline — were not celebrating. U.S. chemicals producers that have invested billions of dollars to harness cheap gas from the shale boom risk losing their cost advantage over foreign rivals as a result of the oil slump, according to analysts.

Over the past decade companies such as Dow and Lyon-dellBasell pledged more than \$200bn to construct vast petrochemicals complexes that transform ethane into the basic building blocks for materials like plastics.

The precipitous fall in crude prices means the edge they have over competitors in Europe and Asia that use oil-derived naphtha could now shrink, industry observers said.

"The fact that the rest of the world doesn't have access to cheap gas has given the U.S. a competitive advantage, which has resulted in billions of dollars of investment focused on exports," said Graham Copley, founding partner at the research consultancy C-MACC. "You start bringing crude oil price down and you take that opportunity away."

(Source: Financial Times)

Saudis' price war or a Russian plot against U.S. shale?!

➡ When faced with disagreement from its biggest non-OPEC ally Russia, the angry Saudi immediately lashed back by offering huge discounts for their oil prices and announcing that they would boost their production to more than 12 million barrels per day (bpd).

Russia, on the other hand, has maintained a calm attitude, saying that its oil industry is resilient enough to keep its market share and withstand even higher price downturns, he said.

■ **Russia and the U.S.**

Khaqani believes that the Russians are in fact at war with the U.S. oil industry, and Washington's use of oil as a strategic asset.

What they call "price war" has already hit the U.S. oil industry hard since Friday and the persistence of the situation could damage the U.S. oil industry and dethrone the U.S. from its position as the world's largest oil producer.

Russia has targeted not only the U.S. oil industry but also the country's bigger strategic programs for using oil and energy as leverage for applying corrective sanction policies, which Kremlin is already under.



Analysts believe that Russia is trying to thwart the U.S. sanctions that have been intervening with the completion of the country's Nord Stream 2 pipeline project, which would take natural gas to Europe, making Russia one of the biggest energy players in the world.

■ **The U.S.**

In response to the mentioned scenarios, The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has said that the U.S. will take all necessary measures to maintain its role as the world's top energy producer and in fact, the country is not going to step back from its "global energy dominance" strategy.

Khaqani believes that the U.S. is seeking to take Saudi Arabia's role in the oil market becoming the new swing producer capable of regulating production levels to control oil prices.

"These attempts by state actors to manipulate and shock oil markets reinforce the importance of the role of the United States as a reliable energy supplier to partners and allies around the world. The United States, as the world's largest producer of oil and gas, can and will withstand this volatility," the DOE said in a statement.

■ **Final thoughts**

Whatever the real reason for the rift between Saudi and Russia is, its impacts on the oil market are undeniable.

If the "war" is just between the kingdom and Russia many believe that the impacts will be short-lived and in the near future, we would witness the markets getting back to a more stable status.

The fact is that now after the break-up Saudi Arabia is going to flood the already oversupplied market with oil and eventually Russia which is not able to increase its production as much as the kingdom will have to step back.

If the second scenario is correct, however, we should expect more complications.

Global wind and solar energy growth rate in 2019 was 'slowest this century'

Electricity generated globally from wind power grew by 12 percent year-on-year in 2019, with solar energy rising by 22 percent, according to a report by climate think-tank Ember (formerly Sandbag).

"The wind and solar generation rise of 265TWh was the second biggest on record, but the growth rate slowed — the 14 percent growth rate was the lowest this century," said the Global Electricity Review.



Wind energy grew to 1,404 terawatt hours (TWh) in 2019, up from 1,260TWh in 2018, while solar grew from 573TWh in 2018 to 699TWh last year.

China was by far the largest source of both wind and solar electricity last year, followed by the US and Germany (see panels), according to data released alongside the report.

The study shows how far the world still has to go to meet the Paris Agreement goals, with coal, natural gas and other fossil fuels still supplying 62 percent of the world's electricity.

According to Ember's data, coal was the world's largest source of electricity in 2019, with 35.18 percent of the total (despite a 3 percent year-on-year fall), followed by natural gas (23.52 percent), hydro (16.54 percent), nuclear (10.52 percent), wind (5.44 percent), other fossil fuels (3.47 percent), solar (2.71 percent), biomass and waste (2.24 percent), and "other renewables" (0.4 percent).

The study points out that 87 percent of the world's coal-fired generation comes from ten countries, and none of them have made commitments to reduce coal use to levels consistent with the IEA's Sustainable Development Scenario (ie, to be compatible with the Paris Agreement).

And the 3 percent fall in coal-fired energy is "not the new normal", says the report, as coal-fired capacity is still growing — with China, for example, adding 36.8GW of net capacity in 2019.

China now accounts for more than 50 percent of the world's coal-fired generation, with 4,560TWh in 2019 — a 1.72 percent increase from 2018 — as electricity demand in the country rose by 4.7 percent year-on-year.

To keep the world to a 1.5C temperature rise, global coal generation needs to fall 11 percent each year, Ember points out.

(Source: rechargenews.com)

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Resurgence of violence as Saudi-Yemen talks collapse

Yemen capture strategic Al-Hazan city, 70,000 displaced

By Salman Parviz

TEHRAN — Informal talks between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis began last September but the resurgence of violence since January has shattered the calm. The United Nations has been trying to re-launch political negotiations between Saudi Arabia and the Houthi movement.

On March 1, Houthis confirmed they captured strategically important Al-Hazan city after heavy fighting. Al-Hazan is the capital of Al-Jawf province, bordering Saudi Arabia. The province is thought to have the largest oil reserves in Yemen, and Houthi success immediately led to Saudi air strikes, which have not been able to translate to superiority on the ground.

The International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) said on Monday that thousands of civilians have fled ongoing clashes to Marib in extremely tough conditions.

“To alleviate their suffering, ICRC and Yemen Red Crescent distributed food and shelter aid for 70,000 displaced people,” ICRC tweeted.

UN Special Envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffith, met with the Secretary General General Nayef Al Hajrat of the PGCC in Riyadh on Saturday. At the weekend, Saudi-led coalition raided Houthi targets in the country's port district of Salif.

Earlier Griffith was in Houthi-controlled territories in the province of Marib (bordering Al-Jawf). He told reporters that Yemen “is in a critical juncture” and further “military adventurism and the quest for territorial gains are futile”.

Last few weeks have seen Houthi military victories on the borders with Saudi Arabia.

A Saudi Tornado aircraft in Al-Jawf was downed in mid-February, reported the official Saudi press agency but did not specify fate of the crew or the cause of the crash. The Houthis al-Masirah television channel said the jet was downed by the rebels using an advanced surface-to-air missile.

Earlier in January Houthi missile attack on Yemen's UN-recognized President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi-led Yemeni government forces killed at least 116. Ballistic missiles hit at al-Estiqbal military camp in the central province of Ma'rib.

The incident came amid a fall in violence across Yemen despite heightened tensions between the U.S. and Iran after the assassination of Gen. Qassem Soleimani on January 3.

Suleimani's death prompted demonstrations against the U.S. in Iraq, Iran, India and many other parts of the Muslim world, including Sana'a, where Houthi describe killings of Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis as 'clear attack on all Muslims' and called for revenge, reports Anadolu Agency.

==Raab visits Riyadh, Muscat

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, criticized by at home for British arms sales to Saudi Arabia, on his first visit to the Persian Gulf visited Riyadh on March 2, where he met Saudi king, foreign minister and deputy defense minister. Raab also held talks with Hadi to negotiate an end to the war. After meetings he told Reuters “2020 could be a year of change for Yemen.”

On the same day Raab, appointed foreign secretary last July, proceeded to Oman where he met with Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said in Muscat reportedly to discuss the role of



Yemeni children standing outside a tent at a makeshift camp for Internally Displaced Persons after west of Marib city, on 8 May 2016. (Photo: AFP)

any mediation talks in Yemen.

Oman has played a central role in diplomatic efforts in staving off regional conflict. Muscat has made efforts in the past to broker indirect negotiations between Houthi rebels and Saudi-led coalition. So far no results have been announced about Raab's talks with Riyadh and Muscat.

In a recent interview with the Tehran Times Dr. Foad Izadi, of the Faculty of World Studies at the University of Tehran, said “It is a decision the two sides [Yemen and Saudi led coalition] have to make. Iran has four-step proposal:

1. Seize hostilities; 2. Humanitarian aid; 3. Establishing Yemeni-Yemeni dialogue without external interference; and 4. Reaching a political solution in regards to the Yemen war.”

====Court martial

Saudi-led coalition said it has launched the first court martial proceedings against its military personnel suspected of breaches of international laws, Spokesperson Colonel Turki al-Maliki said in a briefing in London, Saudi news agency said on February 14.

The proceedings are related to three airstrikes:

First was an attack on hospital supported by the French health charity Medecins Sans Frontiers on Aug. 15, 2016. 16 people died, according to MSF with Saudi coalition claiming an error had occurred.

Second, a strike on a wedding ceremony in Bani Qayis in April 2018 that left 20 dead. Saudi coalition's joint incident action team found that an error had occurred breaching

rules of engagement.

Third, the incident was a strike in August 2018 on a civilian bus in Dahyan that left more than 40 schoolchildren dead, most of them under 10.

So far there is no news of any proceedings or outcome of the court martial.

Last year a UN panel of experts accused the alliance, led by Saudi Arabia and UAE, for possible war crimes saying the coalition had killed civilians in airstrikes and deliberately denied people food in a country facing famine.

Saudi Arabia dominated the arms market in the past five years, increasing its purchases of combat aircraft, missiles and guided bombs by 130 percent, supplied mainly from America and Britain, reports The Times.

According to new data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) international transfers of major arms during the five-year period 2015-19 increased by 5.5 percent, with Saudi Arabia being the world's largest importer.

