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Steel export up 28% in 11 months yr/yr

TEHRAN — Iran's export of steel during the eleven-month period from March 21, 2019 until February 19, 2020 has risen 28 percent compared to the same period of time in the past year, IRNA reported.

As reported, the country exported 6.5 million tons of steel during the mentioned eleven-month period.

Although in early May last year, the U.S. imposed new sanctions on Iran targeting the country's metals sector, the report released by World Steel Association (WSA) and also Iranian organizations indicate that not only did not the new round of sanctions hinder Iranian steel sector, this industry has preserved its growth trend as well. **→4**

Trump should review U.S. forces' presence in the region, Iran says

TEHRAN — The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman on Friday rejected Donald Trump's baseless accusations that Iran is responsible for recent attacks on a military base hosting U.S. troops in Iraq, calling on Trump to revise the presence of his country's forces in the Middle East.

Abbas Mousavi said, "The U.S. can not flinch from the negative impacts of its forces' illegal presence in Iraq and re-

action of the Muslim country's people to assassination of their commanders and combatants via resorting to the technique of escaping forward and accusing others of being behind the developments."

He added, "Trump, instead of taking dangerous measures and making baseless accusations, must fundamentally review his troops' presence and behaviors in the region." **→3**

Iraq condemns U.S. assault, summons Washington, London envoys

TEHRAN (FNA) — The Iraqi military and the presidency condemned US airstrikes, and summoned both the American and UK envoys to the country.

"The Iraqi Presidency condemns airstrikes on several bases in Iraq, including a recently opened airport in the Holy City of Karbala which led to the death of security forces and civilians," the presidency said in a statement on Friday, Middle East News reported.

The Iraqi military also denounced the

US raids as a targeted aggression against the nation's official armed forces and a violation of its sovereignty.

According to the Iraqi military statement, three soldiers, two police officers and one civilian were killed in the attacks.

The statement added that four soldiers, two police officers, one civilian, and five individuals affiliated with the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) were also wounded. **→10**

Al Khalifa's political exploitation of coronavirus, ignoring its obligations

By Ramin Hosseinabadian

TEHRAN — Al Khalifa finds the outbreak of the coronavirus in the region as the best opportunity to achieve political goals and recently prevented the return of Bahraini nationals from Iran.

Since the spread of coronavirus in many regional countries and the world in the past weeks, the authorities of the Al Khalifa regime have adopted a strange policy towards their nationals in the Islamic Republic who had traveled to Iran for pilgrimage and vacation. This move has drawn a lot of criticism.

Bahraini authorities have banned the entry of their citizens from Iran to Bahrain. In fact, they are evading responsibilities towards their nationals by pursuing this strange and unprecedented policy.

However, many countries around the world have returned their nationals from other regions.

A Bahraini activist Ibrahim AL Madhoun pointed to this issue and said, "We notice that the Bahraini government has caused distress for its citizens by not allowing them to return to their country. These people have been in the Islamic Republic for a long time and the Bahraini regime does not fulfill its duties towards its nationals."

Meanwhile, the head of the Human Rights Association of Bahrain Bagher Darvish maintained, "After the outbreak of coronavirus in Iran, the reaction of Bahraini officials towards their nationals was blatantly negligent. This behavior caused suffering and financial problems for a

large number of these people."

Indeed, this move by the Al Khalifa reflects its tribalism approach and discriminatory policies towards Bahrainis. The truth is that the regime is using the spread of coronavirus as an excuse to implement its sectarian policies against the citizens of Bahrain and ultimately repress them further.

Referring to the tribalism policy of the Al Khalifa regime, political activist Abdul-Ghani al-Khanjar said, "The Al Khalifa's action to prevent the return of Bahrainis from Iran with the excuse of spreading the coronavirus is a grave crime against the people of Bahrain. It proves that Al Khalifa extremely favors tribalism and does not deserve to rule a country like Bahrain." **→10**

The British role in Indian policy against Muslims

By Mahdi Asgari

TEHRAN — India's Muslims have taken to streets these days to protest the citizenship amendment act (CAA), and extremist Hindus who run the government violently have confronted them. What has triggered the Muslims to protest is the law that will deprive a large number of the Indian Muslim minority of citizenship.

