



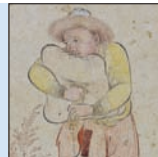
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ARTICLE
Mahdi Azizi
Journalist

MbS and the risky adventure of seizing the throne

Informed diplomatic sources have described the continued detentions by bin Salman in Saudi Arabia as the last move by the crown prince to capture the throne.

Saudi Arabia's developments, which began on Friday, have been the center of attention of experts and analysts as they will shape Saudi Arabia's future. Considering there are not much news about mysterious Saudi Arabia and the war of power in the country, it seems that a great deal of change is going to happen. This issue reveals many domestic secrets of the House of Saud over the past few days.

The developments in Saudi Arabia were came as U.S. media outlets reported on Friday the detention of two Saudi princes, stating that the Saudi court has said that they were engaged in a coup.

The Wall Street Journal newspaper and Bloomberg News have reported that the Saudi King's brother Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz and former Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef have been charged with "treason" and plotting a coup and are now in custody.

Citing the arrest of the two Saudis, Bloomberg News quoted Ayham Kamel, head of Middle East and North Africa at the Eurasia Group consultancy as saying, "The Saudi leadership's challenges have snowballed in recent days. Recent developments may have made King Salman and Prince Mohammed's branch of the royal family more sensitive to risks of a coup".

Bloomberg also reported that Prince Ahmed bin Abdulaziz and Mohammed bin Nayef were arrested while they were on a land trip together. According to the reports, Ahmad bin Abdulaziz and Mohammed bin Nayef have been charged with "treason" and are being held in a desert military camp.

The arrest of the two prominent princes comes at a time when bin Salman has made unprecedented unilateral decisions in recent days. The crown prince has suspended the pilgrimages to the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina over the spread of the coronavirus, which is an unprecedented act in the Islamic history. On the other hand, some rumors have been circulating about the health condition of the Saudi king. [→7](#)

MbS condition will get worse after Salman death: Paul Pillar

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN – Professor Paul Pillar, who was CIA intelligence analyst for 28 years, tells that the death of Salman and the need to select a new king will bring to a head the competition between MBS and those members of the royal family who oppose his acquisition of absolute power.

Pillar says "But he has been able to do what he has done because his father, King Salman, has permitted him to grab power."

He also adds that "Once Salman is gone, other family members may feel better able to challenge MBS."

Following is the text of the interview:

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

A: The arrests were another step in Mohammed bin Salman's (MBS) consolidation of power. The announced charges against the arrested individuals probably are contrived. Two of those arrested--Prince Ahmed and Prince Mohammed bin Nayef--are along those who would have the greatest claim to power themselves, and evidently MBS considered it necessary to eliminate them as competitors.

■ The physical condition of King Salman seems to be inadequate and this has led to a power struggle in Saudi Arabia. How do you

foresee the power equations after King Salman's eventual death?

A: The death of Salman and the need to select a new king will bring to a head the competition between MBS and those members of the royal family who oppose his acquisition of absolute power. MBS clearly has the insight track for becoming king. But he has been able to do what he has done because his father, King Salman, has permitted him to grab power. Once Salman is gone, other family members may feel better able to challenge MBS.

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

Barham Salih announces deadline for nominating Iraqi PM

Iraq's President Barham Salih announces next mid-week as deadline for nominating new prime minister from major parliamentary factions.

Iraq's acting Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi last week said he will stop fulfilling most of his duties while calling for snap elections, a day after prime minister-designate, Mohammad Tawfiq Allawi, withdrew his candidacy after the divided parliament failed to approve his new cabinet.

In a letter to President Barham Salih, Abdul Mahdi said he would take "voluntary absence" and would not carry out most of his official duties. He asked for a deputy prime minister or minister to chair the cabinet meetings.

"I announced on February 19 that the constitutional deadline of 30 days to secure the vote of confidence in the new government from the parliament and its ministerial platform would expire on March 2. And I stated that at the end of this period, 'I will have no choice but to resort to the solutions stipulated in the constitution or the internal system of the Council of Ministers,'" Abdul Mahdi said in his letter.

The Iraqi constitution now puts the president, a Kurd, in charge as acting premier. He has 15 days to designate a new candidate but there is a bumpy road ahead as parties still remain divided along ethnic and sectarian lines.

Political turmoil began in Iraq in early October

2019, when public grievances grew, pressing the government to initiate reforms that would eliminate corruption and alleviate the economic woes.

Protests, however, soon turned violent, amid reports of foreign interference. Hundreds of people, including members of security forces, were killed.

In November, Abdul Mahdi resigned under the pressure of growing demonstrations. The parliament approved his resignation in early December, but he had retained the position ever since as caretaker prime minister.

His decision on Monday, which will further increase a persisting power vacuum, was taken after Allawi withdrew overnight, accusing legislators of obstructing his attempt to form a government. [→10](#)



New equipment, machinery unveiled to combat coronavirus

TEHRAN – The Ministry of Defense and the Tehran Fire Department have unveiled new equipment and machinery in order to facilitate the fight against the coronavirus.

The Tehran Fire Department used for the first time a heavy duty vehicle to wash streets, bus stations, and marketplaces using high pressure systems.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Defense has launched the mass production of advanced thermal cameras used to screen people for the illness caused by the new coronavirus.

Offering state-owned shares to be expedited

TEHRAN – Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dehpasand said offering the shares of state-owned companies, which are planned to be privatized, will be sped up, IRIB reported.

The minister made the remarks on the sidelines of a meeting of Stock Market High Council on Wednesday attended

also by Securities and Exchange Organization's Head Shapour Mohammadi and Central Bank of Iran's Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati.

He further highlighted that Iran's stock market is reaching its real status, adding, "People are gradually getting acquainted with the capital market's potential and welcoming it." [→4](#)

Iranian-made medicine raises hope to treat severe cases of COVID-19

TEHRAN – The Iranian health ministry has announced that testing a domestically-made medicine has resulted in improvement of symptoms in severe cases of coronavirus, also known as COVID-19.

An immunomodulatory drug called "Actemra" in patients with coronavirus in a hospital in Isfahan city

has led to a partial improvement of the patient's symptoms in scans, health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

The first case undergone trial, and symptoms have declined within 48 hours after consumption, but it is still too early to judge, he added. [→9](#)

Taliban rejects Afghan gov't conditional prisoner release order

The conditional prisoner release order announced by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani is against the U.S.-Taliban agreement signed in Doha last month, a spokesman for the Taliban armed group said on Wednesday.

"It is properly explained in the peace accord that first 5,000 prisoners would be freed and then the Afghan dialogue would be initiated," Suhail Shaheen, spokesman for the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, said.

"We never agreed to any conditional

release of the prisoners. If someone claims this, it will be against the peace accord that we signed on February 29."

The Taliban reaction comes after Ghani issued a decree ordering the release of 1,500 Taliban fighters, which presidential spokesman Sediq Sediqqi said was the first of two phases of releasing 5,000 Taliban prisoners.

Sediqqi wrote on Twitter that the initial release was a goodwill gesture to kick-start peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. [→10](#)



PERSPECTIVE
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Chinese Twitter diplomacy on coronavirus

In January 2020 the coronavirus affected China's image in the world. Turned to be a global fear, it influenced China's international relations.

Likewise, everywhere in Iran social media users whispered their concerns about the new deadly pandemic disease. They also criticized Chinese tourists who were spending their New Year holidays in Iran.

The continuation of Mahan Air flights to China increased concerns among journalists and social media users as well.

Despite this, Chang Hua, the ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Tehran, started a direct communication to reduce the fear among the Iranians via his Twitter account. On January 26, he tweeted the photos of Chinese tourists visiting Iran's heritage sites in Fars province.

After a couple of days, he tweeted a picture of his official meeting with Iranian Health Minister Saeed Namaki with a caption in Farsi. This was the beginning of his attempt to make an effective communication with social media users. According to his tweets, the Chinese ambassador also met Mahan Air CEO and interviewed with journalists.

In February 2020, when coronaviruses became an epidemic in Wuhan, where the disease first emerged, Iran's government sent 2 million face masks to China to show solidarity with the people of China. Furthermore, the Iranian cinema director Majid Majidi wrote a letter to the people of China and wish them health and success to defeat the disease. Likewise, this attempt by Iran and celebrities featured in the Chinese ambassador's Twitter account.

The Iranian Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, also tweeted in Chinese, saying, "China not only prevented the epidemic from deteriorating at home, but also prevented the epidemic from spreading internationally."

On February 19, in a show of solidarity with China and the victims of the deadly coronavirus, the Azadi Tower in Tehran was lit up with the pictures of Iran and China's flags. The event was attended by the Chinese ambassador. [→3](#)

China urges relevant parties to immediately lift unilateral sanctions against Iran: diplomat

TEHRAN (Xinhua Net) — China urges relevant parties to immediately lift unilateral sanctions against Iran to prevent further harm to the human rights of the Iranian people, a senior Chinese diplomat has said.

Liu Hua, Special Representative for Human Rights of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, told the on-going 43rd session of the UN Human Rights Council on Monday that imposing external mechanisms without the consent of the countries concerned is not conducive to dialogue and cooperation, and does not play a role in promoting and protecting human rights.

Liu said that the international community should treat the human rights situation of Iran in an objective and fair manner, understand the challenges Iran faces as a developing country in promoting and protecting human rights, and listen more to the Iranian government and the demands of its people.

The unilateral sanctions imposed by relevant countries on Iran have had a significant negative impact on the human rights of the Iranian people, and have also restricted the United Nations and other organizations from providing humanitarian assistance to Iran, she said.

The Chinese diplomat highlighted that it is crucial time at this moment for the Iranian government and its people to fight the COVID-19 epidemic.

“China is providing support to the Iranian side within its capacity, including providing testing kits and other anti-epidemic materials, and sending a team of volunteer experts to help Iran fight the epidemic. China also calls on all parties to strengthen cooperation with Iran on epidemic prevention,” Liu said.

She also highlighted that China has always advocated that all countries should address human rights issues through constructive dialogue and cooperation, oppose politicization, selectivity, double standards, and confrontational practices, and does not support the practice of “naming and shaming” and publicly pressuring.

Russian UN envoy says all governors disagree with U.S. policy on nuclear deal

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia’s permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organizations, has said that all members to the International Atomic Energy Agency Board of Governors disagree with the United States’ policy on the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA.

“The #IAEA Board of Governors started today consideration of the report on verification in #Iran in the light of UNSC 2231. No surprises so far. Almost all Governors disagree with US policy on #JCPOA and call upon Iran to resume full implementation of the nuclear deal,” Ulyanov tweeted on Wednesday.

Rafael Grossi, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said in a meeting with the board members in Vienna on Monday that Iran continues to provide international inspectors access to its nuclear facilities, even after its announcement that it was no longer bound by “any restrictions” of the landmark nuclear deal.

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

Iran says will do its best to restore stability to Afghanistan

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi on Wednesday voiced Tehran’s determination to restore sustainable stability to Afghanistan.

The remarks by the Foreign Ministry official comes as Ashraf Ghani and his chief rival, Abdullah Abdullah, took the oath of office as the president of Afghanistan on Monday, plunging the fragile country into a new crisis.

“The only way towards prosperity, stability and security in Afghanistan is forming a comprehensive unity government which includes all Afghan elites and political figures and groups,” Mousavi told a regular news briefing.

He underscored that Tehran’s policy is to support for Afghan-Afghan talks.

Recently, Taliban and the U.S. signed a peace agreement as Washington is seeking an exit route from Afghanistan after 19 years.

On Tuesday, Taliban spokesman Sohail Shaheen pointed to Iran’s role in the Afghanistan peace process and noted, “Taliban holds talks with neighboring countries with regard to maintaining peace.”

Shaheen went on to say that ending the war against the Afghan government is dependent on the talks between Afghans and noted, “If the inter-Afghan negotiations begun, the future Islamic government and the end of the war would be discussed. But the talks must begin first.”

Referring to Iran’s role in establishing permanent peace in Afghanistan he emphasized, “It is a fact that we have political relations with the countries of the world and our neighbors, and we talk about peace with them, this is a necessity which is for the benefit of our country.”

“Currently, a peace agreement has been signed with the U.S. and we are committed to implementing it,” the Taliban spokesman added.

Rouhani: We have to cut chain of coronavirus’ spread

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that it is essential to cut the chain of the coronavirus’ spread and avoid inter-city travels and traffic.

“We have reached a unique prescription about what action must be taken against the coronavirus. It is cutting the chain of the spread of the virus,” he said during a cabinet meeting.

“This chain starts by infection of one person and this person enters a gathering of people and the infection spreads to others. This chain starts from one point and spreads to other cities and even countries,” he explained.

He also said that disinfection must also been carried out to cut the chain.

Rouhani also said it is necessary to avoid trips between cities and traffic.

“All must pay attention to the issued protocols and guidelines to cut the chain of the spread,” he noted.

He called for observing all the healthcare guidelines during the Norouz (New Year) holidays to prevent spread of the coronavirus.

He said the Norouz holidays should not turn into a period during which the coronavirus is spread more by “unmanaged traveling and commuting”.

Elsewhere, Rouhani said that the whole administration is involved in campaign against the coronavirus.

“We seek to create a situation in which the people observe all the guidelines and live through this hard time. Today, all our ministers are involved.”

■ **‘If people do not cooperate, we will not reach a result soon’**

Rouhani also said that if the people do not cooperate, no good result will be achieved soon to control its outbreak.

“However, if the people cooperate, we will reach result soon,” he added.

He also said that the safest place for the people is home. “We are through hard days. However, these hard days will pass and we will stand beside each other,” he pointed out.

■ **‘Approvals of center tasked to control coronavirus must be followed by all’**

Rouhani also said that approvals of the National Headquarters for Fighting Coronavirus must be observed by all bodies.

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



Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Monday that all bodies must follow the decisions taken by the headquarters.

“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.

■ **‘Spreading fear is worse than coronavirus’**

Rouhani also said that spreading fear is worse than the coronavirus.

“We must defeat the coronavirus. We must observe the guidelines and at the same time avoid spreading fear among the people,” he said.

■ **Calls for Rouhani to take helm of committee fighting coronavirus**

Calls have been growing for Rouhani to personally take charge of the crisis committee formed to manage the nationwide fight against a coronavirus epidemic.

In a statement addressed to the president on Tuesday, a group of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) outlined a set of emergency measures that the government could take to promote its efforts to rein in COVID-19, as the novel coronavirus is called.

They highlighted the need for Rouhani, as the country’s chief executive, to take over the crisis committee’s leadership from the Health Ministry to pave the way for better coordination among the country’s executive institutions, Press TV reported.

Iran says IAEA questions should be technical, legal

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman announced on Wednesday that Iran is only tasked to answer “legal and technical questions” by the International Atomic Energy Organization (IAEA).

In his video news conference, Abbas Mousavi said, “Iran’s cooperation framework with the agency is obvious, so the agency should keep its credibility respected and do not pursue any futile question or claim planned by anyone or any regime.”

“The agency’s questions should enjoy legal and technical bases,” the spokesman said, rejecting any politically-tainted attempt by certain regimes to force the IAEA to put Iran under pressure.

Mousavi said that Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi has responded to the recent claims by the IAEA underscoring that “we have had the highest level of technical cooperation with the agency (and that) Iran reserves the right not to answer any baseless questions asked by the agency.”

Speaking in Vienna on March 9, Rafael Grossi, the new head of the IAEA, demanded that Iran should stop blocking the IAEA investigation into three possible nuclear sites.

Grossi told the IAEA governing board

that Iran should “cooperate immediately and fully with the agency.”

Tehran’s cooperation should include “providing prompt access to the locations specified” by the IAEA, he added.

Grossi said in February that Tehran was refusing to answer questions about three locations where nuclear material may have been used or stored before Iran concluded its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

He claimed without Tehran’s cooperation, it will be difficult for the IAEA to confirm whether or not Iran has declared all of its nuclear materials.

Kamalvandi has said Grossi is using the bogus espionage by Israel for its

■ **‘Europeans should not be worried about IAEA report on Iran’**

The Foreign Ministry spokesman further pointed to the reaction of the European nations to the recent report of Grossi, saying, “The issue has nothing to do with the Europeans officials. We have already voiced our concerns.”

“(Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad) Zarif, in a phone conversation with Josep Borrell (the high representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy), talked about the issue as well as Iran’s cooperation with the agency,” Mousavi added



■ **Iran is ready to return to JCPOA undertakings if E3 fulfills commitments**

Elsewhere in his remarks, Mousavi said, “The European Union’s recent statement comprises two parts of Iran’s economic interest from the JCPOA and Tehran’s commitments under the deal. We consider the statement as a ‘treatment statement’, so if the Europeans are ready we are ready too. They should fulfill their JCPOA commitments to guarantee our economic interest according to the deal’s text.”

“Whenever Europe takes practical steps to fulfill their commitments, Iran will also embark on balancing its obligations and rights,” Mousavi said.