The jump took place despite alarm over the use of fighter bombers and guided munitions in the Saudi-led assault on Yemen in which tens of thousands of civilians have died.

The UK government was forced to suspend new arms export licenses to Saudi Arabia last year after a Court of Appeal ruling that the selling of weapons for attacks on Yemen was unlawful.

Political exploitation of the coronavirus by Saudi media against Iran

By Farzad Farhadi

TEHRAN — While the coronavirus has spread in many countries around the world, the Saudi and UAE media outlets have greatly and politically used the virus as a tool against Iran.

It has been a while that the global crisis of coronavirus has affected all states, nations and international organizations. Therefore, all governments have made every efforts to prevent or reduce the spread of the virus.

Most media outlets in the world focus on containment and awareness-raising and consider alerting processes in their news programs and policies. Of course, this move is in line with containment measures, not to cause anxiety, fear and stress that can disturb both the mental

security and physical immunity of individuals in the community.

The countries that do not seem to have good diplomatic and political relations should not take political advantage of the current crisis and seek revenge. This issue is not accepted even in the simplest form of diplomacy.

However, it should be said that in case of Iran everything is different. Good pretexts and subjects for opposition media might be found in natural disasters such as flood and earthquake to undermine Iran, but it was expected that the same thing would not happen about this global crisis due to human and moral aspects.

The media policy of these news agencies has been set to tarnish the Iranian image under any circumstances. However,

it is not fair that a global havoc in which the human factor is least involved to become a tool for political exploitation. The Saudi, Kuwaiti and some regional media outlets have taken full advantage of the coronavirus, ignoring human and moral aspect.

In the meanwhile, the Saudi and Emirati media outlets have the most prominent role and have focused on the political exploitation of the virus, trying to deal a blow to Tehran. Saudi Arabia is carrying out all these moves and hostilities, while Riyadh has considered prison time and fine for those who spread the news about the virus.

The situation in the UAE is no better than in Saudi Arabia, as a prominent Emirati activist has recent revealed that the UAE has affected by

the virus more than any countries. In this regard, the Emirati activist Ali al-Tawil said that the infections from the coronavirus in the UAE is several times higher than the figures have officially announced. Schools, public and non-governmental academic institutions and many other organizations have been closed for several weeks, indicating a widespread outbreak of COVID-19 in the UAE.

However, the mentioned states are not in normal conditions. Many stores are closed and people are anxious.

The Kuwaiti and Saudi media outlets are recommended to observe professional and moral approaches, teach their citizens the containment measures and raise awareness instead of plotting against Iran and exploiting the virus.

‘IAEA main weaknesses is relying on information provided by its members’

➡ A: It is not clear whether the sites mentioned by the IAEA are related to the so-called “past military dimensions”. It may be just sites that the Agency considers as undeclared and it should be allowed to find out whether this is the case or not. In any case, it is true that one of the main weaknesses of the Agency is not to have any means of collecting its own intelligence and relying on the information provided by its Member States. The only way for the IAEA to check the validity of such information is to conduct on-site inspections and report on its findings.

■ 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: The Agency as such does not have this power but needs a decision of its Board of Governors that cannot be taken for granted. If Iran was deferred to the UN Security Council for non-compliance with its Safeguards Agreement, the evidence to be provided should be overwhelming. At this stage, there does not seem to be any agreement among the Permanent Members of the Security Council to re-instate sanctions against Iran.



■ 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: It is true that Iran has accepted to be one of the most inspected Member States of the IAEA. The fact that Israel, as a non-party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), is not subject to inspections and possesses nuclear weapons of course does not grant Israel any particular rights but fuels the feeling of double standards in the Middle East and worldwide.

■ 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: As said previously, the flaw of the IAEA is to rely on intelligence provided by its Member States that can be inaccurate or manipulated. Israel is known for its rivalry with Iran, and this is not surprising. So the best way of proving that those allegations are false is to cooperate with the IAEA and show that Iran does not have anything inconsistent with its commitments to hide.

Plan to trigger entrepreneurship globally

➡ 3. Technological advancement in third world countries and providing means for achieving scientific goals by deploying technocrats in the field.

This project will be presented to WIPO and UN after the legal process and registration has taken place. The registration for this plan will be done in Iran via Real Estate Registration Organization of Iran. Next Safakish plans to send it to WIPO and plans to wait for a response from WIPO headquarters. However, before all the registration Safakish points out that he cannot publicly reveal his plan.

In the end Safakish aims to benefit all humanity from this plan. We wish him success.

We are ready to end war, if Kabul starts inter-Afghan talks: Taliban spox

By Mohsen Haddadi

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid says that ‘jihad’ with the Afghanistan government is a must unless they, like the Americans, are willing to resolve issues through negotiations.

“According to a peace agreement signed between Taliban and US officials, US troops have six months to leave Afghanistan. But the Taliban will continue to its jihad with American puppets,” Mujahid told MNA about the group's recent agreement with the United States.

Asked why the Taliban have stopped attacks on US forces but continues attacking Afghan forces, Mujahid said “Jihad in Afghanistan needs great care; we give Americans immunity to leave Afghanistan, but from the domestic point of view, we do not accept the American puppet government that has taken the power to serve American purposes and we will continue fighting until the Islamic rule in Afghanistan is established.

“Until that time, there is a need for pressure and war and we need to understand this,” he stressed. “We should not make decisions emotionally. The jihadi issues need research and reasoning and all Afghans need to understand that we cannot let Ashraf Ghani destroy our jihadi ideals and we cannot say we regret the war”.

Mujahid believes that the war with the Afghan government is a form of jihad. “Jihad begins for a legitimate and religious purpose and must continue until the end and the goals of jihad must be pursued,” he continued.

He went on to say that jihad basically produces wars, makes deaths, destroys the economy and demolishes cities. “But it also has its benefits, and God will reward the Mujahideen, because it leads to the establishment of Islamic government, and if there is no jihad, the Islamic establishments will be destroyed. That is why jihad, despite all its devastating aspect, is a legitimate and reasonable issue”.

He went on to say, “We have made jihad and removed the occupiers from the country, that is important of course, but if we do not establish an Islamic rule, all of our Jihadi aspirations will be destroyed.”

Mujahid acknowledged that he Afghans are sick and tired of too many wars. “War is enough. We fight carefully so the people not to be harmed more”.

Taliban spokesman added that the end of the war in Afghanistan depends on the beginning of inter-Afghan talks, saying: “Jihad with the government is a must unless they, like the Americans, are willing to negotiate with us to resolve issues through dialogue. We should pave the way to establish the Islamic system in the country.

However, in his earlier talks, Zabihullah Mujahid, had claimed that the Taliban are fighting the Afghan government because it is occupied by US forces. He had conditioned ending the war on the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

Baghdad's negative response to Washington, relations with Iran to continue

By Ramin Hosseinabadian

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Iraqi Prime Minister has recently revealed the heavy pressure from Washington against Baghdad to cut ties with Iran and responded that Iraq's relations with Iran will remain strong.

The Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi has recently revealed a series of US sabotage and repeated interference in Iraq's internal affairs.

The Iraqi Prime Minister noted, “The United States is seeking to sever Iraq's relations with Iran by putting pressure on Baghdad. However, geopolitical logic dictates that we use the capabilities of our neighbors to serve our national interests and security.” These remarks have a clear message to Washington regarding the strengthening of relations between Iran and Iraq.

As an example, we can refer to US pressure on Baghdad government after Washington's withdrawal from the Nuclear Deal. At that time, US officials resorted to any means of forcing Baghdad to comply with Washington's sanctions against Tehran, but the Abdul-Mahdi's government did not surrender to US pressure and explicitly stated that Baghdad was not part of the anti-Iranian sanctions.

Another message that the Iraqi Prime Minister conveyed to the US is the fight against terrorism. He recently appreciated the assistance of the Iranian nation and government in the fight against ISIL in Iraq. These remarks have a significant message to Washington which always claims that Iran supports terrorism.

US efforts to put pressure on Iraqi Officials with the aim of cutting Iran-Iraq relations have been futile so far. The Iraqi government is not affected by these moves and maintains that the relations of the two countries must further be improved.

This means that US massive investment in Iraq, especially since Donald Trump took office, aimed at severing Baghdad's ties with Tehran and consequently, reducing the Islamic Republic of Iran's influence in Iraq has completely failed. Obviously, Americans have realized that they are more isolated in Iraq than before.

The countdown has begun for the withdrawal of US terrorist forces from Iraq. US authorities are increasingly concerned about the growing ties between Tehran and Baghdad, as contrary to their claims they are well aware that the Islamic Republic is at the forefront of fighting against terrorism in the region.

UAE issues flight permit to Iran till March 20

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – The United Arab Emirates (UAE), which has suspended all flights to and from Iran over the outbreak of the new coronavirus, has issued a permit for operating flights to the Islamic Republic till March 20, Iran's embassy in the UAE announced on Tuesday.



"The General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) in the United Arab Emirates has issued a permit to operate flights to Iran until March 20, 2020," the embassy said, ISNA reported.

"This permit has been issued for Iranian flights (one-way flights from Dubai to Iran) to return Iranian passengers to the country."

The UAE called off all flights to and from Iran in February after coronavirus spread was announced across the Islamic Republic.

Don't travel, don't socialize, stay inside: Italy's coronavirus lockdown rules

Italians have been told to stay at home and avoid all non-essential travel as quarantine measures were extended to the whole country to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

Here are the main points of a government decree signed on Monday night that brings the restrictions into effect until 3 April.

From Tuesday, the movements of Italy's population of 60 million are severely limited. Travel is only allowed for "urgent, verifiable work situations and emergencies or health reasons".