There are many assumptions and arguments about the conflicts between Muslims and Hindus, which ultimately led to the separation of Pakistan (as an Islamic state) from India in 1947. One of the most important causes of conflicts between Muslims and Hindus were British policy during their colonization in the Indian subcontinent. The

consequences of this policy today have effected Muslims and Hindus.

To realize the role of British policies in these events one has to look back at two centuries earlier, when India was Britain's colony.

In 1857 the indigenous people of India (Hindus and Muslims) revolted against British colonialism, a move which was suppressed by the British government. Britain considered Indian Muslims as the main element of the uprising. Therefore, it made every effort to undermine Muslim groups, ranging from dismissing Muslims from administrative positions to obstructing their economic affairs. But the most important plan to weaken Muslims was to cause disagreement between Hindus and Muslims. In this regard,

Lord Edward Ellenborough, the governor-general of India at the time said, "It cannot be ignored that the Muslim nation is, due to the nature of its religion, our serious enemy. So our real plan is to please the Hindus".

Regarding the plan, Mountstuart Elphinstone said, "Divide and rule! This is a slogan we have to rely on in running India".

According to this British policy, Hindus should have considered themselves superior to Muslims. Unfortunately, evidence suggests that Britain was successful in implementing the plan. In 1876, for example, Hindus waged a language conflict against the Muslims. Initially, Hindus replaced Hindi language with Urdu language, so the Hindi alphabet was replaced the Arabic alphabet. **→10**



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Disinfection work in full swing to contain coronavirus

The photo shows disinfection operations against the coronavirus in the historical bazaar of the city of Tabriz, northwestern Iran. Using methods ranging from simple hand-wiping to mobile spray cannons, workers and volunteers are attempting to halt the transfer of the virus by touch. According to latest statistics, the number of coronavirus cases in the country has risen to 11,364, with 3529 recovered and 514 dead.



ARTICLE
Hana Saada
Journalist from Algeria

Take an in-depth look at Algeria's New Republic

In February, 22nd 2019, millions of Algerians have taken to the streets in cities nationwide as well as abroad, shattering the wall of fear of silence, demanding the departure of the-then President Abdelaziz Bouteflika who proceeded to run for a fifth presidential term despite his poor health. This announcement sparked anger among Algerian citizens, giving birth to a massive grassroots movement in several cities, the biggest outpouring of dissent seen in Algeria for decades in 1988 due to social despair, which surprised the international community and observers of Algerian politics due to its peaceful nature.

What happened as a reaction to these marches?

The former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika responded favorably to the pressure of his resignation. He stepped down on April 2nd reversing his decision to seek a fifth term in power, however, this decision has failed to appease protesters and satisfy their claims. Protesters, young and old, men and women from all walks of life, indeed, remained in the streets every Friday re-appropriating long confiscated public spaces and calling for the overhaul of the whole system and the sweeping away of the remnants of Bouteflika's inner circle, viewed as corrupt. They have directed drawing rage at the political elite they blame driving the country to a political deadlock and economic collapse.

Politically, this departure was about to create a political vacuum, thus, the army interfered, under the leadership of the late Lieutenant General Ahmed Gaid Salah, deputy Minister of National Defense, Chief of the Army Staff, (in Algeria, the President of the Republic assumes the post of Minister of National Defense), who positioned himself on the side of people by bringing forward Bouteflika's resignation.