In the JCPOA joint commission meeting in Vienna on Feb. 27, a statement was issued in which it was said participants “acknowledged

that the re-imposition of U.S. sanctions did not allow Iran to reap the full benefits arising from sanctions-lifting.”

In early February, President Hassan Rouhani said, in a meeting with Borrell in Tehran, that Iran was ready to “return to its commitments” under the 2015 nuclear deal when other parties uphold their commitments.

Rouhani added that Iran would continue cooperating with international nuclear inspectors “unless we face a new situation.”

Iran has been reducing its obligations to the JCPOA since President Donald Trump pulled the U.S. out of the deal in 2018 and imposed the toughest ever sanctions in history against Iran in line with his administration’s “maximum pressure” strategy against Tehran.

Britain, France, and Germany (the E3) have claimed that they are working to keep the agreement alive but so far they have taken no concrete measure to protect Iran’s economy from sanctions.

Borrell’s trip to Tehran was part of what is called the dispute settlement mechanism under which Iran would enter negotiations to keep the deal alive in order to avoid taking the matter to the UN Security Council.

Under the 2015 deal, Iran agreed to curb its uranium enrichment in exchange for termination of economic and financial sanctions.

Iran’s special situation in coronavirus crisis

By Mohammad Ghaderi

TEHRAN — While the outbreak of the coronavirus in Wuhan, China, had become the main subject of the world’s media outlets, the Iranian Ministry of Health have engineered comprehensive plans to counter a possible spread of the virus in Iran. It begun its job by restricting travels to China and getting prepared for the outbreak inside the country.

In late February 2020, when the tests of two citizens in Qom proved positive for the new coronavirus, COVID-19, a national campaign was launched to contain the disease through a national mobilization.

As a global challenge, the coronavirus requires international cooperation and the support of all countries to prevent the spread of the disease and to treat patients.

The enemies of the Iranian people not only have refused to give up economic terrorism in such a difficult and complex condition, they have also worsened the situation through psychological and media warfare.

Accusing Iran of spreading the virus across the region and many countries around the world and deceiving the public opinion by spreading false news about the death toll in Iran coupled with accusation that the country’s management system has failed to deal with the epidemic are only a part of the “perceptive terrorism” that the

hegemonic system has carried out to exacerbate the influence of “economic terrorism” on the Iranian people.

The WHO representatives have visited Iran to monitor the process of providing health services to the people as well as programs implemented to contain the coronavirus. They have applauded the performance of the Islamic Republic of Iran, even calling for using the Iranian model to combat the virus in other countries.

Some great measures have been predicted to contain and fight the virus, which have so far yielded good results.

Given the unpredictability of the disease and its devastating economic and psychological effects on Iran and the world at large, the current situation cannot be maintained without using all available capabilities, especially in terms of financing and capacity building with other countries.

Trade and banking sanctions by the U.S. against Iran have practically made the importation of medicine, disinfectants, etc. extremely difficult and have doubled the pressure of the outbreak on our country.

Under such circumstances, U.S. officials are making false claims that they are ready to help Iran contain the coronavirus. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has pretended that he is concerned over the coronavirus outbreak in Iran, claiming that Washington is ready to help Tehran.

How can one believe the claim that comes along with practical measures to increase sanctions and taking no care of its

consequences?

The only way that the U.S. can prove its claims is to resume its legal obligations under the nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA, and lift the illegal and inhumane sanctions on the Iranian people.

However, there is no hope that the U.S. take under such a step under its gambler president.

Sayed Abbas Mousavi, the spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, said the claims of support had been circulated in the media before reaching the Iranian government. Mousavi said it was just a hypocritical propaganda campaign aimed at deceiving the public opinion in the world. On Saturday, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also wrote on his Twitter account that “the world can no longer be silent as US economic terrorism is supplanted by its medical terrorism”.

Also, Supreme National Security Council secretary Ali Shamkhani said on his Twitter account on Saturday that “the virus of sanctions and non-commitment to promises is threatening international security more than the coronavirus.”

He added, “The US claim that it is ready to help Iran can only be verified through the country’s implementation of its legal obligations under the JCPOA.”

Now, it is time to verify Americans’ claim, as the White House officials have occasionally stated that they stand by the Iranian people. They can prove their claims by lifting or suspending sanctions in this special situation in Iran.

Iran’s ambassador to IAEA: Problem arises when technical issues are being politicized

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Kazzem Gharibabadi, Iran’s ambassador to the Vienna-based international organizations, has said that the international community as well as the countries that still adhere to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) should return balance to the agreement.

Gharibabadi wrote in his statement that the internationally-backed nuclear deal has been derailed, so the international community as well as the countries that are still adhering to it should embark on practical measures to return it to the right track.

Hereunder is a copy of his statement released on Wednesday:

At the outset, I would like to express my delegation’s appreciation to Deputy Director General Juan Carlos Lentijo for his remarks under this agenda item, and thank the Department of Nuclear Safety and Security for the preparation of the Report.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

The Saipa Expansion Engineering Corporation Company intends to “R.F.P For a Robotic Coat Application Package (ZAMYAD Paint Shop) through the bidding process among qualified contractor (s). The qualified applicants are invited to visit our website: www.seeco.ir for further information or send their related resume via email to info@seesaipa.com.

Advisor highlights Iran-Turkey-Russia talks on Syria

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Hossein Amir Abdollahian, a senior foreign policy advisor to the Iranian Parliament speaker, has attached great importance to Iran-Turkey-Russia talks on Syria.

During a meeting with Syrian Ambassador to Tehran Adnan Mahmoud on Wednesday, Amir Abdollahian said that it is important to implement agreements reached in Iran-Turkey-Russia negotiations in the format of the Astana talks.

Pointing to situation around the north-western province of Idlib, he said the crisis must be settled politically.

The Syrian diplomat, for his part, attached importance to cooperation with Iran.

He noted that Syria owes its success in defeating terrorism to the sacrifices made by its army and the support provided by Iran, Russia and the Lebanese Hezbollah.

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.

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 Idlib.

According to ISNA, the diplomats also insisted on the importance of close cooperation between Iran, Russia and Turkey within the framework of the Astana process 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".

On March 6, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin announced a military ceasefire in Idlib, after a meeting in Moscow that lasted six hours.

Idlib, the last rebel stronghold in Syria, has witnessed increased violence and bloodshed since last December, the start of a Syrian offensive to regain control over the region.

According to al Jazeera, Putin said Russia did not always agree with its Turkish partners but hoped the deal will serve as a "good basis for ending the fighting in the Idlib de-escalation zone, put an end to [the] suffering of [the] civilian population and contain a growing humanitarian crisis."

Even as the ceasefire came into effect, Turkey's state-owned Anadolu news agency reported that Turkish forces killed 21 Syrian troops and destroyed two artillery pieces and two missile launchers, in retaliation of the killing of two Turkish soldiers in Idlib earlier on Thursday.

Countries must not give in to U.S. pressure, MP says

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Alaeddin Boroujerdi, a member of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, has said that the countries must not give in to the United States' pressure and sanctions against Iran.

"It is expected that countries do not give in to the United States and remove sanctions against Iran so that Iran will be able to fight the coronavirus, otherwise the United States' officials will be responsible for the people who are dying from this virus," he told ISNA in an interview published on Wednesday.

"The United States has sanctioned Iran, but we are not under sanctions of the [UN] Security Council. So, the countries are not obliged to follow the United States' sanctions," he said.

He warned that all countries will be affected by the coronavirus if it is not contained.

Boroujerdi said that any help in controlling the coronavirus is beneficial to all.

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 "hu-

manitarian 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."

Hossein Amir Abdollahian, a senior foreign policy advisor to the Iranian parliament speaker, has also denounced the United States for not allowing shipment of coronavirus medical equipment to Iran, saying the U.S. is targeting ordinary Iranians.

"The USA has not allowed shipment of #COVID19 medicines/medical equipment to #Iran," Amir Abdollahian said in a tweet on Saturday.

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 all across the world, sparking fears of a global pandemic. The virus is spreading rapidly in the region, with cases recorded in many countries.

There's no universal method to fight coronavirus, says envoy

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Iran's ambassador to London says there is no universal method to fight the coronavirus outbreak, pointing out that each city or country takes an approach that meets their needs.

"Countering coronavirus in each country is carried out based on the specific circumstances of that country and there's no unified method," Hamid Baedinejad tweeted on Tuesday.

"Our country's authorities also strive to take the best and most effective decision," he said, adding, "The Foreign Ministry, in an invaluable initiative, tasked all foreign missions to collect and share their experiences [with Iran]."

As of Wednesday, the death toll from the coronavirus outbreak in Iran has risen to 354 with 9,000 confirmed cases.

The virus first emerged in China in December last year and is now spreading in the U.S., Europe and across the Middle East, sparking fears of a global pandemic.

In remarks last week, Baedinejad said the anti-Iran terrorist group of Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) and other foreign-based anti-Iran groups have launched a propaganda campaign to mislead the public opinion about the coronavirus outbreak in the country.

The MEK cult and similar groups have been trying to exploit the epidemic to push the public opinion in Iran into a "mental deadlock", Baedinejad said on his Telegram channel on March 3.

The campaign features a "very duplicitous" news policy, the envoy said.

When the country had not yet sensed



the urgency to seek foreign aid, Baedinejad said certain media outlets have launched a propaganda campaign implying that the Tehran government would resist Western assistance even at the expense of its people's lives.

At the time, they were trying to create the impression that Iran was facing international isolation, and that no country was willing to provide it with emergency aid, Baedinejad noted.

In the second phase, the propaganda drive alleged that the foreign medical supplies that had entered the country, including testing kits, were contaminated, he said.

The envoy gave assurances that Iran procures the foreign items required through trusted suppliers and that all the relevant sanitary standards are observed in the process.

"The main goal pursued by this propaganda is to create distrust between the people and the authorities," he said, dismissing the "delusions" by those who think such campaigns would yield results.

Tehran calls on Britain to prevent fake news on coronavirus outbreak in Iran

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — The Foreign Ministry has called on London to prevent certain London-based Farsi language news channels from spreading fake news about the coronavirus outbreak and its death toll in Iran.

The UK government on Monday announced that it had assembled a counter-disinformation unit that would work with social-media companies to "identify and respond" to these and other conspiracy theories spread by foreign powers.

"Defending the country from misinformation and digital interference is a top priority," said Oliver Dowden, the UK secretary of state for digital, culture, media, and sport, according to Business Insider.

"As part of our ongoing work to tackle these threats we have brought together expert teams to make sure we can respond effectively should these threats be identified in relation to the spread of COVID-19.

"This work includes regular engagement with the social-media companies, which are well placed to monitor interference and limit the spread of disinformation, and will make sure we are on the front foot to act if required."

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi welcomed the formation of the counter-disinformation unit, saying Iran believes that Britain, in addition to forming that unit, should prevent certain London-based Farsi language news channels from publishing disinformation and fake news which dishearten the Iranian people.

However, Mousavi said, Iran has no hope that London would take any measure in that regard.



■ **Foreign Ministry voices concern about health condition of Iranian inmates in U.S.**

Mousavi also said that the way the U.S. government is facing the outbreak of coronavirus has worried Tehran.

"We hope that the U.S. pay attention to the health situation of inmates. We are worried about health of some Iranian nationals who are taken hostage (by the U.S.)."

The U.S. death toll due to coronavirus has risen to 28 as infections spread to all but a handful of states. The global death toll topped 4,200 and the number of confirmed cases approached 120,000.

New Jersey reported its first death, a 69-year-old Bergen County man with several underlying health complications including emphysema, diabetes and hypertension.

The number of U.S. confirmed cases rose to 1,025 early Wednesday, including Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer announcing the state's first two cases and declaring a state of emergency.

with the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

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

More than 4,200 people have died of COVID-19 across the world, and more than 113,000 people have also been infected, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). About 64,000 people have also recovered from the illness, globally.

The death toll from COVID-19 outbreak in Iran rose to 291 on Tuesday. Meanwhile, more than 2,700 coronavirus patients have recovered from the respiratory disease and discharged from hospitals so far.

Tehran urges Riyadh not to politicize coronavirus outbreak

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Tehran has rejected Riyadh's claim about the reason why the passports of Saudi nationals arriving in Iran are not stamped, urging Saudi Arabia not to politicize the coronavirus disease.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on Tuesday, "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has already provided a description of the issue, and we are surprised that such quite simple subject has been once again mooted by Saudis," the Foreign Ministry website reported.

Mousavi made the remarks in response to a question posed by Sputnik news agency's reporter about Saudi Arabia's claim that the passports of Saudi nationals are not stamped upon entry into Iran.

"We have already made it clear that the Islamic Republic of Iran's regulations on issuing electronic visa are equal for the nationals of all countries except for the holders of British, American and Canadian passports, and attaching labels and issuing entry and exit stamps (in the passports) are avoided in conformity with the visa policy of many advanced countries," he explained.

Mousavi underlined that such policy has nothing to do with the citizens of any particular country or with the coronavirus, and advised Saudi Arabia to refrain from politicizing the coronavirus disease and pinning the blame on others in this regard.

Saudi Arabia criticized Iran on Tuesday for facilitating the entry of Saudi citizens into its territories without stamping their passports amid the global outbreak of the new coronavirus.

The cabinet, chaired by King Salman, slammed Tehran for undermining international efforts to combat the virus and said that Iran was responsible for the spread of the virus, Arab News reported.

Coronavirus has many features of 'biological warfare', general warns

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — The commander of Civil Defense Organization has said the novel coronavirus has many characteristics of a biological warfare.

"It cannot be said with certainty whether coronavirus is a biological warfare, but it has many characteristics of a biological warfare," Brigadier General Gholam Reza Jalali said on Tuesday.

He said further experiments in labs are needed to see whether that's the case.

Last week, Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami said Iran is currently engaged in biological warfare and will definitely win the war.

"Today, we are involved in biological warfare, but the country is resisting," Salami said on Thursday.

"The enemy is still focusing on economic pressure and psychological operation (against Iran) and uses every opportunity to toughen the conditions for our people. The enemy is seeking to shape the regional developments in its own favor," the IRGC commander further warned.

The coronavirus, also called COVID-19, initially emerged in China late last year and is now spreading in the American and European continents and the Middle East, sparking fears of a global pandemic.

In Iran, the epidemic has so far killed 354 people and infected 9,000 others. Some 2,959 people have also recovered.

The illness, whose symptoms are fever, cough and difficulty breathing, may cause lung lesions and pneumonia.

Since December 2019, over 119,400 people have been infected in several countries, with 4,300 deaths mostly in China.

Iran to send over 2000 Afghan prisoners to their homeland

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Iran's deputy justice minister for human rights and international affairs announced on Wednesday that Iran plans to repatriate more than 2000 Afghan prisoners to their homes.

Mohmoud Abbasi said the decision was taken as Iran is fighting the spread of coronavirus within its territory.

"We are negotiating with Afghanistan's political and judicial officials for a speedy transfer of the convicts," he explained.

Abbasi said according to an agreement between Iran and Afghanistan on repatriation of prisoners, the Afghans will spend the rest of their sentences in their own country.

To protect the lives of prisoners, Iran has given temporary leave to 70,000 of its inmates.

Chinese Twitter diplomacy on coronavirus

➡ When Iran's Health Ministry spokesperson confirmed for the first time that two patients in Qom had tested positive for coronavirus, Farsi twitter users tried to find out how the Chinese have been coping with the phenomenon. Mr. Hua increased activity on Twitter by posting statements about the Chinese experience in confronting the virus.

He also shared some videos in which Chinese journalist speak in Farsi and give some protection advices. The Chinese ambassador also expressed the Chinese people's solidarity with the Iranians by sending first aid to Iran, collecting about \$500,000 for the purpose. Five Chinese experts from the Red Cross Society of China also visited Tehran on Feb. 29 to discuss ways how to prevent and control the spread of the virus in Iran.

Simultaneously, the ambassador continued with his Twitter diplomacy. The exchange of tweets between Iranian and Chinese diplomats, recalls the classic Persian poem by Saadi who says:

Human beings are members of a whole
In creation of one essence and soul
If one member is afflicted with pain
Other members uneasy will remain
If you have no sympathy for human pain
The name of human you cannot retain

Defense Ministry produces advanced thermal cameras

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — Iran's Defense Ministry launched the mass production of advanced thermal cameras used to screen people for the illness caused by the new coronavirus, known as COVID-19, as all provinces of the country are struggling with the infectious disease.

Following the outbreak of the novel coronavirus in the country, the defense industry's experts made round-the-clock efforts and conducted research and managed to mass produce thermal cameras used to screen the people for detecting coronavirus patients, the Defense Ministry's Public Relations Department was quoted by Tasnim as announcing.

Speaking at a ceremony held on Wednesday to unveil the advanced thermal cameras, the managing director of Iran Electronics Industries said the Defense Ministry regards the suffering of the people as its own.