People who have tested positive for Covid-19 must not leave their homes for any reason, while anyone with a fever or respiratory symptoms is strongly encouraged to stay at home and limit social contact, including with their doctor.

To avoid work-related travel, public and private companies have been urged to put their staff on leave.

■ Gatherings cancelled

The latest decree prohibits "all forms of gatherings in public places or sites open to the public" – going further than the rules that went into force over the weekend in large parts of northern Italy.

Swimming pools, spas, sports halls and wellness centers must not operate, and ski resorts across the country are shut.

■ Venues closed

To encourage people to stay in, bars and restaurants are only allowed to open between 6am and 6pm, and only if it is possible to keep a distance of at least a meter between customers.

All museums and cultural venues are closed, as well as nightclubs, cinemas, theatres and casinos, which have been shut since the weekend.

While supermarkets will remain open, large shopping centres and department stores must close on public holidays and the day before public holidays.

■ School's out

Schools and universities are closed, and all exams cancelled. Religious institutions will stay open, as long as people can stay a meter from one another – but ceremonies such as marriages, baptisms and funerals are banned.

(Source: The Guardian)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Pyu Ancient Cities

The Pyu Ancient Cities in Peru provide the earliest testimony of the introduction of Buddhism into Southeast Asia almost two thousand years ago and the attendant economic, socio-political and cultural transformations which resulted in the rise of the first, largest, and longest-lived urbanized settlements of the region up until the 9th century.



The Pyu showed a striking capacity to assimilate Indic influences and swiftly move into a significant degree of re-invention. They created a special form of urbanization, the city of extended urban format, which subsequently influenced urbanization in most of mainland Southeast Asia.

These earliest Buddhist city-states played a seminal role in the process of transmitting the literary, architectural and ritual traditions of Pali-based Buddhism to other societies in the sub-region where they continue to be practiced up to the present.

Halin, Beikthano and Sri Ksetra together as a Serial Property jointly testify to the several aspects of the development of this new model of urban settlement for the Southeast Asian region.

Together the three cities provide evidence for the entire sequence and range of Pyu urban transformation from ca. 2nd century BCE to the 9th century CE, Buddhist monastic communities, distinctive mortuary practice, skilful water management, and long distant trade.

At all three Pyu Ancient City sites, the irrigated landscape of the Pyu era is still impacting on the rural livelihoods of the modern population, while the religious monuments continue to be venerated by Buddhist pilgrims from throughout the region.

(Source: UNECO)

Tehran's major museums open during Noruz despite corona fear

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Tehran's major museums and historical places will be open during Noruz (Iranian new year holidays, starting March 21) despite the outbreak of coronavirus.

The National Museum of Iran, Niavaran Cultural Historical Complex, Sa'dabad Cultural-Historical Complex, and the National Museum of the Holy Quran will be open to the public according to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts ISNA reported on Monday.

The ministry has closed its affiliated cultural heritage museums and historical sites as of February 23 in 15 provinces in a preventive measure and until further notice.

Earlier this month, tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan asked the nation to postpone or reschedule tours so as to help the tourism industry over the virus outbreak.

"My suggestion to my dear people is that they do not cancel their hotel reservations and domestic tours as far as possible in order to help the tourism industry and prevent it from bankruptcy by making their reservations in time after virus is controlled."

Domestic travel and subsequently visiting museums and historical sites reaches traditionally its climax from mid-March to early April, a time corresponding to the Noruz holidays. Iranians made 74 million overnight stays in their domestic trips during the Noruz holidays last year, which showed a 20 percent increase year on year.

Iranian authorities have also limited travel between its major cities in an effort to halt the virus spread. A ban on traffic on some of the country's roads, particularly [roads to] touristic provinces, was approved and put into practice as of March 5 evening to fight the coronavirus outbreak.

The number of coronavirus cases in the country has risen to 8,042, with 2,731 recovered and 291 dead, official sources announced on Tuesday.

The U.S.-based Global Business Travel Association has predicted that the coronavirus could scythe the \$560 billion from spending on corporate global travel this year, a 37 percent drop from its 2020 global expenditure forecast, as meetings and events are cancelled and companies limit travel to protect employees.



People visit a majestic capital of a column from Persepolis, the ceremonial capital city of the Persian Achaemenid Empire (ca. 550-330 BC), at the National Museum of Iran.

Kish Island to close tourist sites during Noruz amid coronavirus outbreak

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – It started with domestic flight restrictions to the Kish Island, but authorities have announced the Persian Gulf island "will receive no traveler" during the Noruz holidays (starting March 21).

"All the malls, commercial, cultural, sports, and recreational centers as well as places such as hairdressers and ... that were previously announced to be closed will remain closed until further notice," Kish health council announced.

"All patients and their confidants are required to comply with mandatory quarantine at home, and if they fail to comply with the requirements of the prosecutor's office on Kish Island, mandatory quarantine measures will be forced," the council said, adding, "cancellation of Noruz trips to the



Kish Island remains in place."

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.

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.

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.

Arts of ancient Iran: cylinder seal with links between Mesopotamia and the Indus

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** – The pictured cylinder seal, which was found in Susa, southwest Iran, and is currently kept at the Louvre, reflects the extent of commercial links between Mesopotamia, Iran and the Indus.

The language of the inscription carved on the cylinder seal reveals that it was (probably) made in Harappa in the Indus Valley, according to the Louvre's Department of Near Eastern Antiquities.

In Antiquity, the valley was known as Meluhha. The seal's chalky white appearance is due to the fired steatite it is made of. Craftsmen in the Indus Valley made most of their seals from this material, although square shapes were usually favored. The animal carving is similar to those found in Harappan works.

The animal is a bull with no hump on its shoulders, or possibly a short-horned gaur. Its head is lowered and the body unusually elongated. As was often the case, the animal is depicted eating from a woven wicker manger.



The seal is made of fired steatite, a material widely used by craftsmen in Harappa. The animal - a bull with no hump on its shoulders - is also widely attested in the region.

■ Trading links between the Indus, Iran, and Mesopotamia

This piece can be compared to another circular seal carved with a Harappan inscription, also found in Susa. The two seals reveal the existence of trading links between this region and the Indus valley. Other Hara-

ppan objects have likewise been found in Mesopotamia, whose sphere of influence reached as far as Susa.

■ The manufacture and use of the seals

Cylinder seals were used mainly to protect sealed vessels and even doors to storage spaces against tampering. The surface of the seal was carved. Because the seals were so small, the artists had to carve tiny scenes on a material that allowed for fine detail. The

seal was then rolled over clay to produce a reverse print of the carving. Some cylinder seals also had handles

■ What were the ancient seals?

Seals were small, engraved devices used to make an impression, usually on clay or wax. Seals came in various shapes, including cones, squares, cylinders, and even animal heads. Seal impressions could indicate ownership or authenticate a document, and they could be used to secure bags or openings, such as doors or entrances to tombs.

Seals were fashioned out of a variety of materials, including bone, limestone, metal, semiprecious stone, or wood. Sometimes the names of the owner and his father were inscribed on the seal. Some seals showed the owner's title.

In order to authenticate a document, the owner of the seal would press its engraving into the clay, wax, or other soft substance affixed to the document. The substance would then harden and hopefully prevent someone from tampering with the document.

How to disinfect your space on an airplane

By Tariro Mzezewa

Major airlines, including Delta Air Lines and American Airlines, say they clean their planes to varying degrees between flights, and that plane cleanliness is a priority. But some travelers, including apparently Ms. Campbell, prefer the comfort of knowing they've also taken measures of their own to sanitize their airplane space.

There's been increased attention on this in recent weeks, with the unsettling spread of the coronavirus around the world.

"The airplane and airplane seat is a public space, and we know that germs can live on surfaces for a long time, so it doesn't hurt to clean it," said Aaron Milstone, associate hospital epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Hospital.

Here are some tips for cleaning your area of a plane and keeping healthy on a flight.

■ Keep your hands clean and stop touching your face

"Wiping down surfaces on a plane won't hurt, as long as it doesn't give you a false

sense of security," Andrew Mehle, associate professor of medical microbiology and immunology at the University of Wisconsin Madison, said, stressing that sanitizing your space on a plane should be done in conjunction with washing hands and following other best practices.

■ Get an informed guide to the global outbreak with our daily coronavirus newsletter.

Viral particles, the transmission vehicle of the coronavirus, must travel within mucus or saliva, and they must enter through eyes, nose or mouth. While the coronavirus can last on surfaces like tray tables, touch screens, door handles and faucets — one study found that other coronaviruses, like SARS and MERS stay on metal, glass and plastic for up to nine days — a disinfectant on a hard surface, or soap while washing your hands, will kill the virus.

However, most people tend to touch their faces more often than they realize. Doing so after touching a surface where there are droplets from when someone sneezed or

coughed can lead to the virus being passed on. So first things first: Wash your hands.

"It's just as important to think about where your hands have been and to wash your hands," said Dr. Mehle.

Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or long enough to sing "Happy Birthday" twice, and if that's not possible, then use a generous amount of hand sanitizer.

■ Choose a window seat

A study from Emory University found that during flu season, the safest place to sit on a plane is by a window. Researchers studied passengers and crew members on 10 three- to five-hour flights and observed that people sitting in window seats had less contact with potentially sick people.

"Book a window seat, try not to move during the flight, stay hydrated and keep your hands away from your face," said Vicki Stover Hertzberg, a professor at Emory University's School of Nursing and director of the Center for Nursing Data Science at Emory, and one of the lead researchers on the study. "Be vigilant about your hand hygiene."