Late Gaid Salah, in a speech addressed to the nation, called for the application of the article 102 of the Algerian constitution, appointing the Speaker of the Council of the Nation Abdelkader Bensalah as an interim Head of State for a maximum period of 90 days until an election will be organized, in an attempt to calm down the Algerian people. **→7**



ARTICLE
Yurum Abdullah Weiler
Analyst and journalist

U.S. on collision course with the world's first coronavirus pandemic

"We have never before seen a pandemic sparked by a coronavirus. This is the first pandemic caused by a coronavirus." Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

With over 100,000 cases of COVID-19, the disease caused by the SARS COVID-2 virus, and over 4,000 fatalities, the World Health Organization (WHO) has officially declared the virus outbreak a pandemic. But rather than treat this as a public health crisis, some nations' leaders have scoffed at the gravity of the threat posed by the deadly pathogen, and have chosen instead to focus on the epidemic's economic impact. The U.S. president, even after standing next to an individual infected with COVID-19, quipped, "Let's put it this way: I'm not concerned."

Scope of the pandemic

Given the 13-fold increase of the epidemic over a two week period, and the cavalier inaction by many countries, the U.S. in particular, the prognosis for containment and mitigation is not good. Dr. Ghebreyesus stated that the WHO "has been in full response mode since we were notified of the first cases," and has "called every day for countries to take urgent and aggressive action." He also conceded that his organization has never before seen a pandemic that can be controlled. Acknowledging the measures taken by Iran, Italy and the Republic of Korea to deal with the outbreak, in a not so subtle reference to the U.S. he noted, "Some countries are struggling with a lack of resolve."

The disease is spreading rapidly, from isolated cases, to expanding clusters and communities. Italy, for example, had only 350 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 11 deaths as of February 25, but by March 10, the numbers had mushroomed to 10,419 cases and 631 deaths. Italy, by the way, has a national health care system, reportedly one of the best in Europe. By March 7, over 42,000 people had been tested for coronavirus, as compared to a mere few thousand in the U.S., which, according to its bombastic president, has "the most advanced healthcare, and the most talented doctors, scientists, and researchers anywhere in the world." **→3**

Ayatollah Khamenei commands armed forces to establish medical base to control coronavirus

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has commanded Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Bagheri to establish a medical base to fight the coronavirus as there is an increased likelihood that the virus be a “biological attack”.

Ayatollah Khamenei issued the decree on Thursday to General Bagheri. The Leader praised the armed forces’ services to the people in the campaign against the coronavirus and emphasized the need to organize these services in the form of a “health and treatment base” for preventing the spread of the disease.

Following is full text of the decree published by the khamenei.ir:

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful
Major General Bagheri,

With appreciation for the services that the Armed Forces have provided to the dear people so far in the fight against Coronavirus, and with emphasis on the need to continue and expand these services, it is necessary to organize these services into a Health and Treatment Base. In addition to treating the sick and establishing medical centers such as field hospitals, places of quarantine, etc., the spread of the disease should also be prevented using the necessary methods. The division of duties and missions of the organizations and departments of the Armed Forces is one of the tasks of this Base. This Base must work in full coordination with the government and the Ministry of Health.

This measure may also be regarded as a biological defense exercise and add to our national sovereignty and power given the evidence that suggests the likelihood of this being a “biological attack.”

It is hoped that with divine guidance and the special support of Imam Mahdi (‘a.j.), the Iranian nation will always be victorious, safe and sound.

Envoy: Iran’s health capacity viciously targeted by unilateral U.S. sanctions

(Press TV) — Tehran’s ambassador to international organizations in Geneva has slammed U.S. sanctions as the main factor targeting the Iranian health sector’s capabilities, urging the UN Human Rights Council (UNHCR) not to ignore this grave problem.



“Iran’s health capacity is viciously targeted by the United States’ unilateral sanctions,” Esmail Baqaei said while addressing a meeting of the UNHCR in Geneva on Thursday. “That’s something that the Council cannot afford to ignore since it is deliberately affecting the basic rights of a whole population,” he added.

Under President Donald Trump’s “maximum pressure” policy, the U.S. re-imposed its sanctions against Iran in May 2018. Washington took the move after leaving a historic United Nations-endorsed nuclear deal with the Islamic Republic and major world powers.