Defense industry experts have managed to produce state-of-the-art thermal cameras that have been completely designed by domestic technology and software through mobilizing all scientific capacities, he added.

Iran's administration on Thursday extended the closure of all schools and universities nationwide until the end of the current Iranian year (March 19) as the country is struggling

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	520211.1
IFX	6767.17

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,614 rials
GBP	54,280 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$35.76/b
WTI	\$33.05/b
OPEC Basket	\$34.71/b
Gold	\$1,666.50/oz
Silver	\$17.03/oz
Platinum	\$884.70/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

EU plans €25b coronavirus aid fund

The EU is fighting the coronavirus crisis with an aid fund worth over 25 billion euros.

The money is said to flow into fragile economic sectors in order to mitigate the economic consequences of the epidemic. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced on Tuesday evening after a video conference with the heads of state and government, EU Council President Charles Michel and ECB chief Christine Lagarde.

Michel said: "We are ready to use all the necessary tools." The United States is also working on a large-scale stimulus package that should include massive tax breaks.



Von der Leyen said at a press conference in Brussels that the planned fund should quickly reach a volume of EUR 25 billion. "To implement this, I will be proposing this week to the Council and Parliament to release 7.5 billion euros in liquidity," she said.

This amount is made up of EU funds that member countries were unable to spend due to bureaucratic obstacles, as an EU representative explained. The funds did not need to be sent back to Brussels, but could be used to support the domestic economies.

The total amount of 25 billion euros will be reached by paying EU structural aid that has already been committed into the fund. This should benefit the health systems and small companies in distress and be used for job security measures.

Michel added that the heads of state and government had agreed to provide liquidity to deal with the crisis. In addition, the EU rules for public budgets and government subsidies are to be relaxed. Von der Leyen said the EU Commission would submit new guidelines this week. This is to ensure that governments can more easily provide support. This was particularly the problem in Italy, which is the most affected by the virus in Europe.

Chancellor Angela Merkel, according to her spokesman Steffen Seibert, emphasized at the conference that quick, coordinated steps are required to counter the economic consequences of the corona epidemic. "Germany is expanding the possibilities for receiving short-time work benefits and will enable comprehensive measures to provide liquidity," he said.

Some economists assume that the German economy will slide into a recession due to the epidemic. Seibert added: "The European Central Bank also has an important role to play." At their interest rate meeting on Thursday, the euro guards will discuss new monetary policy aids for the monetary community. French President Emmanuel Macron spoke of an "exceptional crisis that requires exceptional answers".

There is also an economic stimulus package in the USA. President Donald Trump has already announced a corresponding package of measures. However, details are not yet known. The ruling Republicans must agree with the Democrats who rule the House of Representatives. Wage tax cuts of around \$300 billion are under discussion. Republican Senator Marco Rubio named this number. Republican Mitch McConnell, leader of the United States Senate, said he hoped for an early settlement.

(Source: Reuters)

Japan spot LNG price falls to lowest on record amid coronavirus outbreak

Prices for spot liquefied natural gas (LNG) cargoes imported into Japan, the world's biggest buyer of the fuel, fell in February to the lowest since the country's trade ministry started compiling data in 2014.

LNG prices have been hit by a perfect storm of new supply coming on stream in the United States and Australia, a warmer northern hemisphere winter, and the coronavirus outbreak this year that has eviscerated demand for gas and other commodities.

The average contract price for spot LNG cargoes shipped to Japan in February fell to \$3.40 per million British thermal units (mmBtu), according to data released by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) on Tuesday.

That was the lowest since METI started publishing the data in March 2014 and was down from \$5.90/mmBtu in January.

Asian spot LNG prices LNG-AS fell to a record low of \$2.70/mmBtu last month as the coronavirus outbreak worsened in China, the fastest growing market for LNG imports.

(Source: Reuters)

Offering state-owned shares to be expedited

1 → Dejasand had previously said that the government should amend its policies and methods of setting the prices and transferring the shares in the process of privatization.

In its planned budget for the current Iranian year (ends on March 19), the Iranian government had expected to earn some 106 trillion rials (about \$2.5 billion) of income from divesting shares of state-run companies to the private sector.

In Iran, implementation of privatization plan aimed at more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in domestic econ-

omy, and reducing financial and management burden on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on implementation of the general policies of the Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44,

Iron ore output to exceed 100m tons by Mar. 19

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's iron ore output is going to reach 101 million tons by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 19), registering over a 17-percent rise compared to the previous year, IRNA reported.

Based on the data released by the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2019) Iranian mines produced 49.69 million tons of the mentioned mineral.

The country's iron ore output stood at 86 million tons in the previous Iranian calendar year 1397 (ended on March 20, 2019) while the figure was reported to be 85 million tons in its preceding year of 1396.

Based on the country's Sixth Five-year National Development Plan (2016-2021), Iran's iron ore output is going to reach 105 million tons in the upcoming calendar year (March 2020-2021).

IMIDRO has also estimated that Iron ore production in Iran is going to reach 107 million tons in the Iranian calendar year of 1400 (March 2021-March 2022).

Iran also produced 39.341 million tons



of iron ore concentrate during the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019 – January 20, 2020), registering a three-percent rise compared to the same period last year.

In a bid to prevent the exports of unprocessed minerals, creating more value-added and meeting the requirements of domestic producers for the raw materials, Iran has levied a 25-percent duty on the exports of raw minerals (especially iron ore) since September 23, 2019.

The new duty is aimed at encouraging the production of more processed minerals such as pellets and concentrate instead of selling the raw minerals.



Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejasand

some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the

agenda, but a number of factors has been hindering privatization trend in the country, among them government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

APC pays over \$197m for developing agricultural parks

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Managing Director of Iran's Agricultural Parks Company (APC) says 8.3 trillion rials (about \$197.6 million) of facilities have been paid for the development of agricultural parks across the country since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019), IRNA reported.

According to Ali Ashraf Mansouri the mentioned facilities have been paid for development or construction of various agricultural parks including greenhouses, fisheries and aquaculture, as well as livestock and poultry.

More than 150 requests for over 20 trillion rials (over \$476 million) of facilities are also currently under consideration by the company, Mansouri said.

"Agricultural Parks Company strives to provide food security, create sustainable employment, utilize water and soil resources, and develop export by utilizing the country's resources and facilities and attracting investment in the agricultural sector," the official added.

He went on mentioning some of the services and facilities which APC is providing for investors in this area, including providing

banking facilities, issuing licenses in the shortest possible time, eliminating redundant bureaucracies, securing land with the possibility of granting of ownership after exploitation, reducing infrastructure costs in settlements, and finally providing specialized training and investment services to investors.

According to the AOC head, since the implementation of a program for developing the country's agricultural parks by his company, over 7000 hectares of land have been allocated for establishing such parks across the country.

Over 568 establishment licenses have been issued by the company since the beginning of the program, according to Mansouri.

He further noted that currently over 87 agricultural parks have been constructed or are under construction across the country.

The official also said that since the beginning of the current year, more than 80,000 tons of agricultural products have been produced in the country's agricultural parks.

"This year, the production of agricultural parks has reached 80,000 tons, however, considering the output from the subsidiary companies the total production would exceed 183,000 tons," Mansouri said.

A China-centric global recession?

By Yuwo Hedrick-Wong

The Covid-19 outbreak has dramatically increased the risk of a global recession. According to the IMF, the global economy expanded by only 2.9% in 2019, barely above the 2.5% threshold below which signals a global recession. The economic impact of Covid-19 could easily plunge the global economy into one. If this happens, it will be a China-centric global recession in how it had started, how it would progress, and how it may end.

The epicenter of the Covid-19 outbreak is the city of Wuhan in Hubei province in China. The Chinese government's authoritarian instinct of suppressing information when something unexpected happens is unquestionably one of the contributing factors that helped Covid-19 to spread outside of Wuhan. Since the virus's effect on the economy is indirect, working through human emotions and policy responses, the uncertainty and confusion arising from the lack of transparency on the part of the Chinese government, at least initially, inflamed concerns and amplified the economic shock. The Covid-19 outbreak and its economic impact is therefore China-centric not just in geography, but also in how it is connected to China's political economy.

Now that the outbreak has gone global, its impact is just as China-centric as how it originated. Earlier predictions of the economic impact of Covid-19 typically harked back to the experience of the SARS outbreak in China in 2003. It turned out that the global economic damage of SARS was negligible, and there was no global recession. This time, however, the situation is completely different. To begin with, the Chinese economy today is much bigger compared with 2003. The IMF has estimated that China's share of total global output in 2019 is around 20%, more than twice its share in 2003 at 8.5%. Furthermore, China is now the biggest engine of global economic growth bar none. According to data from the World Bank, China accounted for 35% of total global GDP growth (in nominal U.S. dollar terms) between 2017 and 2019, doubling America's share of 18%, and more than four times that of the EU's 7.9%. The unavoidable conclusion is that the global impact of any slowdown in the Chinese economy today would be far larger than in 2003.



Secondly, global economic production today is highly dependent on China-centric global supply chains. Because of the mass quarantining of tens of millions of its population and the lockdown of entire cities, the majority of China's factories were shut down for most of February. Shortages of parts and components quickly followed in many industries all over the world. Disruptions to the production of Apple's iPhone and auto manufacturing are just the most prominent examples. The impact is in fact far more widespread, affecting even countries that are not usually considered at the core of the global supply chains. For instance, the Indian government has announced that it will restrict the export of India's generic drugs due to production disruptions. It turns out that Indian drug makers rely on China for more than 70% of the active ingredients in their medicine.

Thirdly, the global economy was much weaker than it was in 2003 even before the Covid-19 outbreak struck. In addition to production disruptions, it is now being hit by a China-centric slowdown in demand. Commodity exporters like Australia, and most of Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, who were already struggling before the Covid-19 outbreak, are now facing an even more difficult time because China tends to be their largest customer. The sudden stop of Chinese outbound tourism is hurting the airlines and the hospitality industries since tourist arrivals from China have become one of their biggest sources of demand in recent years. China's

domestic consumption has also been drastically curtailed as consumers stayed home. Being the second largest importer in the world (after the U.S.), China's falling domestic consumption has weakened global demand significantly.

How the global economy may recover from a recession, should one come to pass, would also be China-centric. In the first week of March, the reported infection numbers in China were dropping to just over a hundred daily while they continued to rise outside of China. Mirroring this divergence are the movements in stock markets. The CSI 300 index of Shanghai- and Shenzhen-listed shares reached a two-year high on March 5, whereas the S&P 500, the FTSE, the German Dax and the Stoxx Europe 600 fell.

The Chinese government has begun restarting production, bringing workers back to their factories by stages with tight monitoring measures: regular temperature checks, wearing masks, and sitting apart in canteens during meal times and so on. In the next few weeks at least, China and other Covid-19 affected countries will be moving in opposite directions: as China rams up its production the other virus-affected countries will see more production contraction.

China's strong stock market rebound has to do with expectation that the government will unleash a tidal wave of stimulus spending to compensate for losses due to Covid-19. In the aftermath of the global financial crisis (a U.S.-centric crisis), when the central banks in the U.S. and Europe were struggling to stabilize their financial systems, the Chinese government stabilized the global economy. To counter the fallout from the crisis, in November 2008 the Chinese government introduced the biggest infrastructure spending program the world had ever seen. The total came close to \$600 billion, which necessitated an increase of lending by China's banks of about six fold in one year. If this is what the markets are expecting, they will be sorely disappointed. The Chinese government today has no stomach for fiscal splash of this magnitude. Instead, it is planning for targeted interventions like loan extensions and tax cuts for affected businesses, and subsidized rents for struggling retailers and so on.

(Source: Forbes)

British central bank cuts key interest rate - Will add more if necessary

The UK Federal Reserve cuts its key rate in the face of the coronavirus epidemic.

The Bank of England announced in London on Wednesday that it would be reduced from 0.75 to 0.25 percent outside of the regular meetings. It was the first rate cut since August 2016. "Although the magnitude of the economic shock from Covid-19 is highly uncertain, activity in the UK is likely to weaken significantly over the coming months," said the BoE.

The central bank also declared its willingness to add more if necessary. They also want

to coordinate with the Ministry of Finance and other central banks. The British pound came under pressure after the announcement: the price fell to \$1.2847 after having previously stood at 1.2936.

The Bank of England also announced a package of measures to deal with the virus crisis. For example, small companies are to be provided with an affordable financing instrument in the next twelve months. "These measures will help keep companies and people at work and prevent a temporary interruption from causing long-term economic

damage," the reasoned. It also lowered the so-called domestic countercyclical capital buffer (CCyB) for banks to zero percent from 1.0 percent. This buffer is intended to ensure that banks save additional capital in good economic times, for example to increase their resilience in the event of an economic downturn.

Other central banks had previously eased their monetary policy, including the US Federal Reserve. The European Central Bank will decide on its course on Thursday.

(Source: Reuters)



Over \$210b worth of energy project underway across Iran

ENERGY **TEHRAN** – Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian says 5,931 energy projects worth 8.84 quadrillion rials (about \$210.4 billion) are underway across the country, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

Speaking on the occasion of finishing the A-B-Iran program on Wednesday, Ardakanian said during this program 227 major projects with a total investment of 335.6 trillion rials (about \$7.99 billion) have gone operational in the country.

Under the A-B-Iran scheme [the acronyms A and B stand for water, electricity in Persian], during the current Iranian calendar year (March 2019-March 2020), 10 trillion rials (over \$238 million) of projects were inaugurated in each of the country's provinces, on average.

Based on this program, the Energy Ministry inaugurated some water, electricity projects

across the country every week.

According to the minister, during the 20 weeks of the mentioned program, the minister made 31 trips to various provinces for inaugurating energy projects.

The official also announced that three power plants and 40 new projects worth 60 trillion rials (about \$1.4 billion) will be inaugurated during the first quarter of the next Iranian calendar year (March 20-June 20).

Ardakanian further mentioned some of the other programs carried out by the energy ministry including the establishment of joint committees and consortiums with the neighboring countries for contribution to their energy projects.

He also mentioned the expansion of the country's water and electricity networks in the rural areas and hailed the ministry's efforts in managing natural disasters like floods and earthquakes in some regions.



The official also noted that the energy ministry's programs will continue in the next Iranian calendar year and the ministry is already working on a new scheme called

"optimizing consumption in the sanctions era" that focuses on modifying consumption patterns for better use of energy resources in the country.

Oil ministry explores ways for battling Covid-19

ENERGY **TEHRAN** – Necessary measures for containing the coronavirus (Covid-19) in the Iranian oil industry's operational areas were explored in a meeting on Tuesday, attended by the Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh and the Head of National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) Masoud Karbasian.

As reported by Shana, in the meeting Zanganeh discussed ways of preventing the spread of coronavirus in the oil, gas, refining and petrochemical operational areas with his deputies and managers of operating companies via videoconference.

According to Zanganeh, the meeting was held to underline the importance of the oil industry staff's health and safety, and also to prevent any disruption in the country's oil, gas and petrochemical production and maintaining the performance of the country's refineries at their best.

He pointed out that commuting in the operational areas of the oil industry should be highly controlled, saying: "Access to the operational areas must be highly restricted by the oil



industry safety guards, of course in coordination with the local people."

Managing Director of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC)

Mohammad Meshkinfam, Managing Director of National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) Hassan Montazer Torbati, Alireza Sadeq-Abadi, the managing director of National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC), and Managing Director of Iranian Oil Terminals Company (IOTC) Pirouz Mousavi, as well as Head of Iranian Offshore Oil Company (IOOC) Alireza Salmanzadeh were among the officials who were attending the meeting via video conference.

At the end of the meeting, the officials emphasized that the priority of the country's oil industry is maintaining the health and safety of employees and increasing the level of health services in order to prevent the spread of the virus and contain it.

Earlier on Monday, head of National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) had also said that despite the coronavirus outbreak, all operations in the country's oil and gas rigs are ongoing in full compliance with safety and healthcare standards.

Oil falls as Saudi Aramco aims to increase output capacity

Oil prices fell on Wednesday, giving up earlier gains, pressured by Saudi Arabia's plans to boost oil production capacity for the first time in more than a decade and weakened demand due to the spread of the coronavirus.

Brent crude was down 74 cents or 2 percent to \$36.48 per barrel by 0930 GMT, while U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was off 75 cents or 2.2 percent at \$33.61.

With the collapse of coordinated output cuts by Saudi Arabia, Russia and others, the Saudi energy ministry has directed producer Saudi Aramco to raise its output capacity to 13 million from 12 million barrels per day (bpd).

"Oil's supply-demand dynamics still point to a bias for weakness, as Saudi Arabia and Russia engage in a price war that threatens to push global markets into oversupplied conditions, at a time when global demand is being eroded by the coronavirus outbreak," Han Tan, Market Analyst at FXTM.

Oil prices had climbed \$2 earlier in the session on hopes that spending cuts by North

American producers to cope with multi-year low crude prices would lead to a drop in output.