■ Disinfect hard surfaces

When you get to your seat and your hands are clean, use disinfecting wipes to clean the hard surfaces at your seat like the head and arm rest, the seatbelt buckle, the remote, screen, seat back pocket and the tray table. If the seat is hard and nonporous or leather or pleather, you can wipe that down too. Using wipes on upholstered seats could lead to a wet seat and spreading of germs rather than killing them.

"It's not bad to wipe down the area around you, but it's worth remembering that the coronavirus is not going to jump off the seat and get into your mouth," Dr. Milstone said. "People should be more careful of touching something dirty then putting their hands on their faces."

Disinfecting wipes typically say on the packaging how long a surface needs to stay wet in order for them to work. That time can range from 30 seconds to a few minutes. In order for the wipes to work, you need to follow those time requirements.

(Source: The New York Times)

Iran fully prepared to contain coronavirus outbreak: WHO

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** – Richard Brennan, the Regional Emergency Director of the World Health Organization (WHO) Eastern Mediterranean Region, has said Iran is fully prepared to contain the novel coronavirus outbreak.

Brennan, along with a team of experts, visited a hospital resorts in Tehran on Tuesday to ensure that the process of service and control of the virus is running at its highest level, IRNA reported.

He said that the most important pillar for controlling the contagious diseases, especially COVID-19, is the strong cooperation between responsible bodies and the public, which fortunately is clearly visible in Iran.

Brennan also stated that Iranians behave in a powerful, effective and efficient manner in managing various



crises and can overcome the COVID-19 crisis.

In a press conference in Tehran on Saturday, the WHO official said countries in the region and all over the world should use Iran's experience as a role model in fight against the novel coronavirus.

"Iran benefits from one of the strongest healthcare systems in the region. Iran has made notable achievements in the field of battling coronavirus."

The World Health Organization has so far sent an aircraft carrying tons of medical supplies and test kits along with a medical team to Iran in order to help combat the novel coronavirus.

Deputy health minister Kianoush Jahanpour said that at least 8,042 people have so far been infected in the country. Of the total figure, 2,731 have been recovered and 291 have died.

Iran bans export of medical products over coronavirus outbreak

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** – Iran has banned export of some self-protection equipment, textile and cellulose products as the country tries to meet surging demand of the domestic market driven by COVID-19 outbreak, ISNA news agency reported on Monday.

Following the coronavirus onset and the need to curb the disease, the customs administration has ordered to ban the export of nine categories of goods to provide the health ministry with the necessary supplies.

Accordingly, it is prohibited to export medical equipment items including face masks, scrubs, and medical gloves.

Exports of items such as bleachers, disinfectants, soap and all related sanitary products are also banned.

It is also forbidden to export detergents



and disinfectant liquids, alcohol, pumps and spray taps.

Textile and cellulose products with a subset of non-textile products, as well as tissues, sanitary napkins and paper products will not be exported.

Russia sends 50,000 COVID-19 diagnostic kits to Iran

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** – Russia has sent 50,000 coronavirus diagnostic kits to the Iranian Embassy in Moscow to help combat the COVID-19 outbreak, Iran's Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali has said.

The kits will be delivered to Iran in the shortest possible time, he noted, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

Jalali praised Russia's cooperation with Iran in the fight against the virus, pointing to determination of the two sides to increase cooperation in various fields, especially in the health sector.

Referring to Iran's widespread efforts to contain the outbreak, he stated that given that the eradication of the virus requires regional and global cooperation, negotiations held with Russian authorities on expanded



cooperation.

Jalali expressed hope that the two countries would boost cooperation in the near future.

In this regard, the Russian Red Cross Society has expressed readiness to send medical equipment to the country.

Carbon emissions fall at fastest rate in 30 years as electricity sector moves away from coal

Carbon emissions generated by the electricity sector fell at the fastest rate in at least 30 years as countries turned their backs on coal, analysis suggests.

Coal-fuelled electricity declined 3 per cent in 2019, leading to a 2 per cent fall in the power sector's carbon dioxide emissions, according to a worldwide assessment by climate think tank Ember.

But the report's authors said a shift away from fossil fuels was not yet "the new normal" and warned governments must "dramatically accelerate" the transition to sustainable energy sources if the world is to avoid the worst impacts of global warming.

Last year's fall in coal-fired power was the largest since 1990, when the International Agency began reported figures, and was driven in part by a switch to renewables in Europe and more competitive gas pricing in the US. Coal generated 24 per cent less electricity in Europe and 16 per cent less in the US in 2019.

Nuclear plant restarts in Japan and South Korea also slowed demand for coal, according to Ember. But China bucked the trend by increasing its coal usage by 2 per cent to become responsible for half of worldwide coal-fired power.

Dave Jones, Ember's electricity analyst and lead author of the report, said: "The global decline of coal and power sector emissions is good news for the climate but governments have to dramatically accelerate the electricity transition so that global coal generation collapses throughout the 2020s."

Coal-fired power generation needs to plummet by 11 per cent a year for the next decade if global warming is to be limited to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, the limit scientists warn is needed to avoid to worse impacts of the climate crisis.

Ember said limiting the rise to 1.5C was "looking extremely difficult," adding: "Progress is being made on reducing coal generation, but with nothing like the urgency needed to meet global climate goals, especially in Asia."

The report warned the US coal collapse was "undermined" by a move towards gas, which rose 4 per cent worldwide. "To switch from coal into gas is just swapping one fossil fuel for another," said Mr Jones.

"The cheapest and quickest way to end coal generation is through a rapid roll-out of wind and solar."

In the EU, where coal generation fell by 24 per cent, there was a shift from coal straight to wind and solar power.

Wind and solar generation rose by 15 per cent worldwide

in 2019, generating 8 per cent of the world's electricity.

The same level of growth in renewables is needed every year to meet the Paris climate agreement, added Ember's report. It said lower prices "provide hope" that rate can be sustained" but continued growth "will require a concerted effort from all regions".

Mr Jones said: "China's growth in coal, and to some extent gas, is alarming but the answers are all there."

"The EU leaps out with 18 per cent of electricity now coming from wind and solar, but with the US on 11 per cent, China at 9 per cent and India at 8 per cent the race is on."

The report also revealed demand for electricity slowed to 1.4 per cent last year, the slowest increase since the 2009 recession, due to low economic growth and a milder winter in the US and EU.

The analysis incorporates data on 85 per cent of the world's electricity generation, including from China, the US, India and EU, and informed estimates of the remaining 15 per cent.

Electricity generated by renewables overtook fossil fuels for the first time in the third quarter of last year, according to analysis by Carbon Brief.

(Source: The Independent)

China delivers third batch of COVID-19 aid to Iran

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** – China has sent the third consignment of aid to Iran in order to help fight coronavirus, ISNA news agency reported on Monday.



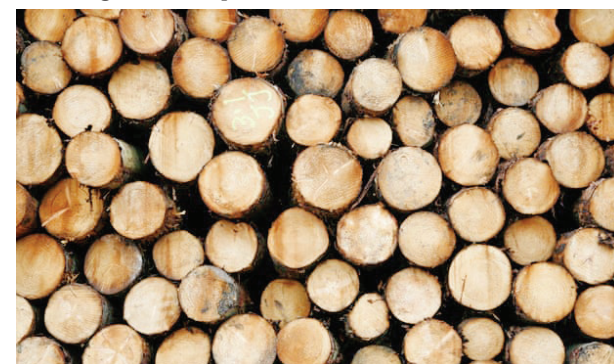
The flight carried 1,600 kg of supplies consisting of traditional Chinese medicine for coronavirus treatment, scrubs, surgical masks, diagnostic kits and face shields that have been donated by Chinese companies and people.

Medicine worth 700,000 yuan (around \$100,000) is included in the items. This medicine is being used to treat coronavirus in China.

China has so far sent 5,000 coronavirus test kits and 250,000 face masks to Iran.

Trees on commercial UK plantations 'not helping climate crisis'

Commercial tree plantations in Britain do not store carbon to help the climate crisis because more than half of the harvested timber is used for less than 15 years and a quarter is burned, according to a new report.



While fast-growing non-native conifers can sequester carbon more quickly than slow-growing broadleaved trees, that carbon is released again if the trees are harvested and the wood is burned or used in products with short lifespans, such as packaging, pallets and fencing.

Of the UK's 2018 timber harvest, 23% was used for wood fuel, while 56% was taken to sawmills. Only 33% of the wood used by sawmills was for construction, where wood used in permanent buildings can lock in carbon for decades. Much of sawmill wood was used for fencing (36%) with a service life of 15 years, or packaging and pallets (24%) or paper (4%).

"There is no point growing a lot of fast-growing conifers with the logic that they sequester carbon quickly if they then go into a paper mill because all that carbon will be lost to the atmosphere within a few years," said Thomas Lancaster, head of UK land policy at the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), which commissioned the report. "We should not be justifying non-native forestry on carbon grounds if it's not being used as a long-term carbon store."

(Source: The Guardian)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Bangladesh bans some ferry trips

(April 23, 2003)

Bangladesh has stopped ferries from sailing between late afternoon and early evening after two ferries sank, resulting in the deaths of well over 100 hundred people. Several others are still missing. This report from Alastair Lawson:

The government's decision to impose restrictions on **ferry sailings** is intended to stop vessels from operating when the weather is at its most **volatile**.

The two boats which sunk earlier this week, were both caught in a sudden late afternoon storm which is common at this time of the year. The travel ban means that hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis, who rely on ferries as their **only means of transport**, will have their movements **curtailed**.

The government's initiative will inevitably be seen by some critics as a **knee-jerk reaction** which has been introduced too late. But ministers say that a **blanket ban** is the only thing they can do at the moment to stop **overloaded ferries** from sailing. They say that they lack both the money and the resources to **deploy** officials across the country to **assess the safety of** each and every ferry.