Earlier on Thursday, Iran’s Foreign Ministry said the country’s top diplomat Mohammad Javad Zarif had written a letter to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, urging lifting of the illegal sanctions, which have greatly hampered the Islamic Republic’s fight against the new coronavirus epidemic.

Novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, is a new respiratory disease first identified in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year. The World Health Organization on Wednesday described the outbreak as a pandemic.

More than 126,000 people have been infected by the virus across the world and 4,630 have died, the vast majority of them in China, according to a Reuters tally.

Iran’s Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour told state television on Thursday that 1,075 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been detected across the country in the last 24 hours, which brings the total number of infected people to 10,075. He also put the death toll at 429.

Zarif reminded in his letter how the renewed sanctions had come in the way of legal trade with Iran amid the outbreak, adding that American officials had recently set some preconditions with the aim of preventing sales of medicine, medical equipment, and humanitarian commodities to the Islamic Republic.

Adding to his remarks, Baqaei also pointed to Washington’s instrumentalization of the issue of human rights for political purposes in its efforts to target Iran.

He said Iran was among the developing countries that have been “scapegoated” by the U.S. and other states for years for alleged human rights violations.

Zarif writes to UN chief on illegal sanctions amid coronavirus fight

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — In a letter to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Thursday, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif denounced the United States’ sanctions as a major obstacle to Iran’s battle against the spread of the novel coronavirus in the country.

In his letter Zarif urged an end to such and “illegal” sanctions.

Zarif said despite Iran’s scientific capabilities and the commitment that the country’s health system has shown to the fight against the coronavirus outbreak, the U.S. sanctions on legal trade and the preconditions that the United States’ authorities have set recently so as to prevent the sale of medicine, medical equipment and humanitarian supplies have posed serious obstacles to the efforts to control the COVID-19 outbreak in Iran.

Copies of the letter were also forwarded to directors of all international organizations and to Zarif’s foreign counterparts across the world, according to the Foreign Ministry website.

In his letter, the foreign minister enumerated examples of the U.S. measures against Iran, pointing to the effect of the secondary sanctions on Iran’s oil sales as well as the ban on private sector’s exports of other products and a consequent reduction in the ability of the government to provide subsidy for the basic commodities consumed by the Iranian citizens.

Following is the text of the letter:

I am writing to you concerning a matter of the greatest urgency. As you—and my counterparts across the world—are painfully aware, we are now officially amid a pandemic. Most of us have been affected by the spread of the



“While the virus ravages our cities and towns, our population—unlike those of other countries affected—suffer under the most severe and indiscriminate campaign of economic terrorism in history, imposed illegally and extra-territorially by the Government of the United States since it reneged on its commitments under Security Council Resolution 2231 in May 2018.”

Shamkhani: ‘Similarity between Soleimani assassination and claim of attack on Camp Taji base’

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), has said in a tweet that there are commonalities between assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and the United States’ claim of attack on the Taji military camp hosting U.S. and British troops in Iraq.

“It seems that there are commonalities between implementation of the assassina-

tion plan and the United States’ claim about missile attack on al-Taji base in Baghdad,” Shamkhani wrote on his Twitter page.

The Pentagon used a deadly attack on a U.S. contractor on Iraq’s Kurdistan on December 27, 2019 as a pretext to attack Hashd al-Shaabi (The Popular Mobilization Forces), killing dozens of Kataib Hezbollah forces. Also, on January 3, the U.S. assassinated General Soleimani, Iran’s legendary

commander in the war against Daesh (ISIL), under the excuse that the group was taking orders from Soleimani.

This took place despite the fact that the killing on the U.S. contractor was a modus operandi of Daesh. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was also grilled by Democrats on a House panel over the killing of Soleimani.

Shamkhani said, “During my visit to Iraq, I asked this country’s officials to iden-

tify and introduce internal elements behind assassination of Martyr Soleimani and Abu Mahdi [al-Muhandis].”

highly contagious Covid19 viral disease, with my country among the worst impacted so far. While the virus ravages our cities and towns, our population—unlike those of other countries affected—suffer under the most severe and indiscriminate campaign of economic terrorism in history, imposed illegally and extra-territorially by the Government of the United States since it reneged on its commitments under Security Council Resolution 2231 in May 2018.