"Any reduction in spending and drilling will take time to show up in actual production figures and is unlikely to mitigate the bearish impact of a massive Saudi output increase, in case the latter does happen," said oil broker PVM's Tamas Varga.

Oil prices were also under pressure after U.S. crude oil inventories rose in the most recent week, while gasoline and distillate stocks fell, American Petroleum Institute data showed.

Policymakers and central banks have been taking measures to bolster their economies against disruption caused by the coronavirus outbreak, the latest being the Bank of England which unexpectedly cut interest rates by half a percent on Wednesday.

"Coronavirus is still spreading globally and no doubt the virus' spread in major economies like the United States will continue to hurt oil demand," said Victor Shum, vice president of Energy Consulting at IHS Markit.



The flu-like coronavirus, which can be transmitted from person to person, originated in China late last year and has spread to more than 60 countries since then. It has infected over 100,000 people and killed more than 4,000 globally.

A worker at Equinor's Martin Linge offshore oil and gas development has been diagnosed with the coronavirus and is being held in isolation, the Norwegian energy firm said. It said activity on the field will be

reduced on Wednesday.

However, China's independent oil refiners are cranking up production as local governments begin to relax strict measures to contain the coronavirus and fuel demand begins to recover.

As new cases subside, more parts of China which had been in lockdown are being allowed to resume work, though travel curbs are still in place in some areas.

(Source: Reuters)

Saudi Arabia, Russia raise stakes in oil production standoff

Saudi Arabia said on Tuesday it would boost its oil supplies to a record high in April, raising the stakes in a standoff with Russia and effectively rebuffing Moscow's suggestion for new talks.

The clash of oil titans Saudi Arabia and Russia sparked a 25 percent slump in crude prices on Monday, triggering panic selling on Wall Street and other equity markets that have already been badly hit by the impact of the coronavirus outbreak.

Oil prices recovered some ground on Tuesday, but were still 40 percent down on the start of the year.

U.S. President Donald Trump spoke with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in a call on Monday to discuss global energy markets, the White House said on Tuesday.

Trump is seeking re-election this year and will benefit from lower gasoline prices at the pump. But the U.S. government will also be concerned by the potential for bankruptcies in the U.S. shale industry, which plays an increasingly important economic role.

Several U.S. oil firms said on Tuesday they would cut spending and dividends.

Amin Nasser, chief executive of Saudi Aramco said the state-run oil giant would increase supply in April to 12.3 million barrels per day (bpd), or 300,000 bpd above its maximum production capacity, indicating it may draw from storage.

Saudi Arabia has been pumping around 9.7 million bpd in the past few months, but has extra production capacity it can turn on and it has hundreds of millions of barrels of crude in store.

Moscow said Russian oil companies might boost output by up to 300,000 bpd and could increase it by as much as 500,000 bpd, sending the Russian rouble and stocks plunging.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin told Russia that energy markets needed to stay "orderly".



Brent oil prices jumped 8 percent on Tuesday to above \$37 per barrel after Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said Moscow was ready to discuss new measures with OPEC.

Russia's Energy Ministry also called for a meeting with Russian oil firms on Wednesday to discuss future cooperation with OPEC, two sources told Reuters.

But Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman appeared to rebuff the suggestion.

"I fail to see the wisdom for holding meetings in May-June that would only demonstrate our failure in attending to what we should have done in a crisis like this and taking the necessary measures," he told Reuters.

Strained budgets

Riyadh's unprecedented hike in supply follows the collapse of talks last week between members of the OPEC+ grouping, an informal alliance of OPEC states, Russia and other producers that has propped up prices since 2016.

Russia rejected OPEC's call to deepen existing supply cuts, prompting OPEC to scrap all production limits

and Russia to say it would also boost output, sending crude prices briefly down to almost \$31 and reviving fears of a 2014-style price crash.

Saudi Arabia needs an oil price of around \$80 to balance its budget, but has cash reserves and the ability to borrow to deal with a price plunge for now. Russia needs about \$42 to balance its books and also has hefty cash reserves it can draw on.

Iraq and some other OPEC nations, with more meager financial resources to cope with a dramatic drop in oil revenues, called for action to shore up prices.

Ratings agency Fitch said a sustained sharp drop in oil prices would hit the sovereign ratings of those exporting countries with weaker finances, particularly those with exchange rates pegged to the dollar.

But even Saudi Arabia, with its hefty financial reserves and sovereign wealth fund, did not have "infinite leeway" to support its A (stable) rating, Fitch analyst Jan Friederich said.

Aramco shares, which slid at the start of the week, were up 9.9 percent at 31.15 riyals at 1353 GMT on Tuesday but were still below their December listing price of 32 riyals.

Shares of U.S. firms which had also dropped recovered slightly on Tuesday, Occidental Petroleum said it would cut dividend and spending, while Chevron said it might cut spending and production.

The U.S. Department of Energy said on Tuesday it had suspended a sale of up to 12 million barrels of oil from the government's emergency crude reserve due to the price drop.

OPEC+ had effectively been cutting output by 2.1 million bpd, including the extra voluntary cuts by Saudi Arabia.

OPEC had sought further cuts that would have brought the total to about 3.6 million bpd or roughly 3.6 percent of global supplies, but Moscow's rejection of that plan led to the collapse of the whole deal.

(Source: Reuters)

Russia mulls increasing oil output up to 500,000 bpd: Novak

Russia could potentially increase oil production by up to 500,000 bpd in the long term, although it hasn't closed the door to further cooperation with OPEC in the future, Energy Minister Alexander Novak said Tuesday.

OPEC and Russia failed to agree on production cuts late Friday, causing oil prices to crash by over 30 percent on Monday. Walking out of the OPEC headquarters, Novak declared that everyone was free to pump oil at will starting April 1.

"We have the potential for production growth. I think that in the short term we can increase by 200,000-300,000 bpd, in the long term the potential is 500,000 bpd," Novak told the Rossiya 24 news channel.

Under the existing production restraint deal between OPEC and non-OPEC producers -- set to remain in force until the end of March -- Russia's quota is 10.328 million bpd. In February, the country produced 11.38 million bpd, according to S&P Global Platts estimates.

The minister is set to meet Russian oil companies this week to discuss production plans and cooperation with OPEC countries.



Despite discord with OPEC, Novak praised the effective cooperation of the so-called OPEC+ grouping over the past three years, which he said had earned Russia \$10 trillion (\$138.9 billion).

The accumulated funds will help Russia to support the ruble after the national currency hit a four-year low on Monday, the finance ministry has said, adding that the funds will help cope with oil prices as low as \$25/b for up to 10 years.

"We may reach new agreements if needed," Novak said, with regard to the possibility of new deals with OPEC+ in the future.

The next meeting of OPEC and non-OPEC ministers is scheduled for May-June, he added.

Riyadh rift

As for the steep drop in prices, he blamed Saudi Arabia offering discounts on oil for the crash, which "will take a few months to recover."

Meanwhile, the Kremlin too did not rule out Moscow and Riyadh returning to the negotiating table and reaching a consensus on oil production cuts.

"Cheap Saudi crude is already providing a highly competitive alternative to Northwestern European refineries as opposed to Russian crude oil, and global demand remains structurally weak," George Voloshin, head of the Paris branch of Aperio Intelligence, said, adding that the end of the US shale industry, another Russian competitor, is unlikely to happen.

"The risk Russia is facing is that it could find itself on the losing end in terms of market share as well," the analyst said.

(Source: Platts)

Italy's oil, gas infrastructure stays online as country goes into lockdown

Italy's key oil refining and gas supply infrastructure remained largely operational Tuesday despite the entire country being placed in lockdown in response to the expanding coronavirus outbreak.

Italy, Europe's number three gas consumer and fifth-biggest oil user, extended a lockdown over the northern Lombardy region and other areas to the entire nation Tuesday, effectively placing about 60 million people in voluntary quarantine. People are being urged to stay at home and all public gatherings and sporting events have been scrapped.

But most refinery plant operators said they are continuing normal operations with tighter health checks on their staff.

Activities at the API refinery in the central Italian coastal town of Falconara Marittima have been unaffected by the new coronavirus measures, a source close to the refinery told S&P Global on Tuesday.

The plant is currently restarting after it went offline on January 25 for some approximately 40 days of upgrades to permit a 5-year extraordinary maintenance cycle to be carried out. It is currently on schedule to restart, which is "imminent," the source said.

Oil major Eni, the country's biggest refiner, said its refining operations were not affected by the decree and confirmed that planned maintenance at its 190,000 bpd Sannazzaro refinery in northern Italy will go ahead from mid-March.

"Since the beginning of the emergency, the company has promptly implemented all necessary measures to protect the health of its people," a spokeswoman for the company said. "Eni is constantly monitoring the evolution of the epidemic in order to continue to guarantee its employees all the appropriate measures for their maximum protection."

Eni sent home staff at its headquarters in Milan on February 26 as local coronavirus cases grew. At the time it said its two refineries in northern Italy, the Sannazzaro plant near Milan and a biorefinery near Venice, were unaffected.

Italy's seven conventional oil refineries were processing about 1.31 million bpd of crude before the outbreak in January, representing about a 75 percent utilization rate.

There were no market reports of changes or disruption to Italy's gas or LNG import behavior.

Health precautions

Operations at Sarroch's refinery in Sardinia are currently unaffected by the recent government lockdown decree, a source close to the refinery told S&P Global Platts Tuesday.

Workers at the refinery have been ordered to adhere to a strict set of health and safety regulations aimed at reducing the possibility of any contagion should someone at the plant become infected by the virus, according to an internal document seen by Platts Tuesday.

Anyone with symptoms of influenza, including coughing, breathing difficulties and fever above 37.5 degrees Celsius "is absolutely banned" from attending the refinery premises, the document also said. The ban has also extended to anyone who cohabits or has been in contact with people that are in obligatory quarantine or self-isolation due to coronavirus infection.

Italy has the highest number of COVID-19 cases outside China with 9,172 confirmed infections and 463 fatalities from the disease. Spain and France and the second most affected European countries with about 1,600 cases each.

(Source: Platts)

First Announcement



ONE TIER GENERAL INTERNATIONAL TENDER NOTICE

Iranian Ideal Tobacco Co. located at Qazvin Ave, Qazvin square, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, Zip code: 1331839182, intends to purchase below non tobacco raw materials through international tender:

Item	Description	Unite	Quantity
1	Cigarette paper 22 mmx6000 m	Bobin	2,600
2	Cigarette paper 27 mmx6000 m double 40cu	Bobin	2,000
3	Cigarette paper 19 mmx6000 m Bahman super slim	Bobin	9,080
4	Cigarette paper 27 mmx4000 m	Bobin	5,110
5	Cigarette paper 21mmx6000 m	Bobin	9,000
6	Cigarette paper 27 mmx6000 m	Bobin	24,000
7	Tipping paper 70 mmx2400 m Bahman super slim blue	Bobin	2,300
8	Cork tipping paper 38 mmx2400 m	Bobin	10,310
9	Tipping paper 62mmx2400 m Tir Slim Black	Bobin	1,780
10	Cork tipping paper 50mmx2400 m	Bobin	8,200
11	Tipping paper 64 mmx2400 m Ultra light	Bobin	3,175
12	Tipping paper 64 mmx2400 m T4	Bobin	805
13	Tipping paper 64 mmx2400 m Nano Black	Bobin	3,270
14	Tipping paper 50 mmx2400 m Bahman light	Bobin	1,580
15	Tipping paper 62mmx2400 m Bahman ketabi	Bobin	880
16	Tipping paper 50 mmx2400 m Tir light	Bobin	1,180
17	Plug wrap 27mmx6000m	Bobin	11,100
18	Plug wrap 26.5mmx6000m	Bobin	2,040
19	Plug wrap 22mmx6000m	Bobin	5,100
20	Acetate cellulose tow 3y-35000	Kg	405,500
21	Acetate cellulose tow 5y-30000	Kg	61,300
22	Acetate cellulose tow 4y-35000	Kg	33,300
23	Filter rod 120 mm Bahman super slim blue	Rod	175,887,000
24	Filter rod 108 mm Bahman ketabi	Rod	51,000,000
25	Filter rod 108 mm Tir Slim black	Rod	104,100,000
26	Filter rod 108 mm Bahman Nano	Rod	279,200,000
27	Tipping adhesive (MAX Glue)	Kg	73,150
28	Triacetate (Plasticizer)	Kg	46,300
29	Side seaming (SE Glue)	Kg	34,490
30	Packaging Glue 7302	Kg	8,000
31	Packaging Glue 7301	Kg	6,250
32	Golden Self- Adhesive Tear tape 1.6 mmx12000 m	Bobin	4,010
33	Clear Self- Adhesive Tear tape 1.6 mmx12000 m	Bobin	290
34	Clear Self- Adhesive Tear tape 1.6 mmx50000 m	Bobin	175
35	Cocoa powder	Kg	32,000

Please note the following:

Tender documents in English and Farsi will be obtainable from March/12/2020 till April/11/2020 at Iranian Ideal Tobacco Company, Tender and Contracts Secretariat Office, Qazvin Ave, Qazvin square, Tehran, Iran, or from the national tender website: www.iets.MPORG.ir register the participation process and receive tender documents.

The samples of each item and the related data sheet and safety data sheet should be dispatched in standard reinforced packing format as below to Security Office, located at Golchin Building, Iranian Tobacco Company, Qazvin Ave, Qazvin square, Tehran, Iran, P.O.Box: 1331838734 exact and complete information of vendor should be indicated on each sample.

Description	Quantity of sample	Description	Quantity of sample
Glue and triacetate	60 kgs of each kind	Cigarette paper	5 Bobins of each size
Tipping Paper	5 Bobins of each size	Plug Wrap Paper	5 Bobins of each size
Golden & Clear Self Adhesive Tear Tape	5 Bobins of each size	Acetate Cellulose Tow	2 bales of each type
Filter rod	10000 rods	-	-

The samples are receivable from March/12/2020 till April/11/2020. Offers must be submitted to our Tender and Contracts Secretariat Office located at, Iranian Ideal Tobacco Company, Qazvin Ave, Qazvin square, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran. Zip Code: 1331839182 until April/27/2020.

For more information, you can contact to 0098 21- 51261920, IITC's Tender and Contracts Secretariat Office.

Iranian Ideal Tobacco Company

Modern Stadium of Martyrs of Khuzestan Football Club (KSC)



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MbS and the risky adventure of seizing the throne

➔ "Mujtahed" a person who revealed the secrets of the Al-Saud family confirmed the detention of Ahmed bin Abdulaziz, Mohammed bin Nayef, Saudi interior minister Abdulaziz bin Saud, as well as some other senior royals by Mohammad bin Salman. He also said that the issue is related to appointment of bin Salman as king and major opposition by the Al Saud family. Bin Salman does not have mercy on anyone.

Mujtahed revealed the arrest of a number of security and military officers who were affiliated with either Ahmed bin Abdulaziz or Mohammed bin Nayef, saying that anyone who bin Salman suspects to be related to these persons would be arrested. The matter is related a serious event, and the major arrest of princes and high-ranking officers is in the same regard.

Mojtahed wrote in another tweet: closing schools does nothing to do with the coronavirus outbreak and there are behind-the-scenes security reasons that have not been announced and that Mohammad bin Salman is due to do something in the coming days.

Referring to the developments in Saudi Arabia, Raialyoum newspaper wrote that informed diplomatic resources in Saudi Arabia assume that there is a connection



between recent arrests of Saudi princes and the efforts by some tribal leaders to hold a meeting for assessing the Saudi situation at the Allegiance Council.

■ **Western and regional officials' increasing concerns**

The paper also wrote that Saudi offi-

cials do not release any information about the current situation, but more than 120 influential figures, including princes and their advisers and officers close to them, have been detained as early as Monday morning, according to an informed diplomatic source. At the same time, concerns

are growing among the officials in Saudi Arabia and Persian Gulf states.

Obviously, the crown prince is trying to show that he is an undisputed king and does not allow anyone to even think about being the successor of 84-year-old king. He is not afraid of using force to defeat his contenders. But the question that has raised by experts and analysts is that why bin Salman has taken steps against other princes in such a situation that there is no threat against him. The crown prince should be aware of the consequences of his move, which may lead him to a terrible fate.

In fact, frustration and dissatisfaction among the princes of the Al Saud family has increased. They blame bin Salman for the attack on the Aramco oil facilities by Yemen on September 14. Hostile and extremist stance on Iran and distrust of the crown prince are also other reasons for the Saudi princes' discontent.

It can be concluded that Mohammad bin Salman is so concern about growing anger among princes which may change king Salman's mind or result in a new Allegiance Council for choosing a new successor, so he resorted to widespread detentions.