Rescue workers are meanwhile still recovering bodies from the sites of both disasters, and a stream of government ministers has **paid condolence** visits to the families of the bereaved. The front pages of many newspapers have photographs of **piles of shoes** belonging to those who died. For many relatives, they are the only way of identifying their loved ones.

Words

ferry sailings: the act or instance of travelling across the sea by a boat that carries people or goods

volatile: changing quickly, unexpectedly and often

only means of transport: only possible way of travelling

curtailed: reduced or restricted

a knee-jerk reaction: a sudden, predictable response that has not been carefully thought about

a blanket ban: a ban that applies to all things or people or in a particular group – in this case, ferries

overloaded ferries: ferries that carry too many people

to deploy: to send; to dispatch

to assess the safety of: to consider and judge how safe the ferries are

paid condolence: offered sympathy

piles of shoes: lots of shoes lying on top of each other

(Source: BBC)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Iran will defeat COVID-19, we believe: Chinese envoy

Chinese Ambassador in Iran, Chang Hua, has said he believes that Iran would overcome the crisis of coronavirus outbreak.

"We believe that by sending humanitarian aid, Iran will overcome the crisis," he said in a meeting with Mahmoud Reza Peyravi, secretary general of the Iranian Red Crescent Society, IRNA reported.

The envoy praised Iran's Red Crescent Society as the first organization affiliated with the Red Cross and the Red Crescent societies which sent humanitarian shipments of aid to the Chinese people.

A delegation of Chinese medical experts arrived in Tehran on Saturday with a cargo of aid to help combat the novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19.

سفیر چین: باور داریم ایران بر بحران کرونا غلبه خواهد کرد

سفیر جمهوری خلق چین در تهران ابراز امیدواری کرد ایران بر بحران شیوع ویروس کرونا غلبه خواهد کرد.

به گزارش ایرنا، چانگ هوا روز دوشنبه در حاشیه دیدار با محمودرضا پیروی دبیرکل جمعیت هلال احمر ایران گفت: ما باور داریم که با ارسال کمک های انساندوستانه از سوی دوستان دولت ایران از بحران این بیماری عبور خواهد کرد. دیپلمات ارشد چین در ادامه ضمن قدردانی از جمعیت هلال احمر ایران به عنوان نخستین سازمان بشردوستانه عضو جمعیت های ملی صلیب سرخ و هلال احمر که محموله های کمک را برای مردم چین ارسال کرد، گفت: ما هم با شدت گرفتن ویروس کرونا در کنار ایران هستیم.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"cryo-, cry-"

■ **Meaning**: freezing or cold

■ **For example**: You can return to most normal activities the day after **cryosurgery**.

PHRASAL VERB

Nail somebody down

■ **Meaning**: to force someone to say clearly what they want or what they intend to do

■ **For example**: Before they repair the car, nail them down to a price.

IDIOM

Cream of the crop

■ **Explanation**: the best people or things in a particular group

■ **For example**: As usual, the cream of the crop of this year's graduates were offered the best jobs.

U.S.-Taliban pact: Agreement on a new war in Afghanistan

➔ The United States has also called on the Taliban not to issue passports, visas or other ID cards to those who have enmity toward the U.S. These are all within the authority of a government, not groups.

Third, since the inter-Afghani talks which is supposed to start these days, there is no specific issue on the agenda and it is not even clear who is going to be a negotiator on behalf of the Taliban.

The Taliban continue to insist that they do not recognize the Afghan government and will not talk to its officials. The Afghan government also insists that the members of the negotiating team must be determined by the government.

Experts believe that these ambiguities are deliberately aimed at shaping Afghanistan's political space for the coming days.

Fourth, the agreement was signed at the presence of representatives from 30 countries and the UN. However, neither the Afghan government nor the representatives of civil and political groups were invited to the ceremony.

Experts are asking why no Afghan government delegate was invited to the event. They have likened the signing of the agreement to the "Deal of the Century".

Fifth, hours after the signing of the agreement, U.S. President Donald Trump told a news conference that the Taliban would fight the terrorists, which means that the deal is not for peace, but a new way of managing the war in Afghanistan and that the Taliban is not going to give up fighting.

The U.S. definition of "terrorist" has always been changing rapidly. And now with Trump's definition, Taliban is a U.S. ally and that makes it unclear whom will they fight as a terrorist? This ambiguity makes the future of the war in Afghanistan extremely worrying.

Saudi-coalition violate Stockholm ceasefire over 170 times

➔ The deal between Yemen's Ansarullah movement and representatives loyal to former Yemeni President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi included three provisions: a ceasefire along the Hudaydah front and the redeployment of armed forces out of the city and its port; an agreement on prisoner exchange; and a statement of understanding on the southern Yemeni city of Ta'izz.

Saudi Arabia and a number of its allies launched the devastating campaign against Yemen in March 2015, with the goal of bringing back to power the government of Hadi and crushing Ansarullah.

The US-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization, estimates that the war has claimed more than 100,000 lives over the past nearly five years.

The Saudi-led coalition has been widely criticized for the high civilian death toll from its bombing campaign. The alliance has carried out nearly 20,500 air raids in Yemen, according to the data collected by the Yemen Data Project.

The Saudis have been enforcing a tight naval blockade on Yemen, particularly on Hudaydah, which acts as a lifeline for the impoverished nation, since August 2015, five months after it started the war.

Xi visits Wuhan as coronavirus outbreak slows in China

Chinese President Xi Jinping has made his first visit to Wuhan since the outbreak of the coronavirus in what could be seen as a signal from the government that the health crisis is coming under control.

Xi, who has been largely unseen throughout the epidemic, made his first appearance on Tuesday in the region that had been under lockdown for weeks.

State news agency Xinhua said the president wanted to "visit and express regards to" those affected by the infection, including medical workers and patients.

National television broadcaster CCTV said Xi began his visit at Huoshenshan hospital, one of the makeshift medical facilities treating patients in severe and critical conditions.

Images published in state-owned media outlets showed Xi greeting the healthcare workers and meeting with health officials, as well as waving to a coronavirus patient through video conferencing.

More than 80,000 people have been infected in the country. More than 3,100 have died.

Xi's visit came at a time when reported cases of coronavirus infection, known as COVID-19, are steadily declining in China. *(Source: al Jazeera)*

U.S. starts pulling out troops from Afghanistan

American troops have reportedly begun their initial troop withdrawal as part of the U.S.-Taliban peace agreement, with hundreds of soldiers leaving the country on Monday with no plans for replacements.

Speaking to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity, a U.S. official confirmed the beginning steps of the withdrawal process have begun, with plans to drop the number of U.S. troops in the country from 13,000 to 8,600.

According to the signed peace agreement, the withdrawal process for U.S. troops had to begin 10 days within the signing of the agreement, which took place on February 29. Defense Secretary Mark Esper approved the withdrawal on March 2. Once troop levels hit 8,600, the conditions in the country will be reassessed before further troops are pulled.

The peace agreement was signed last month by U.S. peace envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad and one of the Taliban's senior leaders, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, in Qatar's capital Doha.

Troops are to be pulled over the course of 135 days from five bases, and the remaining soldiers within 14 months should the country remain stable enough to not need US presence. The pact also promised lifting sanctions on Taliban members by August.

Although the group's leader Hibatullah Akhundzada ordered his fighters to follow the rules of the agreement, they did not follow orders and continued attacks on Afghan forces. U.S. troops responded with strikes.

Another aspect of the deal that may be jeopardized is the promised release of 5,000 imprisoned Taliban fighters. President Ashraf Ghani has said he will only release the men if he gets "an executive guarantee so that these people will not return to violence."

Under the agreement, the prisoners are to be released by March 10. *(Source: RT)*

Putin says no need to do away with Presidential term limits

Russian President Vladimir Putin has spoken out against a proposal to remove constitutional limits on the number of terms a president can serve.

"The proposal made by [United Russia lawmaker] Valentina Tereshkova to exclude the number of terms a president can serve from the constitution is understandable. This practice exists in many other countries, including among our neighbours," Putin said, speaking to Duma lawmakers in Moscow on Tuesday.

"Stability must be the priority, but society should have guarantees about the regularity of a [change] of power. I consider it inappropriate to remove from the constitution restrictions on the number of presidential terms," Putin added.

"At a time when the country still has a lot of problems, but when the political, economic and social spheres have gained a sense of internal stability, of maturity, when the is doubtlessly becoming more powerful and difficult to assail from the outside, then the possibility of a change of power comes to the forefront. This is necessary for the dynamics of the country's development," Putin said.

The president stressed that he believed that eventually the time would come in Russia when the presidency would no longer be "so personified - would no longer be associated with any one specific person."

Putin made the comments in Russia's State Duma lower house of parliament, where he discussed the term limit issue and other proposed amendments to Russia's constitution ahead of a national vote to be held in April.

The Russian president, whose second and final presidential term runs out in 2024, has repeatedly commented on the importance of constitutional guarantees to "rotation in office," which he said was "important" for Russia.

At the moment, the president can serve an unlimited number of terms, but no more than two of them consecutively.



During Tuesday's address, Putin stressed that the proposed constitutional amendments were long overdue, and called on the country to work together in a consolidated manner amid the difficult situation emerging in global politics, security and economics.

He added that he did not believe in the need for snap parliamentary elections, as proposed by Liberal Democratic Party of Russia opposition leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky. Putin added

however that the final decision on that matter would be up to lawmakers.

He added that the final decision on whether the constitutional amendments would pass or not would be given to the voters. "However you vote on 22, so it will be," Putin said.

The Duma approved the proposed amendments to the constitution in the second reading.