Although our medical facilities, doctors, nurses and other health practitioners are among the very finest in the world, we are stymied in our efforts to identify and treat our patients; in combating the spread of the virus; and, ultimately, in defeating it, by the campaign of economic terrorism perpetrated by the Government of the United States.

Beyond targeting our lawful trade with others, the illegal U.S. sanctions regime has impacted every sector of our economy, all while our people are told by the U.S. Secretary of State that their government must submit to outrageous outside diktat “if they want to eat”. Now, the same shameless U.S. official has gone as far as publicly holding medicine for Iranians to ransom, conditioning such trade on extraneous and extra-judicial demands.

The Government of the United States’ general collective punishment of the Iranian people—including by depriving them from humanitarian trade, in contravention of repeated sloganeering to the contrary—is clear. What has hitherto, and unfortunately, been less clear to the international community is how U.S. economic terrorism is specifically—and directly—undermining our efforts to fight the Covid-19 epidemic in Iran.



Iranian Army unveils new disinfection vehicles to fight coronavirus

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Army has unveiled new disinfection vehicles to disinfect the streets of cities as a way to fight the coronavirus outbreak, Mehr reported.

Brigadier General Kiomars Heidari, commander of the Army ground forces, says his forces have relied on the country’s experts to design and produce three new disinfection vehicles which will disinfect the streets in the coming days.

This is while the Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour announced on Friday that the new cases confirmed to have contracted coronavirus have increased to 11,364. He also said the number of those who have died so far have reached to 514.

Jahanpour said since Thursday afternoon, 1,289 cases have been added to the infected.

According to the spokesman, the new cases include 303 in Tehran, 192 in Mazandaran, 110 in Isfahan, 110 in Khorasan Razavi, 97 in East Azarbaijan, 71 in Gilan, 48 in Markazi, 46 in Yazd, 42 in Qom, 38 in Semnan, 33 in Fars, 25 in Lorestan, 25 in West Azarbaijan, 21 in Golestan, 20 in Zanjan, 15 in



Khuzestan, 15 in Ardabil, 15 in Kermanshah, 12 in Kerman, 12 in Qazvin, 10 in Hamadan, 9 in Kurdistan, 8 in Ilam, 6 in Alborz, 4 in Hormozgan, and 2 in Sistan and Baluchestan.

No new cases were found in Bushehr, South Khorasan, North Khorasan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, and Kohgiluyeh

and Buyer-Ahmad provinces.

Jahanpour holds a news briefing on the virus every days at 2:pm local time.

In a decree on Thursday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ordered the establishment of a “health and treatment headquarters” to prevent further spread of the coronavirus in the country.

In his edict, which was addressed to General Baqeri, Ayatollah Khamenei praised the services to the people by the Armed Forces in their drive to hamper further spread of coronavirus and said, “It is necessary that these services be organized in the form of a health and treatment headquarters.”

Ayatollah Khamenei added, “In addition to establishing such treatment facilities as field hospitals and infirmaries, and so forth, you must focus on prevention of further spread of this disease through necessary means as well.

“Since there is speculation that this incident might be a ‘biological attack’, this measure could be also some form of biological defense drill, which would add to national power and strength [of the country],” the leader stated.

Iran: We do not need U.S. doctors

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi has said that Iran has the best and bravest medical staff and does not need the United States’ doctors.

“We have the best, bravest and most efficient medical staff and we do not need the United States’ doctors,” he tweeted on Friday.

He added, “Instead of showing hypocritical sympathy and disgusting bragging, put an end to economic terrorism and medical terrorism.”

Before a meeting with Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar on Thursday, U.S. President Donald Trump said that the U.S. has “greatest doctors in the world”. He added that Washington has offered Iran help in

battle against the coronavirus.