U.S. intervention impedes Iran's right to health, worsens coronavirus crisis: observers

By Hu Yuwei

GLOBAL TIMES — US sanctions are still obstructing Iran's access to medical equipment, aggravating Iran's burgeoning health crisis under stagnation by insufficient trade and a lack of crucial medical supplies, said Iranian residents reached by the Global Times. Global institutions and analysts have expressed concerns with the impact of sanctions on Iranians' right to health and access to medication.

"The epidemic in Iran is serious now. We need international assistance as the sanctions imposed on the country make international help inaccessible," an Iranian scholar who works in Geneva told the Global Times on condition of anonymity.

Within 24 hours, the Iranian Embassy in China has received 4 million yuan (\$576,800) after the embassy released a post on Sina Weibo on Wednesday, saying that Iran is in urgent need of materials like masks, respirators and viral testing kits.

"The generosity and kindness of Chinese friends touched us deeply," the embassy said on Weibo late Thursday, vowing to use the donation to buy disease prevention supplies with transparency.

In the Wednesday Weibo post, the embassy posted contact numbers and QR codes of their WeChat and Alipay accounts, while some netizens commented with screenshots of transfer information under the embassy's post.

Analysts said the US had partly exempted humanitarian goods through certain channels recently, but in name only. Constraints on financial transactions and the reluctance of financial institutions to facilitate trade related to Iran have made accessing medical supplies a persistent challenge.

Even though the US Treasury Department announced partial relief on February 28 to allow humanitarian aid to arrive in Iran through Switzerland, many companies are still hesitant to export critical medical supplies for worries of triggering retaliation from the US, apart from concerns over the difficult transaction procedures.

"US sanctions on Iran are capricious, but they eventually aim to constrain Iran's development and its people's well-being. This exemption of humanitarian aid can be seen as part of the US strategy to lead the Iranian public away from their government seen as a political rival by the US," Tian Feilong, a research fellow in the Middle Eastern studies at the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations in Beijing, told the Global Times.

Iran has become a new focal point for the quick spread of the novel coronavirus since last week. It has reported the second highest number of deaths of COVID-19 outside of China.

A doctor who refused to be named in Tehran told the Global Times that Iran is barely self-sufficient in medical supplies, but some specialist items are in extremely short supply and need to be imported because of Iran's own



limited production capacity. But there are difficulties in acquiring them because of the sanctions imposed by the US.

The US government has initiated "the toughest ever" sanctions against Iranian industry and banks in November 2018. Institutions and global companies breaking these restrictions may face heavy punishment and exclusion from the US financial system.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur Report on Human Rights in Iran in 2019 suggested that sanctions and banking restrictions will unduly affect the availability and distribution of medicines, pharmaceutical equipment and supplies. The report also warned of the potential negative impact sanctions have on UN and other humanitarian programs in Iran.

"Iran can only fill gaps in limited supplies by turning to alternative, unofficial and sometimes underground ways, such as private agencies, overseas third-party payment or Bitcoin transactions. This is needed to trade with outsiders to keep medical workers on the frontline in the struggle against the novel coronavirus," a manager of a trade services company in Iran surnamed Liu said.

Shortages of essential medical protective equipment such as masks and thermometers are obvious across major cities in Iran which in partly are causing the steep price of supplies, Liu told the Global Times.

"Many doctors and nurses on the frontlines of treating patients with suspected coronavirus do not have standard protective outfits and only wear operating gowns with limited antiviral ability," said Li Hong, manager of an Iran-based local tour agency, quoting her friend who is a doctor in a Tehran hospital. "Goggles and disinfection products are also in short supply."

In an interview with Iran's news agency ILNA on Monday, Ramin Fallah, vice president of the Iranian Union

of Importers of Medical Equipment, said the anti-Iran sanctions have hindered the import of coronavirus test kits.

While several foreign companies are ready to ship COVID-19 diagnostic test kits to Iran, the union is unable to transfer any money, because the sellers insist that payments should be made only via banks, Ramin Fallah added.

The intergovernmental Financial Action Task Force made the situation worse by its decision on February 21 to re-blacklist Iran for "its failure to meet with international treaties." US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo applauded the move, saying it would "protect the world from terrorist-financing threats emanating from Iran," media reported.

At present, the international community is highly concerned about the severity of the epidemic in Iran. France, Germany, and UK offered Iran \$5.58 million in aid to combat the coronavirus while China has dispatched expert teams and donated a batch of nucleic acid test kits and medical equipment to Iran. China's State Council and Foreign Minister Wang Yi had a phone call with Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on February 28, expressing support for Iran and sympathy to the patients' families.

'Trump's Deal of Century utterly one-sided, unfair, illegal'

TEHRAN (FNA) — Jafar Ramini, writer and analyst, says Donald Trump, the US President who is surrounded by Zionist advisors, has continued to provide total backing to Israel in what he calls a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, adding that Trump would run a steam-roller over Palestine and the Palestinians if it is the price for winning a second term in office.

In an exclusive interview with FNA, Ramini said, "[Trump's] main concern is to win another term in office and if the price is tearing up the rule-book and running a steam-roller over Palestine and the Palestinians, he will not hesitate."

Jafar Ramini is a London-based author and analyst on the West Asian region affairs. He appears in various TV and radio channels such as Press TV and Radio Sputnik.



Below is the full text of the interview:

■ Are Palestinians going to witness another catastrophe or Nakba, like what happened in 1948?

A: When we look at the prevailing conditions in 1948 when the Arab armies of the time, ill-equipped, ill-trained and out-numbered, decided to take on the battle-hardened, well equipped Jewish forces we all know the result: The Nakba. The tragedy was repeated in 1967, when Israel attacked and crushed the forces of Egypt, Syria and Jordan in six days. The result? The Naksa.

Fast forward to 2020, when you compare the modern Israeli army, considered to be the fifth most powerful in the world, with 300 nuclear war-heads with fragmented Arab countries, at each other's throats and many openly collaborating with Israel. Add to that the total backing of the United States of America and most western countries and you get the picture. Result? The utterly one-sided, unfair and illegal Deal of the Century.

■ How does the International Law rule about the deal of the century as it entails a transfer of a certain group of people from one place to another?

A: Since 1917, when Britain promised a homeland for the Jews in Palestine, the Zionist forces have been cherry-picking what suits them from international law and discarding the rest. Such as the clause in the infamous Balfour Declaration, 'as long as it is clearly understood that nothing should be done to prejudice the civil and religious rights of the non-Jewish communities in Palestine'. In 1949, when Israel was admitted into the United Nations, there was Resolution 194, which compels Israel to allow the return of all Palestinian refugees to their land and homes. Israel, as per usual, disregarded that and continues to do so until today. Israel has also discarded over 80 UN Security Council and UN General Assembly resolutions demanding that it adheres to the rule of international law and the norms of behavior. Israel ignores them all. It laughs at the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the transfer of citizens of the occupying power into the land of the peoples it occupies.

■ What are the political implications of Trump's plan? Does Israel want to get rid of the indigenous Arab population there?

A: This is an interesting question in as much as it puts the international rule-book in focus. We do not need to go back in history to show how this rule-book has been manipulated, altered and shaped to suit the rich and powerful nations of the world. This has been glaringly obvious since the entry of Donald Trump into the American political arena and winning the presidency. This man, who had no discernible experience in politics, international law, human rights or normal international relations has been put in charge of the most powerful Empire known to man. Surrounded by Zionist, both Jewish and Christian advisors, his main concern is to win another term in office and if the price is tearing up the rule-book and running a steam-roller over Palestine and the Palestinians he will not hesitate.

MbS condition will get worse after Salman death: Paul Pillar

➔ A: The Trump administration seems to be satisfied with having a close relationship with MBS, even though this has meant largely looking the other way regarding the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. This policy risks associating the United States with controversial policies of MBS, and antagonizing elements in Saudi Arabia that may yet successfully oppose him.

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

A: Whoever is the ruler in Saudi Arabia will face competing demands from the conservative religious establishment and from other Saudis, especially younger ones, who favor a more liberal society. There is no

reason to believe that MBS will be any better at striking this balance than another ruler would be. Probably MBS will follow the example of earlier Saudi rulers and grant concessions to the religious establishment over matters most important to them, such as education, in exchange for MBS getting some more flexibility in making changes in other areas.

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

A: The negative impact is substantial, and it is likely to get worse for Saudi Arabia before it gets better. Russia has indicated it does not intend to cut oil production to boost prices, and that it would be happy to see low



prices for a while to try to hurt U.S. oil producers using fracking technology.

Second Announcement



N.I.S.O.C

NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY AHVAZ-IRAN

TENDER NO. : 08-21-9640003

National Iranian South Oilfields Company (NISOC) intends to purchase the following goods

Items	Material Description	Quantity
01	TUBING, API GRADE L-80, SEAMLESS "VAM", "N.VAM", "SECR OR APPROVED THREAD RANGE 3(MAX LEN: 40.5 FT) AS PER API SCT/ISO11960, PSL: 2 MARKING : COLD DIE STAMPED IN ACCORDANCE WITH API SCT SIZE(OD), WIGHT(PPF), AS SPECIFIED NOTE: LEVEL OF INSPECTION:1(L.O.I: 1) "QCP/MPS DOCUMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL TO REVIEW & CONFIRM" "ITP DOCUMENTS IS ESSENTIAL FOR TECHNICAL EVALUATION" 4/12 IN. , 13.5 PPF DRIFT:3.795 IN.	9000 LE

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tender are requested to send their "Intention To Participate" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form No.2, available at: www.nisoc.ir, not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded. The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 73,471 EURO or 10,148,000,000 RIAL, in favor of NISOC.

Tender documents including the materials thorough technical specifications and Qualitative to Assessment Forms can be accessed via: www.nisoc.ir-material procurement management tab

ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS D.D.P., NISOC'S WAREHOUSE, AGHAJARI IRAN, PAYMENT TERM IS C.O.D., SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC'S MATERIAL APPROVAL NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID

FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT

Bldg. No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex

Kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran

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Public Relations www.shana.ir www.nisoc.ir

Travel and the coronavirus: answers to your top questions

As the coronavirus continues to spread across the globe, the question of whether to travel, and where it's safe to go, has become increasingly complicated. Experts say you need to stay informed. Here, their advice on some of the most pressing questions facing people who might be considering traveling.



A passenger going through security at Kennedy Airport's international departures terminal, where travel has slowed because of the coronavirus. Credit...Spencer Platt/Getty Images

■ I have a vacation planned. Is it safe to go?

This is up to you, experts said.

"People need to make an individual decision at this point, weighing the risks and benefits," said Scott Weisenberg, an infectious disease doctor at New York University School of Medicine, and director of the university's Travel Medicine Program.

Dr. Weisenberg said travelers should consult with a health care provider and monitor the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website for the most up-to-date travel notices before making a decision. The C.D.C. has recommended travelers avoid "all nonessential travel" to destinations with Level 3 travel notices. These countries include: China, Iran, South Korea and Italy.

If you are an older adult or you have a chronic medical condition, the C.D.C. is advising you to avoid visiting Japan, which now has a Level 2 travel health notice.

If you are thinking about boarding a cruise, the C.D.C. recommends that travelers defer those plans — especially if they have an underlying health condition. Cruises group large numbers of people in very close proximity, which "promotes the spread of respiratory viruses, such as the virus that causes COVID-19," according to the agency's website.

■ If I cancel my flight, will I get my money back?

It depends. Typically, you would have to at least pay a cancellation fee or booking penalty if you did not buy a fully refundable ticket, which is usually more expensive.

But the coronavirus has hit airlines hard, and many, including Delta, United and American, are loosening their booking policies and suspending cancellation or rescheduling fees.

"At the moment, the airlines are being very helpful," said Jonathan Breeze, chief executive of AardvarkCompare Travel Insurance, a travel insurance company. "These are not normal circumstances and the airlines are seeing that people are not booking flights, so airlines are offering commercial flexibility."

■ Will I be quarantined when I come back?

Possibly.

If you travel to a city that does not have a large number of confirmed cases — or perhaps no cases at all — but the number of confirmed cases rapidly increases during your stay, it could affect what happens when you return home, Dr. Weisenberg said. "You might be restricted on your re-entry," Dr. Weisenberg said, adding that you could be asked to quarantine yourself at home, or be placed in a special facility.

Even if you are not quarantined by health officials, some companies are requiring employees who have been traveling to work remotely, he added. And things are changing rapidly. "Those answers may vary depending on ongoing public health changes," Dr. Weisenberg said. "Once we have widespread testing available, then it will be easier for travelers to have a better idea of what the risk is in different areas."

■ Should I just stay home?

As of right now, Dr. Weisenberg cautioned travelers who might be tempted by a cheap airfare to put a lot of thought into whether they should book. Their safest option is to limit travel until the world has a better understanding of the virus, he said. "Think it through, don't go on a whim," he said.

(Source: The New York Times)

Travels banned to Iran's 'golden triangle' over virus fears

TOURISM TEHRAN

Like many other destinations across Iran, its famed "golden triangle" of tourism, which is referred to the cities of Isfahan, Shiraz, and Yazd, has announced it will host no visiting tourists until further notice in a bid to curb the coronavirus outbreak.

The decision was made in a meeting between representatives of the three cities on Monday, emphasizing that securing people's health is the highest priority, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

That is while they had previously inked an agreement to jointly hold celebrations during the Noruz holidays which starts on March 20 this year.

Tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan on Tuesday announced no official celebrations or public gatherings, even the pre-scheduled ones, will be held during the new year Noruz holidays.

Over the past couple of days, Iran has limited travel between its major cities in an effort to halt the spread with traffic limits on some of the country's roads, particularly [roads to] touristic provinces.

Authorities also warned that they may use "force" to limit travel throughout the country if needed.

The "golden triangle" offers sightseers an epitome of Iran for ones who are first-time visitors to the Islamic Republic both in terms of the historical sites and cultural identity.

Celebrated as the heartland of Persian culture for over 2000 years, Shiraz has become synonymous with education, nightingales, poetry and crafts skills passed down from generation to generation. It was one of the most important cities in the medieval Islamic world and was the Iranian capital during the Zand dynasty (1751–1794). Shiraz has also been named as Iran's 2020 Book Capital.

In July 2017, historical structure of the city of Yazd, which is the capital of Yazd province, was named a UNESCO World Heritage. The oasis city is wedged between the northern Dasht-e



A view of three-story Amir Chakhmaq Complex with a scenic pool in the front, Yazd, central Iran.

Kavir and southern Dasht-e Lut on a flat plain ringed by mountains. Its historical structure enjoys a very harmonious public-religious architecture that dates from different eras.

The city of Yazd is usually referred to as a delightful place to stay, or a "don't miss" destination by almost all of its visitors. It is teemed with mudbrick houses that are equipped with innovative badgirs (wind catchers), atmospheric alleyways, and many Islamic and Iranian monuments that shape its eye-catching city landscape.

The province has an interesting mix of people as well, some 10 percent of whom follow the ancient religion of Zoroastrianism. Yazd was Iran's 2019 Book Capital.

Soaked in a rich history, Isfahan was once a crossroad of international trade and diplomacy in Iran and now it is one of Iran's top tourist destinations for good reasons.

Filled with many architectural wonders such as unmatched Islamic buildings, bazaars, museums, Persian gardens and tree-lined boulevards,

Isfahan is, according to many, a city for walking, getting lost in its mazing bazaars, dozing in beautiful gardens, and meeting people.

Isfahan has long been nicknamed as Nesf-e-Jahan which is translated into "half the world"; meaning seeing it is relevant to seeing the whole world. The city is renowned not only for the abundance of great historical bridges, but also for its 'life-giving river', the Zayandeh-Rood, which has long bestowed the city an original beauty and a fertility.

Iran calls off Noruz celebrations amid coronavirus threat

TOURISM TEHRAN

Iran's tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan announced on Tuesday that no official celebrations or public gatherings, even the pre-scheduled ones, will be held during the new year Noruz holidays (starting March 20 this year) in a bid to combat the coronavirus outbreak in the country.

"Working hours for museums and cultural-historical sites should be minimized," he added, CHTN reported.

He went on to say that Noruz celebrations will be cancelled in all 31 provinces across the country, adding all museums (and historical sites that are affiliated with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts) should be closed during the holidays.

That is while Mounesan's deputy for cultural heritage,

Mohammad Hassan Talebian, had announced on Monday that some major museums and historical places in Tehran will be open during Noruz.

Earlier this month, 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."

Deputy health minister Kianoush Jahanpour said on Wednesday that at least 9,000 people have so far been infected with the virus in the country. Of the total figure, 2,959 have recovered and 354 have died.



Ali-Asghar Mounesan in an undated photo

IranAir resumes flights to Europe after temporary halt over coronavirus

TOURISM TEHRAN

Iran's flag carrier, IranAir on Wednesday resumed flights to European destinations following a temporary suspension over the outbreak of the coronavirus, according to sources.

IranAir's services to Europe, excluding Vienna, Stockholm and Goteborg, have been reestablished after a 48-hour halt, IRNA reported.