(Source: Sputnik)

Egypt, UAE establish Libyan naval commando unit to fight Turkey

Backed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt has reportedly set up a special naval operations force made up of Libyan commandos, which is tasked with targeting Turkish naval interests off Libyan coasts.

The London-based newspaper Al-Araby Al-Jadeed quoted Egyptian and Libyan sources as saying on Monday that the military squad is aimed at blocking the naval route that Turkey uses to send military aid to the internationally-recognized government of Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj in the capital, Tripoli.

The force, which consists of around 50 fighters, returned to eastern Libya last week after receiving training from the Egyptian navy in one of the naval bases set up for this purpose, said the sources.

The squad will receive another batch of fighters who are

still undergoing intensive training at one of the Egyptian naval bases, they said.

The sources further said that Abu Dhabi would supply advanced naval boats for the mission, which will be supervised by Egyptian military experts before being handed over to naval forces linked to renegade General Khalifa Haftar fighting the Tripoli government.

Haftar has launched an offensive since April 2019 to seize Tripoli.

Turkey has reportedly been transferring allied militants from Syria to Libya to shore up the Tripoli government.

Last month, the Libyan rebels claimed they had destroyed a Turkish cargo ship carrying ammunition and weapons at the port of Tripoli.

Haftar is supported by Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE.

Turkey says refugee deal with EU 'needs updating'

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu says a 2016 refugee deal between his country and the European Union (EU) needs to be updated, following unsuccessful meetings between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and European officials in Brussels.

Tens of thousands of refugees have been trying to cross into Europe via Turkey since Ankara late last month decided to loosen controls on refugees seeking to reach Europe via its territory, violating the 2016 deal with the EU. That has caused tensions on the Turkey's border with Greece, where Greek forces have been clashing with the refugees to block them.

Cavusoglu said in an interview with state-run Anadolu news agency that the EU had to grant visa-free travel to Turkish citizens within the 28-nation bloc's Schengen area and that an update of the country's customs union with the bloc must be implemented to help solve the refugee issue.

His remarks came after Erdogan left meet-



ings with EU and NATO leaders in Brussels late on Monday without issuing a joint statement or appearing at a joint press conference, as

had been planned.

Erdogan made the trip to Brussels amid heightened tensions between Ankara and

the EU over Turkey's decision regarding its border controls last month, which sparked fears of a repeat of the 2015 refugee crisis, when over one million refugees arrived in the EU, most of them fleeing conflict zones in the Middle East and North Africa, via Turkish territory.

Greece — which shares a border with Turkey — and the EU have accused Ankara of deliberately encouraging the refugees to cross the border as a way of pressuring European leaders into offering more financial assistance or backing Turkey's campaign in Syria.

In March 2016, Turkey and the EU sealed a deal intended to stem the flow of refugees from Syria and other troubled countries to Europe in return for financial and political rewards for Ankara, including visa liberalization. Ankara, however, failed to meet the 72 conditions demanded by the EU for the visa exemption to be approved.

(Source: Anadolu)

Syrian army discovers one of Nusra leader's hideout in Aleppo

The Syrian army has discovered one of the hideouts of the leader of Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist group, formerly known as al-Nusra Front, on the outskirts of the country's northwestern city of Aleppo.

Syria's official news agency SANA reported on Monday that Syrian Arab Army units had uncovered the hiding place of the terrorist group's leader known as Abu Mohammad al-Jolani while patrolling the liberated areas in Aleppo's countryside.

SANA said the site, located in Anjara area

15 kilometers west of Aleppo city, was one of the lairs that Jolani used to direct terrorist attacks on the strategic city and the villages in its vicinity.

"The underground hideout consisted of several rooms including operations rooms and living quarters, complete with ventilation, lighting, and multiple entrances and exits," the news agency said, adding that the hideout also contained vehicles that had been used by the leader and senior members of the terrorist outfit.

In another report on Monday, SANA said

that the Syrian army had uncovered a fortified hideout for terrorists dug beneath a mountain near the town of Anjara in addition to a tunnel in al-Layramoun area on the outskirts of Aleppo city.

The fortified hideout contained ammo, grenades, and assorted shells, including mortar rounds, anti-armor and anti-air rockets as well as rocket tripod mounts.

The Syrian news agency said the tunnel in al-Layramoun area was dug into the bedrock beneath a building under construction and extended 400 meters eastwards towards

al-Khalidiye neighborhood.

"The terrorists couldn't finish the tunnels as the army defeated them and forced them to retreat before its completion," a police officer was quoted as saying by SANA, adding that the building above the tunnel contained ammo and other items left behind by terrorists.

Syrian army units have over the past weeks managed to wrest control over most areas in western Aleppo following clashes with members of the al-Nusra terrorist group.

(Source: SANA)

Taliban prepare for Afghan president to order prisoner swap

The Taliban have sent vehicles to be ready to collect fighters expected to be released by the Afghan government in a prisoner exchange and said they will honor the deal by handing over 1,000 government troops.

The release, expected to be announced on Tuesday, is part of a deal signed by the United States and the militant group last month that would allow U.S. forces and NATO troops to withdraw from Afghanistan to end more than 18 years of war.

The Taliban have demanded the release of the prisoners as a confidence-building measure to pave the way for the opening of direct talks between the government and the insurgents after talks with the both sides and the United States individually.

Sediq Sediqqi, a spokesman for President Ashraf Ghani, said on Twitter that the presidential palace would issue a decree with details of the process, and the release was contingent on security and peace developments.

"The Afghan government has reached a framework based on which the release of prisoners will be in exchange for a



significant reduction in the level of violence," he said.

A senior Taliban leader in Doha, the group's political headquarters, said vehicles had been sent to an area near Bagram Prison, north of the capital Kabul, to fetch the freed fighters.

"After our conversation with Zalmay Khalilzad (the U.S.

special envoy for Afghanistan) on Monday, in which he conveyed to us the release of our 5,000 prisoners, we sent vehicles to pick them up," he said.

A government source said any release was unlikely in the coming days and could be weeks away.

The issue has become one of the biggest sticking points in any progress toward peace, complicated further by differing wording of documents between the United States and the Taliban and the United States and the Afghan government.

"The Taliban needs this to show to their rank and file. For the foot soldiers on the ground, a reduction-in-violence agreement, a troop withdrawal agreement signed in Doha means nothing, fighters returning is something they can feel," said an Asian diplomat in Kabul.

Khalilzad attended Ghani's swearing-in ceremony in Kabul on Monday. The president had previously rejected the Taliban demand for its fighters to be released.

(Source: Reuters)

Iran's NPC plants sapling in honor of Siamand Rahman

1 → He was laid to rest in Oshnavieh last week. "Siamand was known for his chivalry and sportsmanship and I think he is a role model for the other Iranian athletes. Siamand will be missed forever," Rezaei said.

The two-time gold medalist in London 2012 and Rio 2016 was preparing to win his third successive gold at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

Rahman broke the 300kg barrier in the men's over 107kg at the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, lifting an unprecedented 310kg. The mark he set is the equivalent of three baby elephants.

The Iranian powerlifter had already won three gold medals in the last three Asian Para Games (2010 Guangzhou, 2014 Incheon and 2018 Jakarta).

"Siamand was a pioneer for his sport, an inspiration for many in his home country Iran and around the world, and a fantastic ambassador for the Paralympic Movement. He was also a wonderful human being, a gentle giant and one of the friendliest people you could ever meet," the International Paralympic Committee's (IPC) President Andrew Parsons.

"As the world's strongest Paralympian, he made global headlines at Rio 2016 when he became the first Para athlete to lift over 300kg. Few will forget that phenomenal performance which marked a landmark in the history of Paralympic sport.

"The thoughts and deepest condolences of the whole IPC, World Para Powerlifting and the Paralympic Movement are with Siamand's family, friends and loved ones at this difficult time. Our prayers are also with our friends at the Iranian National Paralympic Committee. Sadly, today we have lost a true Paralympic great," he added.



2020 Asian Club Volleyball Championship postponed



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Growing concerns over the Covid-19 outbreak has led to the postponement of the 2020 Asian Men's Club Volleyball Championship, which is due to be held in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand from April 18 to 25.

Since its outbreak in China last December, the novel coronavirus had claimed more than 4,000 lives and over 114,000 people were globally infected with the fast spreading disease. In light of the severe situation worldwide and Asia in particular and to best preserve the health and safety of players, officials and fans, the annual tournament has been postponed to August 10-17, 2020.

Organizers Thailand Volleyball Associ-

ation and hosts Nakhon Ratchasima have sent official letter to AVC, asking for the postponement of the topflight competition over fears of the deadly virus. The governing body eventually came to a decision to call off the tournament and has already circulated letter of postponement to all participating teams, asianvolleyball.net reported.

Participating teams in the 2020 Asian Men's Club Volleyball Championship comprise Australia, Hong Kong China, Iran, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, Chinese Taipei, Kazakhstan, Philippines, Qatar, Sri Lanka, China, Uzbekistan and hosts Thailand.

Defending champions Shahr-dari Varamin will represent Iran in the competition.

Napoli eye Iran international Sardar Azmoun: report



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Italian football club Napoli have shown interest in signing Iranian international forward Sardar Azmoun, 'Corriere dello Sport' reported.

Napoli are monitoring the situation of out-of-favor Real Madrid striker Luka Jovic but another option for the Italian giants is Zenit striker Azmoun, who has scored eleven goals and five assists so far this season.

Azmoun, dubbed "the Iranian Lionel Messi", has been repeatedly linked with a move to English Premier League teams in the recent years but the transfer has

not yet happened.