“I think we have the greatest doctors in the world. We’ve offered Iran assistance. Iran is having a tremendous problem, and we have offered Iran assistance. If they’d like it, we will help them. We’d be glad to help them,” the official website of the White House quoted him as saying.

Iran has denounced the U.S. for impeding effective fight against the coronavirus through its sanctions, especially medical sanctions.

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 ban on medicine medical supplies.

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



The coronavirus outbreak has been labelled a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO).

WHO chief Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on Wednesday that the number of cases outside China had increased 13-fold in two weeks. He said he was “deeply concerned” by “alarming levels of inaction”.

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.

U.S. extends state of emergency with Iran



the Congress a notice stating that the emergency is to continue in effect beyond the anniversary date. In accordance with this provision, I have sent to the Federal Register for publication the enclosed notice stating that the national emergency with respect to Iran that was declared on March 15, 1995, is to continue in effect beyond March 15, 2020,” Trump said in his message to Congress, according to the official website of the White House.

Exercising emergency authorities enabled by the national emergency declaration is not possible provided that they are specified by the president.

Technically, there are two executive orders on Iran declaring states of emergency: order 12957 and order 12170, signed by President Jimmy Carter.

Together, they have frozen Iranian assets held in the United States and have prohibited certain transactions with respect to Iran’s petroleum products.

Generals meet on coronavirus response

Traffic in roads, streets and shopping centers will be limited

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Top commanders of the IRGC, Army and police gathered together on Friday on how to contain the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, called Covid-19.

The session, held at the Imam Reza Health and Treatment Base in Tehran, was headed by Major General Mohammad Baqeri, the chairman of the Armed Forces Chief of Staff.

Army Commander Major General Abolrahim Mousavi; the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Commander Hossein Salami; Police Chief Brigadier General Hossein Ashtari; Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces for Coordination Affairs Major General Ali Abdollahi; and Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces for Intelligence Affairs Brigadier General Gholamreza Ebrahimi were among the top commanders attending the session.

The commanders reviewed establishment of the base in detail and exchanged views over its structure in order to activate the headquarters as soon as possible.

After the meeting, General Baqeri announced that in the next seven or ten days all Iranian citizens will be screened to identify persons suspected of the coronavirus infection.

He said the screening will be done either through social media, telephone and if necessary in front of people's homes.

The healthy people will stay at home but the suspects will be examined in certain medical centers which will be established for the purpose.

The commander said about 1000 mobile and fixed clinics will be added to the country's health centers for the purpose.

The military chief also said in cooperation with the Interior Ministry the traffic in roads, streets and shopping centers will be limited. These steps will be taken with the next 24 hours, Baqeri added.

In a decree on Thursday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ordered the establishment of a "health and treatment headquarters" to prevent further spread of the coronavirus in the country.

In his edict, which was addressed to Gen-



eral Baqeri, Ayatollah Khamenei praised the services to the people by the Armed Forces in their drive to hamper further spread of coronavirus and said, "It is necessary that these services be organized in the form of a health and treatment headquarters."

Ayatollah Khamenei added, "In addition to establishing such treatment facilities as field hospitals and infirmaries, and so forth, you must focus on prevention of further spread of this disease through necessary means as well."

"Since there is speculation that this incident might be a 'biological attack', this measure could be also some form of biological defense drill, which would add to national power and strength [of the country]," the leader stated.

Earlier this month, Brigadier General Kiomars Heidari, the Army ground force commander, announced that the Army has produced unique equipment for diagnosing the virus in the shortest time possible.

He said, "Our experts working for the Ar-

my's self-sufficiency department have planned and built several unique equipment which should go under test by the Health Ministry. If everything goes well the equipment will be a great achievement in rapid diagnosis of the novel coronavirus."

Heidari further said, "One of the army's capabilities, which was unveiled in the ceremony..., was turning anti-bacterial liquids into fog to spray it over vast regions."

"We enjoy anti-pollution systems which are currently utilized by our forces across the country," the commander said, adding, "According to the pre-planned program, the Army ground force is in charge of sanitizing hospitals and medical centers in Tehran."