IranAir on Sunday announced the suspension of all its flights to Europe until further notice, a decision apparently linked to a ban on the carrier's planes from entering European airspace.

IranAir's management board and Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs made the decision following talks with an unnamed European authority, the company said in a statement on its website, without specifying



which routes will resume or whether they will be used to do more than repatriate Iranian nationals, Bloomberg reported.

The move came after the European Union Aviation Safety Agency banned three Airbus models within IranAir's fleet from European airspace, because they no longer met required airworthiness standards, the body said in an emailed statement, adding that the carrier did not face a general ban. The A300/A310 and A330 planes hadn't undergone necessary software upgrades, the Iran-focused website Bourse & Bazaar reported.

Routes to Vienna, Stockholm and Gothenburg, Sweden, are excluded from the decision, the IranAir statement said. IranAir also flies to London, Paris, Hamburg, Cologne and Frankfurt, according to its website.

Qanats yield clues to ancient way of life in Iran

HERITAGE TEHRAN

For thousands of years, qanat systems have supplied water to agricultural and permanent settlements in arid regions of Iran, tapping alluvial aquifers at the heads of valleys and conducting the water along underground tunnels by gravity, often over many kilometers.

The concept of "Persian Qanat" was registered on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2016, representing a select of eleven aqueducts across Iran.

According to UNESCO, The qanats provide exceptional testimony to cultural traditions and civilizations in desert areas with an arid climate.

The qanat system relies on snow fed streams, which flow down the foothills of surrounding mountains channeling through sloping aqueducts, often over far distances to



discharge into city's underground reservoirs or ab-anbars.

Such constructions are still in practice, many of which were made from 13th century onwards. Yazd is among ancient cities which have applied this concept to make urban settlements possible in central Iran.

The earliest water supply constructions in Yazd is believed to date from the Sassanid era (224 to 651 CE) while many others have been continually repaired and used over time, most surviving ab-anbars can be today traced to the late Safavid and Qajar periods.

When it comes to landscape architecture, ab-anbars and wind towers play a pivotal role in enriching the Yazd skyline.

The oasis city of Yazd, which is a UNESCO World Heritage, is wedged between the northern Dasht-e Kavir and southern Dasht-e Lut on a flat plain ringed by mountains.

ROUND THE GLOBE

Lamu Old Town

The UNESCO-registered The Lamu Old Town is the oldest and best preserved example of Swahili settlement in East Africa.

The property is located on an island known by the same name on the coast of East Africa some 350km north of Mombasa, Kenya.



With a core comprising a collection of buildings on 16 ha, Lamu has maintained its social and cultural integrity, as well as retaining its authentic building fabric up to the present day. Once the most important trade center in East Africa, Lamu has exercised an important influence in the entire region in religious, cultural as well as in technological expertise.

A conservative and close-knit society, Lamu has retained its important status as a significant center for education in Islamic and Swahili culture as illustrated by the annual Maulidi and cultural festivals.

Unlike other Swahili settlements which have been abandoned along the East African coast, Lamu has continuously been inhabited for over 700 years.

The architecture and urban structure of Lamu graphically demonstrate the cultural influences that have come together over 700 hundred years from Europe, Arabia, and India, utilizing traditional Swahili techniques that produced a distinct culture.

The property is characterized by its unique Swahili architecture that is defined by spatial organization and narrow winding streets.

(Source: UNESCO)

Iranian-made medicine raises hope to treat severe cases of COVID-19

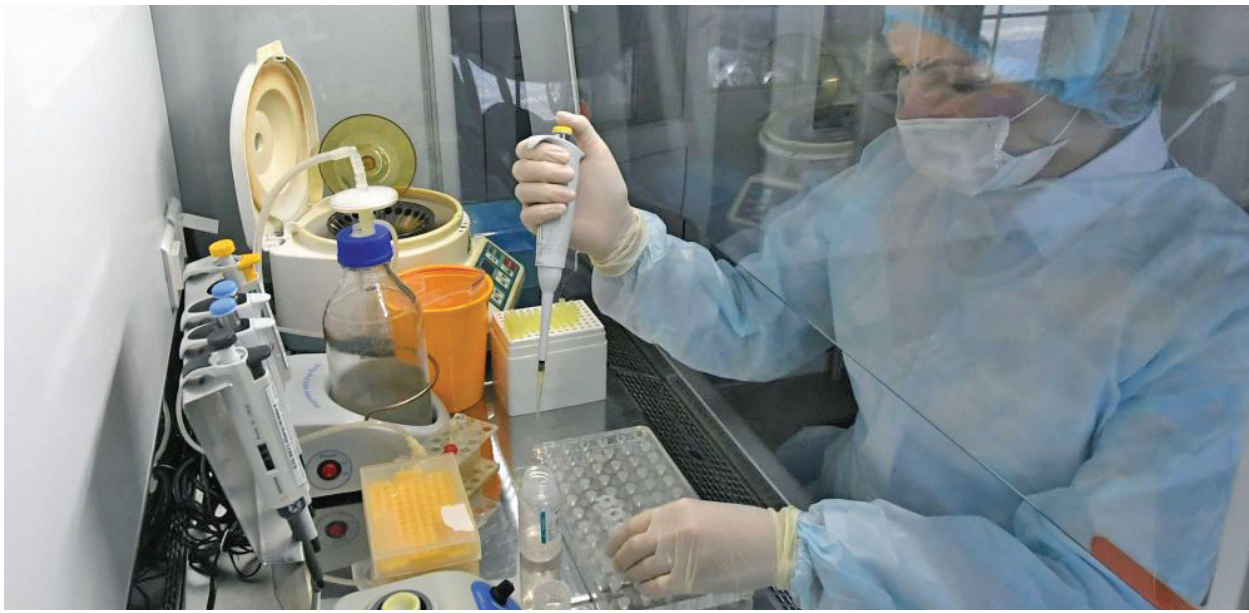
1 → Over the coming days, this trial will continue in other patients with the diagnosis of physicians, and if it has a relative effect, it will likely be included in the national pharmaceutical list, and case reports in China also indicate its relative usefulness in some cases of COVID-19 severe cases, he explained.

However, the mass production of this medicine, due to the localization of the technology, can be marketed in about three weeks, he highlighted.

He went on to say that at the same time, the potential benefits of two other biosimilar drugs that are domestically produced are also discussed, including interferon alfa and interferon beta, both have several domestic manufacturers in the country.

However, Tocilizumab is not yet on the official drug list of the country and needs further investigation as efficacy studies have begun, he concluded.

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, some 9,000 people have so far been infected in the country, with a death toll of 354.



Iran spends \$477m on refugee education annually



SOCIETY d e s k

TEHRAN — Iran spends about 20 trillion rials (nearly \$477 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) every year on the education of foreign national students residing in the country, head of the international affairs department of the Ministry of Education has said.

Over 558,000 foreign national children are receiving education in Iran completely free of charge, 474,000 of whom are Afghan children, ISNA quoted Gholamreza Karimi as saying on Wednesday.

Karimi said that there are currently about 137,000 undocumented Afghan students

in the country, adding that their parents do not have valid residency documents, “but we have provided the conditions for enrolling them in schools.”

A number of foreign nationals from neighboring countries came to Iran over the past four decades due to numerous regional crises and civil wars, he lamented.

A decree was issued by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in May 2015, which allows all foreign nationals, even those who have no identification and are living in Iran illegally, to attend schools in the country.

Distributors of toxic alcohol arrested in Iran



SOCIETY d e s k

TEHRAN — Seventeen distributors of bootleg alcohol have been arrested in southwestern Iran as more than 50 people have reportedly died in two provinces of drinking toxic alcohol thinking that it would prevent coronavirus infection.

During the investigation of the suspects' hideouts, 20,000 liters of industrial and homemade toxic alcohol beverages were discovered, ILNA reported on Wednesday.

Some 40 people in the southwestern

province of Khuzestan and 12 people in the northern province of Mazandaran have so far died of drinking bootleg alcohol mistakenly.

Unfortunately, over the past 24 hours, 170 new cases have been hospitalized in Khuzestan province, 95 percent of whom were in Ahvaz city.

This is while, Deputy health minister Kianoush Jahanpour said that COVID-19 has so far infected at least 9,000 people in the country, raising death toll to 354.

Climate emergency: global action is ‘way off track’ says UN head

The world is “way off track” in dealing with the climate emergency and time is fast running out, the UN secretary general has said.

António Guterres sounded the alarm at the launch of the UN's assessment of the global climate in 2019. The report concludes it was a record-breaking year for heat, and there was rising hunger, displacement and loss of life owing to extreme temperatures and floods around the world.

Scientists said the threat was greater than that from the coronavirus, and world leaders must not be diverted away from climate action.

The climate assessment is led by the UN's World Meteorological Organization (WMO), with input from the UN's

agencies for environment, food, health, disasters, migration and refugees, as well as scientific centres.

In 2019 the oceans were at the hottest on record, with at least 84% of the seas experiencing one or more marine heatwaves. Surface air temperatures around the world were the hottest ever recorded, after a natural El Niño event boosted figures in 2016.

The report says results from the World Glacier Monitoring Service indicate 2018-19 was the 32nd year in a row in which more ice was lost than gained. The melting of land ice combined with thermal expansion of water pushed sea levels up to the highest mark since records began.

The long-term decline of Arctic sea ice also continued in 2019, with the September average extent — usually the

lowest of the year — the third worst on record.

“Climate change is the defining challenge of our time. We are currently way off track to meeting either the 1.5C or 2C targets that the Paris agreement calls for,” said Guterres. 2019 ended with a global average temperature of 1.1C above pre-industrial levels. “Time is fast running out for us to avert the worst impacts of climate disruption and protect our societies.”

He added: “We need more ambition on [emission cuts], adaptation and finance in time for the climate conference, Cop26, in Glasgow, UK, in November. That is the only way to ensure a safer, more prosperous and sustainable future for all people on a healthy planet.”

(Source: The Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

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

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

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

Diagnosis is the most important part of coronavirus treatment, he highlighted. Patients suspected to coronavirus are currently being identified by diagnostic kits that have entered Iran in the form of assistance and purchases by the World Health Organization, China and UNICEF, he said.

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

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

کیت‌های ایرانی تشخیص کووید ۱۹ ماه آینده روانه بازار می‌شوند

دبیر ستاد توسعه زیست‌فناوری معاونت علمی و فناوری ریاست جمهوری گفت: کیت‌های تشخیصی کووید ۱۹، فروردین ماه وارد بازار می‌شوند.

مصطفی قانع، دبیر ستاد توسعه زیست‌فناوری معاونت علمی و فناوری ریاست جمهوری، اظهار داشت: به دنبال فراخوان این ستاد برای ساخت کیت‌های آزمایشگاهی تشخیص کووید ۱۹، با پنج شرکت دانش‌بنیان برای ساخت این کیت‌ها قرارداد منعقد شده است.

تشخیص، مهم‌ترین راه ورود به درمان بیماری کرونا است.

در حال حاضر بیماران مبتلا به کرونا به وسیله کیت‌های تشخیصی که در قالب مساعدت و خرید از طریق سازمان بهداشت جهانی، کشور چین و یونیسف وارد ایران شده‌اند شناسایی می‌شوند؛ اما ستاد توسعه زیست‌فناوری معاونت علمی و فناوری ریاست جمهوری با انتشار فراخوانی از دانش‌بنیان‌های توانمند دعوت کرد تا به حوزه ساخت این کیت‌ها ورود کنند.

به گزارش از مرکز ارتباطات و اطلاع رسانی معاونت علمی و فناوری ریاست جمهوری، وی افزود: کیت‌های وارد شده تا دو ماه آینده کافی هستند اما بعد از این مدت با کمبود کیت‌های تشخیص کرونا مواجه خواهیم شد. به همین دلیل با کمک توانمندی‌های داخلی این نیاز را مرتفع می‌کنیم.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-an, -ian”

■ **Meaning:** a word ending used to form nouns and modifiers that shows something belongs to a group, place, etc.

■ **For example:** I like to learn how to cook **Mexican** food.

PHRASAL VERB

Hand something out

■ **Meaning:** to give something to each person in a group; distribute

■ **For example:** Could you start handing these books out please?

IDIOM

Browned off

■ **Explanation:** if you are browned off, you are bored, fed up or disheartened

■ **For example:** “Tom is browned off with his job.”

Ecosystems the size of Amazon ‘can collapse within decades’

Even large ecosystems the size of the Amazon rainforest can collapse in a few decades, according to a study that shows bigger biomes break up relatively faster than small ones.

The research reveals that once a tipping point has been passed, breakdowns do not occur gradually like an unravelling thread, but rapidly like a stack of Jenga bricks after a keystone piece has been dislodged.

The authors of the study, published on Tuesday in the Nature Communications journal, said the results should warn policymakers they had less time than they realised to deal with the multiple climate and biodiversity crises facing the world.

To examine the relationship between an ecosystem's size and the speed of its collapse, the authors looked at 42 previous cases of “regime shift”. This is the term used to describe a change from one state to another — for example, the collapse of fisheries in Newfoundland, the death of vegetation in the Sahel, desertification of agricultural lands in Niger, bleaching of coral reefs in Jamaica, and the eutrophication of Lake Erhai in China.

They found that bigger and more complex biomes were initially more resilient than small, biologically simpler systems. However, once the former hit a tipping point, they collapse relatively faster because failures repeat throughout their modular structure. As a result, the bigger the ecosystem, the harder it is likely to fall.

Based on their statistical analysis, the authors estimate an ecosystem the size of the Amazon (approximately 5.5m km²) could collapse in approximately 50 years once a tipping point had been reached. For a system the size of the Caribbean coral reefs (about 20,000 km²), collapse could occur in 15 years once triggered.

The paper concludes: “We must prepare for regime shifts in any natural system to occur over the ‘human’ timescales of years and decades, rather than multigenerational timescales of centuries and millennia.

“Humanity now needs to prepare for changes in ecosystems that are faster than we previously envisaged through our traditional linear view of the world, including across Earth's largest and most iconic ecosystems, and the social-ecological systems that they support.”

The paper says this could be the case in Australia where the recent Australian bushfires followed protracted periods of drought and may indicate a shift to a drier ecosystem.

Scientists were already aware that systems tended to decline much faster than they grew but the new study quantifies and explains this trend.

“What is new is that we are showing this is part of a wider story. The larger the system, the greater the fragility and the proportionately quicker collapses,” John Dearing, professor in physical geography at the University of Southampton and lead author of the study, said.

“What we are saying is don't be taken in by the longevity of these systems just because they may have been around for thousands, if not millions, of years — they will collapse much more rapidly than we think.”

Dearing said he was concerned that one of the possible implications of the study was that complete destruction of the Amazon could occur within his grandchildren's lifetimes.

“This is a paper that is satisfying from a scientific point of view, but worrying from a personal point of view. You'd rather not come up with such a set of results,” he said.

A separate study last week warned the Amazon could shift within the next decade into a source of carbon emissions rather than a sink, because of damage caused by loggers, farmers and global heating.

Experts said the new findings should be a spur to action.

“I think the combination of theory, modelling and observations is especially persuasive in this paper, and should alert us to risks from human activities that perturb the large and apparently stable ecosystems upon which we depend,” said Georgina Mace, professor of biodiversity and ecosystems at University College London, who was not involved in the studies.

“There are effective actions that we can take now, such as protecting the existing forest, managing it to maintain diversity, and reducing the direct pressures from logging, burning, clearance and climate change.”

(Source: The Independent)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Conference on Iraq's future

(April 28, 2003)

Representatives from all over Iraq, as well as other countries, are meeting in Baghdad for a conference to try to decide how Iraq will be structured in the future. This report from Claire Marshall, Baghdad:

The invited delegates were **patted down** and searched carefully by US soldiers as they made their way through the **tight security cordon** around the conference center. Several hundred people have come here, both from within Iraq and from abroad including the United States and Britain.

These are the **so-called engaging personalities** which the US believes could potentially turn into future leaders. They include tribal chiefs and other **prominent figures**.

The idea of the conference is to **exchange views on the possible shape of** a future Iraqi government. Some religious groups are **boycotting** the event, but one delegate told the BBC that it was vital to work with the Americans **for the time being** to get Iraq **up and running** again.

■ **Words**

patted down: lightly tapped on top of clothing, from head to toe, with flat open hands to find out whether any weapons have been hidden

tight security cordon: a line or ring of soldiers, police and/or vehicles around an area which is made very safe because only certain people are allowed to enter and leave it

so-called: generally described as, but suggesting that not everyone agrees with the name

engaging personalities: interesting, pleasant and charming people

prominent figures: important people who are well-known or very noticeable

exchange views on: express and listen to opinions on possible shape of: the way something might be structured

boycotting: refusing to be involved because they strongly disapprove of it

for the time being: now, for a while, until it is possible not to

up and running: in a better condition and functioning or working well

(Source: BBC)

Taliban rejects Afghan gov't conditional prisoner release order

➔ 1 Another 3,500 are to be freed after negotiations begin, on the condition that there is a tangible reduction in violence, according to the four-article pardon decree.