The 25-year-old forward has represented Iran at the 2015 and 2019 AFC Asian Cups and the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

Azmoun had joined Rubin Kazan from Iranian club Stephan in 2013 and spent the 2015-16 season on loan at FC Rostov. He moved to Rostov on a permanent deal at the start of 2016-17 season before Rubin bought him back in 2017.

Azmoun joined leaders of the Russian domestic league Zenit on a three-and-a-half-year deal in February 2019.

Iran's training camp canceled



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Following the postponement of upcoming Asian qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, Iran national football team's training camp in mid-March has been canceled.

The outbreak of coronavirus has caused sports events to be suspended or postponed in Asia and Europe, including both domestic and international events.

Some of the qualifier matches to be affected are Team Melli's matches against Hong Kong and Cambodia, scheduled for March 26 and 31 respectively.

The Team Melli's training camp was due to be held from March 18 in 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.

It is expected that the competition scheduled for March to be played in October while the matches which were slated for June will be rescheduled for November 2020.

Earlier, all matches for the AFC Champions League Match Day 3 in the West Zone were postponed. The AFC has asked for help from member associations to figure out a way to get the remaining matches played before the round of 16.

Iran Football Organization released a statement last week announcing that all football competitions of every level in Iran have been postponed until the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 19, 2020).



teams to prepare before Euro 2020.

As for the Italian Cup, interrupted after the first leg of the semi-finals, it is almost impossible for it to be completed before the summer.

In the meantime, training continues, along with UEFA's Champions League and Europa League matches behind closed doors.

The government decree allows for the possibility of organizing matches under international jurisdiction in empty stadiums, such as ties in UEFA's Champions League and Europa League.

Juventus are due to host Lyon in the second leg of their Champions League last-16 tie in Turin next week. Inter Milan are due to host Spain's Getafe in the Europa League on Thursday while Roma welcome Sevilla a week later.

According to the Italian sports press, the hypothesis of validating a final classification on the last full day of play, the 24th round of 38 games, does not suit many clubs.

In that case Juventus would be crowned champions of Italy for a ninth consecutive season. (Source: AFP)

Three intl. taekwondo events on Kish Island canceled over virus

MNA — Iranian Taekwondo Federation announced that three international events that were due to be held on Kish Island in April has been canceled due to concerns over the new coronavirus outbreak.

The decision has been made upon the request of the Asian Taekwondo Union to protect the health of athletes and participants, said the federation on Tuesday.

The three events are the 10th Asian Taekwondo Clubs Championships (April 16), 31st Fajr Open (April 18-19), and 3rd Asian Taekwondo Open Championships (April 22-23).

Earlier, the 2020 Asian Taekwondo Championships in Lebanon had been postponed until further notice.

Iran is among the hard-hit countries by the Covid-19. The country has canceled all its domestic sporting events as one of the measures to contain the outbreak. According to Health Ministry Spokesman on Monday, the virus has infected 7,161 individuals, claiming 237 lives, while 2,391 have been recovered and discharged from hospitals.

Persepolis GM Ansarifard resigns

PLDC — Mohammad Hassan Ansarifard resigned as general manager of Persepolis football club on Tuesday.

Ansarifard was appointed as Persepolis GM in last year's August but has stepped down from his role after six months in charge.

Persepolis face financial difficulties in paying the players and coaches' wages.

The Iran professional league (IPL) leader sit top of the table with 10 points above the second team.

The Persepolis club have announced that they will introduce the new general manager as soon as possible.

Boxer Mousavi on brink of booking Olympics berth

Tasnim — Iranian boxer Shahin Mousavi is one win away from securing his place at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.



The Iranian boxer defeated Uzbekistan's Fanat Kakhramonov in Men's 75kg weight class on Monday.

Mousavi will book his place at the Olympics if he defeats his Mongolian opponent Byamba Erdene Otgonbaatar.

The event was initially due to take place in the Chinese city of Wuhan, but was relocated to Amman, Jordan due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Thirty-five countries and 221 boxers are competing at the event, with 41 men's and 22 women's berths up for grabs at the Olympics.

Iran has sent eight boxers to the event.

2020 IFCPF Nations Cup Postponed

The 2020 International Federation of Cerebral Palsy Football (IFCPF) Nations Cup has been postponed due to coronavirus concerns.

The competition was originally scheduled to take place in Olbia, Italy but new dates for the event are 15th – 25th October 2020, with the Local organizing Committee (LOC) and location remaining unchanged. Iran were preparing for the competition as the Asia-Oceania member.

The virus now known as COVID-19 originated in Wuhan, China, late last year and quickly spread across the globe.

Italy's top tier soccer league — Serie A — plays its games in front of empty stadiums.

In England, broadcasters and sporting bodies met on Monday to discuss staging events behind closed doors.

The Premier League and English Football League bodies have also scrapped pre-game handshakes.

Formula 1 has postponed the China Grand Prix and will stage its Bahrain leg with no crowds. The Moto GP event in Qatar — the opening race of the calendar — didn't go ahead due to travel restrictions imposed on Italy.

(Source: IFCPF)

Danielle Ellis voted February's Allianz Athlete of the Month

Canada's sitting volleyball player Danielle Ellis has been selected as February's Allianz Athlete of the Month after leading the campaign to claim the final Tokyo 2020 Paralympic bid at the World ParaVolley qualifier in Halifax, Canada.

Ellis was named the tournament's Most Outstanding Player with a tournament high 47 kills, 12 aces, 12 blocks and 22 digs.

She received 48 per cent of the public votes. Senegal's taekwondo athlete Ibrahima Seye, who went on to win the men's up to 75kg at the African Qualification Tournament for Tokyo 2020, was second in the poll with 37 per cent.

He was followed by US alpine skier Thomas Walsh with 11 per cent. US Nordic skier Oksana Masters and Thai wheelchair fencer Saysunee Jana were also on the shortlist.

The nominations are compiled from submissions by National Paralympic Committees (NPCs) and International Federations (IFs).

Coronavirus as deadly for Italian football as two World Wars

Only the gunfire of two World Wars had previously stopped "calcio" in football-mad Italy.

But from Tuesday all sporting events in the Mediterranean country, including the top-flight Serie A league, will be suspended for a month because of the coronavirus crisis.

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte made the dramatic announcement as the nation grapples with a disease which has killed 463 people and prompted the government to restrict movement for its 60 million citizens.

The suspension until April 3 amounts to the postponement of two championship days, in a league which has already been hit by delays, with four previous games yet to be played.

The Italian Football Federation meets on Tuesday, and the Lega Serie A later in the week to try and develop a recovery plan.

A plan which could only be effective if the championship resumes in April, which will depend on the evolution of the epidemic.

"I'm not an optimist, unfortunately," said AC Milan president Paolo Scaroni, whose club donated 250,000 euros (\$294,000) on Monday for the care of patients in their Lombardy region, hardest hit by the contagion. "So many of us are involved in football that

there is a real risk of contagion. Even if it is true that nobody is as monitored as the players."

Club CEO Ivan Gazidis added: "There are things in life more important than football. We must all act with the utmost responsibility and listen to the advice of the relevant authorities."

Since 1898, only the dark days of two World Wars had stopped Serie A -- between 1916 and 1919 and from 1943 to 1945.

And in 1915 it was interrupted following Italy's entry into the First World War, with Genoa awarded the title which Lazio still claim was tied.

In 1973 a cholera epidemic which left 227 dead in Italy, including more than 170 in Naples, did not halt play.

Even if competition resumes in early April, time is running out with the end of the season scheduled for May 24.

There is little room for maneuver because of Euro 2020 beginning on June 12.

And there are also concerns that the European tournament, due to be hosted across 12 countries with Italy hosting the opening match, might face an unprecedented cancellation.

The Italian press have speculated of a possible reduction of the time allocated to

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Patience is a fitting cover, and wisdom is a sharp sword. So cover your ugly conduct with patience, and kill carnal desires with wisdom.

Imam Ali (AS)

“The Cycling Wind” competing in Tumbleweeds film festival

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iranian director Nazanin Sobhan-Sarbandi’s short animation “The Cycling Wind” is competing in the 9th Tumbleweeds Film Festival for Kids underway in Salt Lake City, Utah, the U.S.



A scene from “The Cycling Wind” by Nazanin Sobhan-Sarbandi.

Produced by the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCY), the film tells the story of a young wind that comes into possession of a bike, which helps the wind to blow even faster without expending much energy, and to truly enjoy its time.

The Tumbleweeds Film Festival, an international film festival for families that screens films and animations for ages 4 and up, will be held until March 15.

Tehran publisher makes “A Woman’s Book of Life” available for Persian readers

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** – Leading American mind-body expert and author Joan Borysenko’s book “A Woman’s Book of Life” has recently been published in Persian by Now Publications in Tehran.

Translated by Qeytas Mardaniard, the 1996 book teaches women how to align with the physical changes that occur at every stage of life in order to maximize health and well-being.

The book allows the reader to look back and see the forgotten gifts of childhood, or to look ahead in celebration of what’s to come. It also tries to show the value of being female and to celebrate the power of the feminine life cycle.

“When the Moon Was Full”, “Diapason” to compete in India’s Habitat film festival

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – The Iranian movies “When the Moon Was Full” and “Diapason” will be screened at the 3rd Habitat International Film Festival (HIFF) in New Delhi, India.



A scene from “When the Moon Was Full” by Iranian director Narges Abyar.

Director Narges Abyar’s acclaimed movie “When the Moon Was Full” tells the story of a woman from Tehran who marries a man from an Iranian province near the border of Pakistan. Soon afterwards, she discovers that her new brother-in-law is a religious extremist trying to recruit her husband for his bloody cause.

Directed by Hamed Tehrani, “Diapason” focuses on a single mother facing the tragic death of her young daughter and the problems she faces from Iran’s laws and customs.

The Habitat International Film Festival was scheduled to be held from March 13 to 22, but it has been postponed to May 21 to 31 due to the epidemic of the new coronavirus in the world.

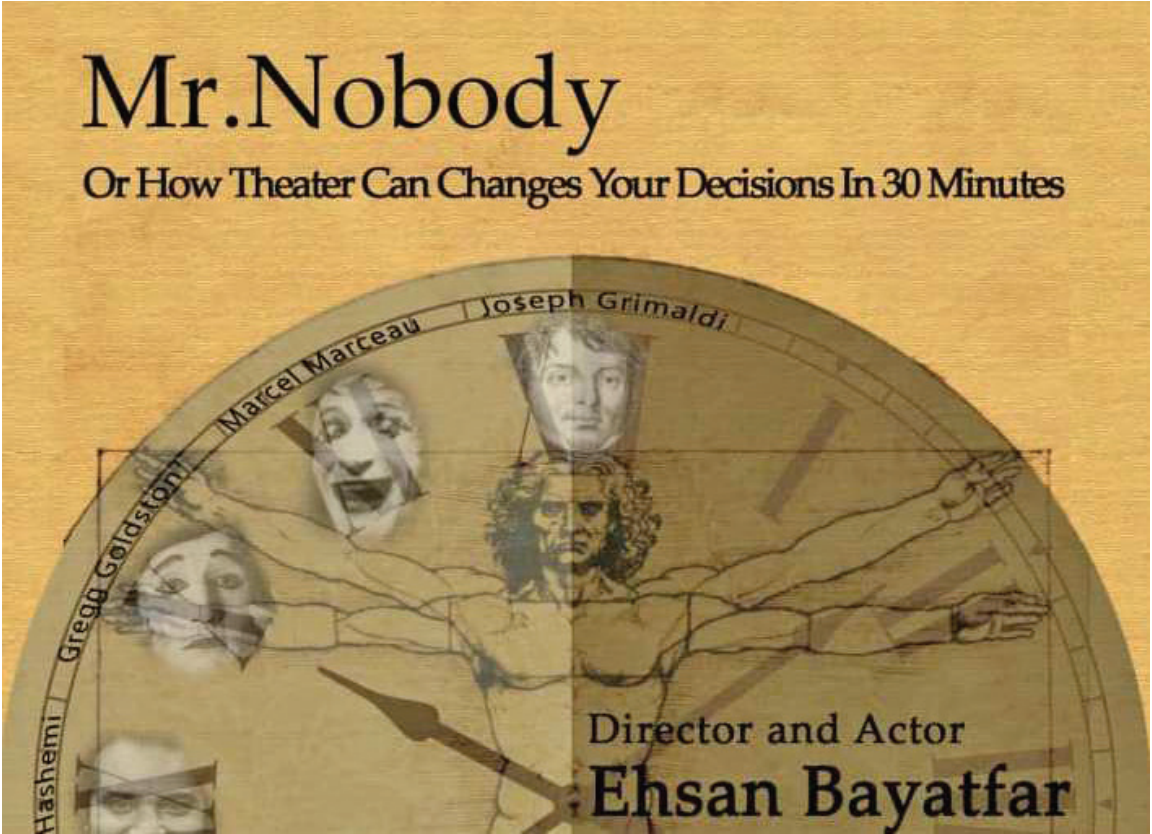
“Mr. Nobody” to illustrate global issues onstage at Melbourne Meat Market

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iranian director and actor Ehsan Bayatfar plans to provide a fresh insight into some vital issues facing the modern world in the mime “Mr. Nobody” at the Meat Market in Melbourne, Australia on March 14.

“The reason behind choosing the method of performing is to develop a better communication with the English-speaking people in Australia,” Bayatfar told the Persian service of Honaronline on Tuesday.

“The present condition and economic problems are now endemic around the world, and it is not limited to the Asian nations, all first world countries are also coming to grips with the problems. Therefore, I decided to bring some of the problems, even the new coronavirus, into the spotlight by performing the mime,” he headed.

“Unfortunately, the new virus is advancing and has endangered the health of my people and has also affected all cultural events in the country, so I hope my performance can do well in representing my country,” said Bayatfar who is studying English



A poster for Iranian director and actor Ehsan Bayatfar's performance “Mr. Nobody”.

in Australia.

“Mr. Nobody” is based on director and writer Alireza Nasehi’s play “Mine and Paganini” that he staged at the Tehran’s Theater Office during June and July 2019.

As a production from the Andisheh Yekom Company, the performance “keeps you smiling until the end and will leave you meditating on the human race,” Bayatfar wrote in a statement for his performance.

Iran’s “Limit” named best short at Woodbury festival



A scene from “Limit” by Iranian director Javad Darai.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iranian director Javad Darai’s acclaimed short film “Limit” has been won the short film award at the Woodbury Short Film Festival, the organizers have announced.

The film tells the story of a desperate man who frantically pleads with strangers to accompany him to his home, without being clear on his intentions.

“Limit” has been screened at numerous international events and has won awards at some of them, including the award for best short fiction at the 10th Southampton

Film Week and the Bleedingham Horror Short Film Festival, as well as the award for best drama at the NCCC (Niagara County Community College) Film and Animation Festival in the U.S. state of New York.

The Woodbury Short Film Festival took place from March 6 to 8 in Salt Lake City, the capital city of Utah in the western U.S.

The award for best experimental narrative went to Terrence Turner’s one-act, one-woman short film “Dishonor” from the U.S., and the award for best student short went to “A Horsey Name” by Russian-American film director Natasha Fissiak.

Travel curbs on South Koreans prompt K-pop cancellations, especially in Japan

SEOUL (Reuters) — Japan’s travel restrictions on South Koreans over the coronavirus epidemic have spurred cancellations of a string of K-pop concerts scheduled in Japan, threatening to hurt the Korean entertainment industry in its most lucrative market.

Japan said starting Monday, people arriving from South Korea will be quarantined for two weeks. Tokyo also suspended visa waivers and the validity of existing visas for Koreans, followed by a similar move by South Korea, rekindling a diplomatic feud between the neighbors.

South Korean boy band Super Junior called off its tours scheduled to take place on March 25 and 26 in Japan, citing the Japanese government’s measures to “curb immigration.”

South Korea’s entertainment firm CJ ENM followed suit, postponing its annual K-pop festival KCON in Japan. KCON in Japan last year drew more than 88,000 fans, according to CJ ENM.

Japan’s travel restrictions are a fresh blow to the entertainment industry in the wake of a fast-spreading



Members from South Korean K-pop group Super Junior pose on the red carpet during the Mnet Asian Music Awards in Hong Kong, China December 1, 2017. (Reuters/Bobby Yip)

virus. K-pop events have also been canceled or postponed elsewhere in the world because of the epidemic.

Swedish actor Max von Sydow, star of “Seventh Seal” and “Exorcist”, dies aged 90

PARIS (Reuters) — Max von Sydow, the tall, blond Swedish actor who brought gravitas to arthouse dramas, horror movies and Hollywood blockbusters, has died in France aged 90, his agent said on Monday.

His wife, producer Catherine Brelet, told Paris Match: “It is with a broken heart and with infinite sadness that we have the extreme pain of announcing the departure of Max von Sydow on March 8, 2020.”

The actor’s gaunt face and gravelly voice were immediately recognizable on the big screen, and made him an ideal match for his compatriot and director Ingrid Bergman, with whom he collaborated on a series of acclaimed movies.

Arguably von Sydow’s most famous role was that of the knight Antonius Block, who plays chess with Death in the 1957 fantasy “The Seventh Seal”, the film that helped establish Bergman’s reputation beyond Scandinavia.

The men went on to work together on more than a dozen movies including “Wild

Strawberries” (1957), “Through a Glass Darkly” (1961), “Winter Light” (1963) and “Shame” (1968), before von Sydow branched out into international cinema.

His big Hollywood breakthrough came with the role of Father Merrin in the 1973 horror classic “The Exorcist”, after which he worked with Woody Allen in “Hannah and Her Sisters”, David Lynch in “Dune” and Sydney Pollack in “Three Days of the Condor”.

The 1987 film “Pelle the Conqueror”, in which von Sydow played the father of the title character, won the Academy Award for best foreign language film and the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival among other accolades.

He was working until well into his 80s and appeared in “Star Wars: The Force Awakens” which came out in 2015.

He was born Carl Adolf von Sydow on April 10, 1929, into a family of academics in Lund in southern Sweden, and went on to appear in more than 120 movies in a dozen

different countries, as well as numerous plays and radio dramas.

Von Sydow founded an amateur theater company in his teens, and took the name Max after a flea he portrayed in a play during military service.

He trained at the Royal Dramatic Theater in Stockholm in 1948-51, during which time he also made his screen debut in “Only a Mother” (1949).

In 1955, Bergman invited von Sydow to work with him at the Malmo Municipal Theater and he became part of a group of actors with whom Bergman remained close until his death in 2007.

Von Sydow said in a 2012 interview that Bergman taught him everything from discipline to philosophy.

“He was my teacher, my friend and my director in I don’t know how many productions,” he told French magazine Telereama.

Of von Sydow, Bergman was quoted as saying: “He controls his demons with the utmost degree of discipline, never allowing



Actor Max von Sydow attends a news conference to promote the movie “Extremely Loud And Incredibly Close” at the 62nd Berlinale International Film Festival in Berlin February 10, 2012. (Reuters/Morris Mac Matzen/File Photo)

them to roam free in his private life, only unleashing them on stage.”

Von Sydow was married twice, to the actor Christina Inga Britta Olin from 1951-1979. In 1997 he married Brelet and in 2002 became a citizen of her native France.