However, amid a public feud between Ghani and his main rival, Abdullah Abdullah, it is not clear who would represent Kabul in intra-Afghan talks, even if the Taliban agree to start negotiations.

Ghani's presidency has been challenged by Abdullah, who has also sworn himself in as the country's president.

Since the U.S.-Taliban deal was signed in the Qatari capital on February 29, nearly 40 people have been killed in attacks, with 32 killed on Monday in a gun attack claimed by the ISIL (ISIS) armed group.

The U.S. State Department issued a statement on Tuesday saying that the level of violence in Afghanistan is "unacceptable," and that, while the Taliban have stopped attacks against the U.S.-led coalition forces and in Afghan cities, the violence in the countryside remains too high.

Despite the political turmoil in Kabul and increased violence on the battlefield, the U.S. has started withdrawing its troops in keeping with the Doha deal. In the first phase, Washington will reduce its presence to 8,600 soldiers, down from the current 13,000.

If the Taliban adhere to their commitments to deny safe havens to armed groups in Afghanistan, Washington will withdraw the remainder of its troops over 14 months, according to the agreement.

At the time of its signing, the U.S.-Taliban deal was touted as Afghanistan's best chance at peace after 40 years of relentless war while offering the U.S. an exit after nearly 19 years of fighting in the country - its longest war.

President Donald Trump has expressed increasing frustration with the Afghan government and its security forces' inability to police and manage their own affairs.

The deal has faced hurdles from the outset, despite efforts by Washington's Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad to bring the divided Afghan leadership together.

The U.S. and other international players seem to have backed Ghani's leadership. Still, Abdullah, with his significant support base, cannot be ignored, analysts say.

(Source: al Jazeera)

Barham Salih announces deadline for nominating Iraqi PM

➔ 1 On Sunday, only 108 lawmakers of the 329-member parliament, known as the Council of Representatives of Iraq, attended the extraordinary session, which had already been delayed twice last week, on Saturday and Thursday, over a lack of quorum.



Allawi, a 65-year-old former communications minister, was appointed as the new premier by Salih on February 1, after the parliament missed a deadline set by the president to nominate someone for the post.

Earlier, Shia cleric Moqtada Sadr, whose bloc is the largest in parliament and supports Allawi, had threatened to organize mass protests outside parliament unless the legislators backed the new cabinet in a confidence vote.

(Source: agencies)

More than 500 medical sites struck in Syria since 2016: WHO

The World Health Organization (WHO) said on Wednesday that it has documented more than 500 attacks on medical facilities in Syria since it began counting them in 2016, with nearly as many deaths among staff and patients.

About two-thirds of those struck were in Syria's northwest where fighting has intensified in recent months as Damascus, backed by Russia, has sought to capture the last slice of the country beyond its control.

A ceasefire between Russia and Turkey, which back opposing sides in the conflict, was agreed last week and only minor violations have occurred.

The data documented 494 attacks on health facilities between 2016-2019, the report showed in what the WHO says is the first comprehensive time it has released of data on medical strikes.

Since the start of this year, it has confirmed nine further attacks, all in northwest Syria, that resulted in 10 deaths, without saying who was responsible.

The total death toll of medical workers and patients was 480 from January 2016 to present, it said.

"What is troubling, is that we've come to a point where attacks on health - something the international community shouldn't tolerate - are now taken for granted; something we have become accustomed to," said Richard Brennan, WHO's Regional Emergency Director in the Eastern Mediterranean.

He added that only half of facilities in northwest Syria, where about 1 million people displaced by recent violence are based, remain operational.

The WHO, a Geneva-based UN agency, is mandated to keep track of attacks on health facilities and began doing so in 2016. The system has since then been formalized under its Surveillance System for Attacks.

Such data could help the UN Board of Inquiry which last year began investigating a series of incidents in northwest Syria, including attacks on health facilities.

UN officials have previously denounced "deliberate" attacks by the Syrian government and its allies on protected civilian sites, including hospitals and schools. If proven, these would amount to war crimes.

(Source: Reuters)

Sixteen more years? Russian parliament backs move to keep Putin in power

Constitutional changes allowing Vladimir Putin to run for president again in 2024 sailed through both houses of Russia's parliament Wednesday, raising the prospect he could clock up over three decades in the Kremlin.

Putin, 67, who has dominated Russia's political landscape for two decades as either president or prime minister, made a dramatic appearance in the lower chamber a day earlier to argue that term limits were less important in times of crisis.

A former KGB officer, Putin is currently required by the constitution to step down in 2024 when his second sequential and fourth presidential term ends. But the amendment which he backed would formally reset his own presidential term tally to zero. Successors would face a two-term limit however.

The 450-seat State Duma, the lower house of parliament, Wednesday backed the term reset for Putin, along with other amendments to the constitution, by 383 votes, in a third and final reading. Nobody voted against; 43 lawmakers abstained.

Hours later, the 170-seat Federation Council, the upper house of parliament, gave its approval by 160 votes to one with just three abstentions.

If, as Putin critics expect, regional parliaments and the constitutional court now give their blessing and the overall changes are backed in a nationwide vote in April, Putin would have the option to run again for president in 2024.

Were he to do that, and his health and electoral fortunes allowed, he could potentially stay in office for another two back-to-back



six-year terms until 2036 at which point he would be 83 and have spent 36 years at the top of Russian politics.

Such a scenario would see him wield power longer than Soviet leader Josef Stalin, but still leave him well short of Tsar Peter the Great, who reigned for 43 years.

■ PRESIDENT FOR LIFE?

Kremlin critic and opposition politician

Alexei Navalny has said he believed Putin was trying to become president for life.

Putin has not spelled out his plans after 2024, but has said he does not favor the Soviet-era practice of leaders remaining in place until they die.

Opposition politician and former lawmaker Dmitry Gudkov said Wednesday he thought the changes had dealt a mortal blow to the

country's constitution.

"Russia has lost its constitution, which didn't work anyway," Gudkov wrote on social media. "The fig leaf has fallen off the regime and we can see who turned out to be beneath it."

Putin in January unveiled a major shake-up of Russian politics and a constitutional overhaul, which the Kremlin billed as a re-distribution of power from the presidency to parliament.

But Putin's critics say the reform was merely a smoke screen to give the country's ruling elite a way to keep Putin in power after 2024.

Opposition activists have said they plan to organize protests as early as Friday. Their plans are complicated however by an order from Moscow's government which has banned public gatherings of more than 5,000 people until April 10 due to coronavirus-related risks.

Putin remains popular with many Russians, who see him as a welcome source of stability, even as others complain that he has been in power for too long.

Two people staged lone pickets outside the State Duma Wednesday. One of them Gleb Tumanov, 31, said he was a member of the Yabloko party, and held a banner calling the move "an usurpation of power."

"I'm here because of Vladimir Putin's desire to stay for a fifth term or even maybe a sixth," said Tumanov.

"It just feels sad. And reminiscent of the Soviet Union. I didn't spend very much time living in the Soviet Union obviously but neither do I have any desire to do so."

(Source: Daily Star)

U.S. now openly admits its goal in Syria is to make it 'difficult' for Moscow and Damascus to defeat terrorists

he State Department's special envoy for Syria has just admitted that the U.S. aims to defend militants in Idlib against 'Russian aggression,' proving once again that the swamp in Foggy Bottom is alive and well.

Russia and the Syrian government "are out to get a military victory in all of Syria," Ambassador James Jeffrey told reporters on a conference call out of Brussels on Tuesday.

To illustrate these methods, Jeffrey cited the U.S. threat to respond "in a very savage military way" against any chemical attacks, which he described as "a favorite tactic of the Syrian regime in making advances." This is factually untrue, since the alleged attacks always happen after Syrian Army victories, as a pretext for U.S. intervention.

Jeffrey also noted that there are U.S. and coalition troops in parts of Syria - officially there to fight Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS), but in actuality "guarding" the oil fields. He tellingly described their presence as "a complication" for the Syrian government.

Jeffrey and U.S. ambassador to Turkey David Satterfield



were in Brussels after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit, to discuss ways the US and NATO can help Ankara protect its pet militants in their last remaining redoubt - Syria's Idlib province.

But while Satterfield described Idlib as containing "three million-plus innocent civilians, the majority of whom are

women and children," and accused "Russian aggression" of seeking to displace them, listen to how Jeffrey chose to describe the situation, when asked by a CNN reporter if NATO was considering sending in ground troops:

This is either appallingly ignorant or downright delusional, as the Syrian army had successfully rolled up the Turkish-backed militants and the ceasefire Ankara agreed to in Moscow last week confirmed that.

he real revelation here is that the militants are described as Turkey's "opposition." Contrast this with the words of Colonel Myles Caggins, spokesman for the anti-ISIS coalition's military arm, just three weeks ago:

"Idlib province seems to be a magnet for terrorist groups, especially because it is an ungoverned space in many ways," Caggins told Sky News. "There are [a] variety of groups there - all of them are a nuisance, a menace and a threat to... hundreds of thousands of civilians who are just trying to make it through the winter."

(Source: RT)

Merkel says 70pc of Germans could get coronavirus



German Chancellor Angela Merkel cited expert estimates that up to 70 percent of the population could be infected by the coronavirus.

Germany confirmed some 1,300 infections, with two deaths.

"You have to understand that if the virus is there, and the population has no immunity yet to this virus, there are no vaccines and no therapy so far, a high percentage - experts say 60 to 70 percent - of the population will be

infected," Merkel said at a news conference in Berlin.

She said the priority is to slow the spread of the disease "so all the measures we are taking are of the greatest significance because they are giving us time - it does matter what we do, it is not in vain."

The government recommended the cancellation of events with more than 1,000 people, among other things.

(Source: DPA)

Primary wins give Joe Biden commanding edge in U.S. Democratic race



In a continuation of the Super Tuesday turnout, Democratic voters turned out in droves on Tuesday for primaries in six states aimed at clearing up the question of who will go up against President Donald Trump in November - game-changer Bernie Sanders or the status quo candidate, Joe Biden.

Ultimately, Democratic voters opted for Biden, raising the question of whether Sanders will suspend his campaign.

While the exact delegate counts will take days to tally, Biden won the popular

vote in Michigan, Missouri, Mississippi, and Idaho.

Exit polls indicated that a pattern established in earlier states continued on Tuesday, with younger voters and Muslims opting for Sanders and older voters, along with African Americans and suburbanites, turning out for Biden. Voters told pollsters that one of their primary motivations was finding a candidate who can defeat Trump in the general election.

(Source: al Jazeera)

U.S. offers Turkey Patriot missiles if it ditches Russia's S-400: Erdogan

Turkey's president says the United States has offered to provide Ankara with the Patriot missile system if it refuses to operationalize the advanced S-400 defense system that it has bought from Russia.

The U.S. "softened significantly on this S-400 issue. They are now at the point of promise us you won't make the S-400s operational," said Recep Tayyip Erdogan while returning from a meeting in Brussels on Tuesday.

Erdogan's remarks suggested that Washington had rowed back on its previous insistence that Ankara should return the S-400s, which are considered to be Russia's most advanced long-range anti-aircraft missile system.

Russia and Turkey finalized an agreement on the delivery of the missile system in late 2017. So far, Turkey has received several batteries and has said it would make them operational in April.

The purchase has been a bone of contention in Turkey's ties with the U.S., which claims the Russian systems do not fit the rest of the military equipment operated by the Western NATO military alliance, of which Turkey is a member.

Washington has suspended Ankara's participation in

a project aimed at manufacturing American F-35 aircraft in protest at the purchase.

The Pentagon, meanwhile, claimed that U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper had reiterated the country's stance concerning the prospect of Patriot missile system's delivery to Turkey.

"Turkey is not going to receive a Patriot battery unless it returns the S-400," it said.

A senior Turkish official talking to Reuters on the condition of anonymity, however, echoed Erdogan's remarks concerning the U.S.'s most recent position on the issue, saying Washington "has once again brought up the Patriot offer."

"The United States' previous strong stance isn't the case anymore. They are approaching Turkey more empathetically now," said the official, adding that this time, it would be sufficient for Washington to see "that the S-400s are not activated, or in other words, that they are not unboxed."

Turkey asked the U.S. to deploy the missile batteries on its border with Syria as Ankara's military intervention in the Arab country is facing a decisive response from

the Syrian army, threatening a direct confrontation with Russia, which backs Damascus' anti-terror efforts.

Turkey has dispatched forces to Syria under a deal aimed at reinforcing de-escalation efforts there. The Turkish forces, however, recently ventured out of their assigned areas in northwestern Syria, engaging in deadly clashes with the Syrian army.

Outraged by Turkey's military adventurism and ongoing support for anti-Damascus militant groups, Moscow has warned Ankara against violating the agreed-escalation regime in Syria.

Erdogan said besides asking the U.S. to deploy the missiles, Turkey has proposed that it would buy the missile system. "We made this offer to the United States on the Patriot: If you are going to give us Patriots, then do it. We can also buy Patriots from you," he said.

Observers say the approach towards Washington as well as an announcement by Erdogan on March 1 that Turkey would no longer hold back refugees from entering Europe amount to Ankara's direct attempts at dragging NATO into the Syria conflict.

(Source: agencies)

Iranian boxers secure berths at 2020 Olympics

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Two Iranian boxers Danial Shahbakhsh and Shahin Mousavi secured their places at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics on Wednesday.

At the Asia-Oceania Olympic boxing qualifier in Amman, Shahbakhsh defeated his opponent TSO Sing Yu from Hong Kong in the Men's 57kg weight class in three rounds.

Mousavi also defeated Mongolian boxer Byamba Erdene Otgonbaatar in the Men's 75kg weight class and became the second Iranian boxer to book place at the Olympics.

Omid Ahmadi Safa (52kg) and Ashkan Rezaei (63) failed to earn place in the competition after losing to their rivals on Wednesday.

More than 220 boxers are competing in the event which is one of the most important Asian challenges of the year, with 41 men's and 22 women's berths up for grabs at the Olympics.

Iran had sent eight boxers to the competition. Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, India, China, Australia, Thailand, South Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Chinese Taipei, Tajikistan, Jordan, Iran, Kyrgyzstan and Philippines attend in the event with the biggest and strongest delegations in Amman.

The qualification tournament was held from March 3 to 11 in Jordan, after being rescheduled from Feb. 3 in 14 in Wuhan, China due to the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak. The virus has since infected more than 100,000 people in the world and killed 4,000 people.



Kolakovic shows support for Iranians in fighting coronavirus



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran national volleyball team head coach Igor Kolakovic has shown support for the Iranian people in fighting the novel coronavirus.

A total of 354 people in Iran have died from the coronavirus so far but Kolakovic has encouraged the Iranian people to fight the disease.

"I know how hard it is for you, my heart is with you, the brave Iranian people."

In your long and rich history, you have been able to withstand great tribulation and problems, coronavirus is nothing for you. Resist and defy," Kolakovic posted on his Instagram account.

COVID-19 has spread to 115 countries with more than 4,000 deaths – more than five times more than SARS, in less time.

Recent reports suggest that the number of global Covid-19 cases had reached about 120,000.

Asbaghian elected as Iran Sports Federation for the Disabled President



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Mohammad Shervin Asbaghian has been elected as new president of Iran Sports Federation for the Disabled.

He replaced Hamid Ali Samimi for a four-year term till 2024 by receiving 23 votes out of 35 votes in the presidential elections held at the Iran's Academy Olympic on Wednesday.

Asbaghian currently is director gen-

eral of federations' common affairs at Iranian Ministry of Sports but he must resign from his role to start his work as head of Iran Sports Federation for the Disabled.

"I would like to thank all the members who voted for me. We want to continue the federation's success, that's why I'm here. We have a lot of work to do because we are going to do our best at the 2020 Paralympic Games," Asbaghian said.

Rasoul-Panah named Persepolis acting GM

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis have announced Mehdi Rasoul-Panah as the acting general manager of the Iranian football club on Wednesday.

Rasoul-Panah replaced Mohammad Hasan Ansarifard, who resigned as general manager of the club on Tuesday. Ansarifard's resignation came amid managerial disagreement between him and the club's board of directors.

Rasoul-Panah is the head of Persepolis board of directors and now he will work as the general manager at the same time.

Rasool-Panah raised questions about the financial situation of the club during Ansarifard's era and asked him to attend the board meetings.



"During Mr. Ansarifard's responsibility, many financial commitments have been made and we are looking forward to seeing him attending a board meeting and explain about financial commitments and other related issues," he told website of the Ministry of Sport and Youth.

"According to the decision of the board of directors, I am in charge until the appointment of the new general manager of the club," he added.

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

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

The Reds have had 12 GMs in the last eight years.

Tokyo 2020 organizers insist Olympics on despite virus 'concern'



Preparations for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics this summer are going ahead "as scheduled," organizers insisted on Wednesday, while acknowledging they are "concerned" about the spread of the new coronavirus.

Tokyo 2020 president Yoshiro Mori made the comments after a member of the organizers' executive board sounded the alarm on the virus outbreak, warning postponing the Games for two years might be the best

option under the circumstances.

But Mori dismissed that option, as did Japanese Olympic minister Seiko Hashimoto, who told a parliament committee that postponing or cancelling the Games was "inconceivable."

"Of course we are concerned," Mori told reporters, conceding the outbreak that has infected more than 117,339 people worldwide and caused 4,251 deaths will have some effect on the Games.

"I didn't say it won't, I think there will be," he said.

But "as the organizing committee, it is only natural for us to move forward with our work as scheduled," Mori added.

He said the World Health Organization, which has been consulting with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and organizers in Tokyo, was expected to announce its "basic thoughts soon."

Mori's comments came at a hastily organized briefing called after executive board member Haruyuki Takahashi made a splash in interviews warning that preparations should be made for a postponement.

Takahashi told Japan's Asahi Shimbun daily it would be ideal to hold the Olympics

as planned but "there has to be an alternative plan."

"The coronavirus has become a global problem. We can't just hold it (the Olympics) because Japan is OK," he told the daily.

He said the summer two years from now "offers the best possibility" for a postponement, given the international sporting calendar, adding that "preparation must start now" if a delay is on the cards.

He insisted that it would be "impossible" to cancel the Games altogether, and said he was speaking out as "a warning bell" for the organizing committee, adding that he would raise the issue at a board meeting later this month.

'Inconceivable to cancel'

Mori said a postponement was impractical, noting that many of the Olympic venues might not be available in two years.

"This is not something that you can delay one or two years and make it happen," he said.

"Honestly I thought the statement was out of line," he said of Takahashi's remarks, adding he had asked him to consider his comments more carefully.

The organizers also distanced themselves from Takahashi's remarks in a statement,

stressing that the IOC has consistently said the Games are going ahead as scheduled.

"We sought clarification from Mr. Takahashi. He stated he had inadvertently given his personal opinion in response to a hypothetical question," they said.

And Olympic minister Hashimoto also said alterations to the schedule were not on the cards.

"From the viewpoint of athletes who are the main protagonists in the Tokyo Games, as they are making adjustments and preparations for this once-in-four-years event... it is inconceivable to cancel or postpone," she told a parliament committee.

She conceded that "it is the IOC (International Olympic Committee) who will make a final decision on the Games".

"We think it is important that the government gives correct information so that the IOC makes an appropriate decision," she added.

The rapid spread of the virus, which has infected more than 560 people and been linked to 12 deaths in Japan, has already cast a shadow over preparations for the Games.

(Source: AFP)

All sporting events in Iran halted till late April

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran's Minister of Sport and Youth Masoud Soltanifar announced the suspension of all sporting events in the country until April 20.

The sporting events in Iran had been already canceled until April 2 but the postponement has been extended until April 20.

A total of 354 people in Iran have died from the coronavirus so far.

COVID-19 has spread to 115 countries with more than 4,000 deaths – more than five times more than SARS, in less time.

Recent reports suggest that the number of global Covid-19 cases had reached about 120,000.

Iran's Tavasoli nominated for Best Female Goalkeeper in the World

Iran's goalkeeper Farzaneh Tavasoli has been nominated for Best Female Goalkeeper of the World.

Tavasoli will vie with nine other women to win the one of the most traditional prizes of futsal.

She helped Iran win 2018 AFC Women's Futsal Championship.

■ Nominees are as follow:

(in strict alphabetical order!)

*Ana Carolina Caliarì Sestari (BRA/ITA)

Montesilvano C5 Femminile (ITA) - ITALY N.T.

*Ana Catarina Silva Pereira (POR)

Sport Lisboa e Benfica (POR) - PORTUGAL N.T.

*Flaviani do Nascimento «Flavi» (BRA)

Futsal Feminino Taboão da Serra (BRA) - BRAZIL N.T.

*Anastasia Ivanova (RUS)

FK Aurora Sankt-Peterburg (RUS) - RUSSIA N.T.

*Júlia Inês Melz (BRA)

Cianorte Futsal Feminino (BRA)

*Marta Balbuena (ESP)

C.D. Futsi Atlético Navalcarnero (ESP) - SPAIN N.T.

*Sofia Victoria Olivera Trakimas «Chofy» (URU)

Club Atlético Peñarol (URU)

*Silvia Agüete Outón (ESP)

Poio Pescamar F. S. (ESP) - SPAIN N.T.

*Farzaneh Tavasoli Sis (IRN)

Namino Isfahan (IRN) - IRAN N.T.

*Ayaka Yamamoto (JPN)

SWH Ladies Futsal Club (JPN)

(Source: Futsal Planet)

Esteghlal remain best Iranian football club in world ranking

TASNIM — Esteghlal are the best Iranian football club in the latest Club World Ranking.

Esteghlal, who are the favorites to win the Iran Professional League (IPL) in the current season, sit first in the ranking with 4222 points. Another Iranian football giants Persepolis are second with 4053 points.

Zob Ahan are the third Iranian team in the ranking with 3243 points and Sepahan are fourth (3063).

Liverpool are first in the world, followed by Barcelona and Flamengo.

Club World Ranking is a ranking system of the best soccer teams, top scorers and coaches in the world, based on match results over the past 52 weeks.

Andrew Parsons meets President of Iceland

International Paralympic Committee (IPC) President Andrew Parsons travelled to Iceland between 9 and 10 March to meet with the nation's leaders and discuss the development of the Paralympic Movement across the country and the world.

During his visit, Parsons met with Iceland President Guðni Th. Jóhannesson and Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir, along with Lilja Alfreðsdóttir, Minister of Education and Sport, and Asmundur Einar Daoason, Minister of Welfare and Children Affairs.



Parsons said: "Just spent the last two days visiting Iceland. I am impressed with the high profile of Paralympic sport in the country and how the National Paralympic Committee is a fundamental partner of both the Ministries of Social Affairs, and Education & Sport in a holistic approach to persons with disabilities on a national level."

"I also met with Mr. Guðni Th. Jóhannesson, president of Iceland and Mrs. Katrín Jakobsdóttir, the nation's Prime Minister, to discuss the future developments of the Paralympic Movement in Iceland and worldwide. I have also visited the National Olympic and Sports Association of Iceland where I was greeted by its president, Lárus Blöndal, who briefed me on the structure of Icelandic sport."

"It was a pleasure to spend time with some Paralympic athletes who are fighting to qualify for Tokyo and share views with them. The entire time I was there, I was accompanied by NPC Iceland president Thordur Arni Hjaltastétt, with whom I had excellent discussions about his organisation and the IPC. I thank everyone for their hospitality and congratulations on their great work."

(Source: Paralympic.org)

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**GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING**

*He who improves what is between him and God,
will see that God improves what is between him
and people.*

Imam Ali (AS)

“Driving Lessons” crowned best at Through Women’s Eyes film festival

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** —Iranian director Marzieh Riahi’s acclaimed movie “Driving Lessons” was named best short narrative at the 21st Through Women’s Eyes International Film Festival (TWE) in Sarasota, Florida, the U.S., a public relations team for the film announced on Wednesday.



Ascene from “Driving Lessons” by Iranian director Marzieh Riahi.

The film tells the story of Bahareh, a young woman who, according to Iranian law, must have a man from among her relatives accompany her on driving lessons so she and her male instructor won’t be alone.

The Through Women’s Eyes International Film Festival, which offers films with a focus on international women’s issues and lives as well as films on any topic by women filmmakers, was held from March 6 to 8.

NLAI launches digital library for children and young adults

C U L T U R E d e s k **TEHRAN** — The National Library and Archives of Iran (NLAI) has established a digital library for children and young adults.

Books on various topics suitable for children aged 7 to 14 are easily accessible through the website <http://iclna.nlai.ir>, the NLAI has announced.



This image shows the home page of the website of the Iranian Children’s National Library.

The portal also offers audio books, magazines and podcasts prepared for children and young adults. Interested applicants can join as members and make their own personal digital libraries.

Prague Film Festival called off amid coronavirus fears

NEW YORK (Variety) — The Prague International Film Festival is the latest industry event to be canceled in the wake of the global coronavirus outbreak.

Organizers confirmed Tuesday that the event, also known as Febiofest, is canceled until further notice and will aim to be rescheduled later in the year.

The cancellation follows a ban by the Czech Ministry of Health on cinema screenings, elementary and high school classes, sports matches and cultural events in response to fears over the coronavirus.

The government ban targets public events nationwide that expect attendance of more than 100 people. Cinemas, theater productions, concerts, exhibitions and trade fares are to be shut down as of Tuesday evening at 6PM, while schools are to cancel classes starting Wednesday with no timeline stated for re-opening.

For now, pre-schools, restaurants, shopping centers and public transport are to remain open, according to the announcement.

Rare paintings confirm Iranian origins of neyanban

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian vocalist and neyanban virtuoso Mohsen Sharifian has published pictures of two rare paintings by Iranian miniaturist Reza Abbasi that confirm the Iranian origins of neyanban, a kind of bagpipe most common in southern Iran.

“In several beautiful and elegant paintings, Reza Abbasi, who lived from 1565 to 1635, has portrayed neyanban players with full details of the amazing instrument,” Sharifian wrote on his Instagram post on March 10 to mark International Bagpipe Day.

“These show the importance of the instrument during the Safavid period,” he added.

He noted that nobody knows exactly when Abbasi did the first painting, however, there is clear evidence that he created the second painting 25 years after the first one.

The second painting bears Abbasi’s autograph made in 1624 A.D. Sharifian said that the painting is on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

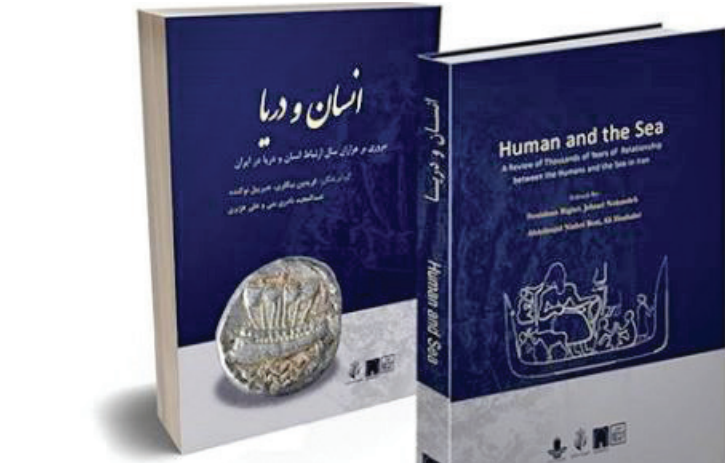
If Abbasi created the second painting 25 years before his death, neyanban’s presence in the history of Iranian music would date back to over 400 years ago.

Sharifian is the leader of the Lian ensemble from the southern Iranian city of Bushehr. He has performed concerts during international events, including the William Kennedy Piping Festival running in the Irish town of Armagh and London’s WOMAD Festival.



This combination photo shows paintings by Iranian miniaturist Reza Abbasi (1565-1635).

Book on history of Iranians’ relationship with sea published



A poster for the book “Human and the Sea: A Review of Thousands of Years of Relationship between the Human and the Sea in Iran”.

C U L T U R E d e s k **TEHRAN** — The National Museum of Iran in Tehran has recently published a book reviews the history of Iranians’ relationship with the sea.

“Human and the Sea: A Review of Thousands of Years of Relationship between the Human and the Sea in Iran” is bilingual in Persian and English, the museum announced on Wednesday.

Compiled by Fereidun Biglari, Jebrail Nokandeh, Abdolmajid Naderibani and Ali Hojabri, the book contains 17 articles

on the sea and sailing in Iran from the Stone Age to the Qajar era by Iranian and foreign scholars including Dutch Iranologist Wouter Franklin Merijn Henkelman.

It also features photos of tools related to sailing in different eras in Iran displayed in an exhibition the museum organized during December and January.

“Human and the Sea” has been published in collaborations with the Ports and Maritime Organization of Iran and the Iranian National Institute for Oceanography and Atmospheric Science.

Iranian films line up for Visions du Réel



A scene from “The Silhouettes” by Afsaneh Salari.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — A lineup of four Iranian films will be screened in the various sections of the Visions du Réel, an international film festival in Nyon, Switzerland.

Documentary movies “Fish Eye” by Amin Behrrouzadeh and “The Silhouettes” by Afsaneh Salari will go on screen in the international competition of the festival, which will be held from April 24 to May 2.

“Fish Eye” follows Parsian Shila, Iran’s biggest industrial fishing boat that plans to catch 2000 tons of tuna fish. The film

depicts the cruelty and harsh conditions of the job, and just how nature is affected by this activity.

“The Silhouettes” is about an Afghan family that had left their homeland 40 years ago to start a new life in Iran. Now their son wants to return to Afghanistan to live and work there, but the family opposes his plan.

The festival will also screen short films “A Horse Has More Blood Than a Human”, a co-production between Iran and the UK by Iranian director Abolfazl Taluni, and “The Leaves” by Hamid Jafari.

COI discusses plans to support coronavirus-hit film industry

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Cinema Organization of Iran (COI) has discussed plans to support the country’s film industry in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

In a meeting held on Tuesday, COI director Hossein Entezami urged his colleagues to establish a committee to evaluate the financial losses caused by the shutdown of movie theaters and film projects due to the coronavirus epidemic, the COI announced in a press release on Wednesday.

The committee is tasked with finding ways to support cineastes and theater owners impacted by the coronavirus.

The participants also discussed ways to combat the financial losses and to stop the underproduction projects. All film projects were shut down by the COI to stop the spread of the virus.

Entezami also asked his colleagues to improve the home video network to entertain people who themselves are forced to stay home due to the outbreak of the virus.

“Mulan” goes on, Bond waits as Hollywood tracks virus spread

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Walt Disney Co held a red carpet premiere for its action epic “Mulan” on Monday, pushing ahead with the movie’s rollout even though the coronavirus spread will keep the film out of China, the second-largest film market, indefinitely.

At the moment, film studios have decided the show must go on at movie theaters in most of the world. The major exception is James Bond thriller “No Time to Die,” which producers moved to November from April.

On Tuesday, Sony Pictures postponed to August the release of “Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway” citing disruption in the movie market in Europe. Italy on Tuesday placed the entire country on lockdown and France has banned gatherings of more than 1,000 people in a bid to contain the virus.

Hollywood studio executives are closely watching the spread of the coronavirus and the upcoming film calendar. Summer blockbuster season is scheduled to kick off May 1 with Disney’s Marvel adventure “Black Widow,” followed by a new “Fast and Furious” spectacle from Comcast Corp’s Universal Pictures, a “Top Gun” sequel from ViacomCBS Inc’s Paramount Pictures, and other big-budget action flicks.

If the coronavirus keeps people at home or shuts more theaters, it would threaten box office receipts during Hollywood’s most lucrative season. Movie theaters are closed across China and Italy and in part of France.

The situation puts movie studios in “uncharted



Jesse Grant/Getty Images for Disney.

waters”, said Jeff Goldstein, president of domestic distribution at AT&T Inc’s Warner Bros. studio.

Warner Bros. has not delayed any film openings, Goldstein said, “but we have an open mind. We will have to look at everything and see how it unfolds.”

The National Association of Theater Owners said moviegoing remained healthy in most areas and cinemas will remain open “in line with local conditions.”

This past weekend, ticket sales in the United States and Canada, the world’s biggest box office market, rose 1.2 percent from a week earlier to \$100.7 million, according to measurement firm Comscore.

“Right now, I haven’t seen any discernible impact

at the (U.S. and Canadian) box office,” said Comscore senior media analyst Paul Dergarabedian.

“Mulan,” a \$200 million live-action remake of Disney’s animated classic, has been expected to rank as one of the company’s biggest hits of the year.

The movie was tailored to appeal especially to the Chinese market. The story features a Chinese heroine and an all-Asian cast, and parts were filmed in China. The central character is played by Yifei Liu, a film and TV actress well known in China.

It was unclear when Chinese movie theaters will re-open. The movie is set to debut in the United States on March 27.

“My heart goes out to everybody in China and around the world that is affected,” “Mulan” director Niki Caro said on the red carpet on Monday. “When we do have the opportunity to bring this movie back home to China, it’s going to be the most wonderful celebration.”

“Mulan” was made for “a global audience,” producer Chris Bender said at the premiere. “We want everybody to see it.”

Dergarabedian said “Mulan” will be an important test of moviegoing amid the coronavirus outbreak. “This is a situation that is changing day by day,” he said.

In the meantime, studios are moving ahead. On Monday, Disney released a new trailer for “Black Widow” starring Scarlett Johansson as the popular Avengers character. The trailer said the movie’s release date remained May 1.