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

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Wednesday declared the rapidly spreading coronavirus outbreak a pandemic, ac-

knowledging what seemed clear for some time — the virus would likely spread to all countries on the globe.

Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the situation would worsen.

"We expect to see the number of cases, the number of deaths, and the number of affected countries climb even higher," said Tedros, as the director-general is known.

As of Thursday, 114 countries have reported that 135,000 have contracted COVID-19. Nearly 5,000 people have thus far died.

Following the disease outbreak, the Iranian authorities ordered the closure of schools, universities and cultural and sports events in a bid to contain the outbreak.

The Iranian Health Ministry announced on Friday that totally 11,364 nationals have been confirmed infected by the virus, out of which 514 have lost their lives.

According to the Health Ministry, the health condition of a sum of 3,529 patients have improved.

Iran's envoy named vice-chair of OPCW Executive Council

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The permanent representative of Iran to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Alireza Kazemi Abadi was elected as one of the vice-chairs of the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Kazemi Abadi was named vice-chair of the OPCW Executive Council from the Asia regional group during the 93rd Session of the Executive Council of the OPCW on Wednesday, according to Tasnim.

The envoy from the U.S. protested the election of Iran's envoy as a vice-chair of the council, saying he could not agree with what he called the state sponsors of terrorism taking a post.

In response to the American ambassador's protest, the permanent representative of Iran to the OPCW said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran has been elected as the vice-chair of the Executive Council by the general consensus among the Asian group's Member States."

"The U.S. has already proved that it has no respect for international law and international organizations, and is the main sponsor of the terrorist groups and state terror-



ism, particularly in the Middle East," Kazemi Abadi added, according to the Foreign Ministry's official website.

"The brazen example of the American terrorist measures was the U.S. president's order to assassinate General Soleimani and his entourage on the Iraqi soil, which amounts to a clear violation of the fundamental principles of international law,

the United Nations Charter, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," the Iranian ambassador stated, saying the U.S., with such shameful record, is in no position to portray itself as an anti-terrorism country.

IRGC Quds Force Commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani was in Baghdad at the invitation of the Iraqi government when he was targeted in Baghdad's international airport on January 3.

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

In the early hours of January 8, the IRGC attacked the U.S. airbase of Ain al-Assad in Anbar province in western Iraq as part of its promised "tough revenge" for the U.S. terror attack.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said Trump was misled to believe his country would get away with the assassination of General Soleimani.

Trump believed that the assassination would augment U.S. security but it worked the other way around, Zarif said in an interview with NBC News' Richard Engel in Munich last month on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference.

U.S. on collision course with the world's first coronavirus pandemic

1→ Despite the rosy prognosis painted by POTUS, the attending physician of the U.S. Congress is less optimistic. During a closed-door meeting on Tuesday March 10, Dr. Brian Monahan informed those present that ultimately somewhere between 70 and 150 million Americans would contract COVID-19, according to statistical predictions. According to Dr. Monahan, only members of Congress would be tested for coronavirus; the rest should go to their personal doctors should symptoms arise. He also predicted that 80 percent of those infected would recover, implying that some 14 to 30 million people would not, but would remain ill or expire. Based on WHO statistics as of March 12, the mortality rate for the coronavirus is 3.9 percent, which translates to from 275,000 to 588,000 American deaths using Dr. Monahan's estimate.

■ U.S. president's reaction

While U.S. president Trump's oblique use of the word "hoax" appeared to target criticism of his administration's response to the coronavirus and not the disease itself, he was unambiguous in his minimization of the threat potential posed by the contagion. Trump emphasized that, at least at the time, "so far we have lost nobody to coronavirus in the United States." Furthermore, he accused the press of being in the "hysteria mode," and that the U.S. is fully prepared to deal with COVID-19, "because we've done such a good job." This is while the new coronavirus appears much more lethal than ordinary influenza, and to date there is no vaccine

or treatment for the disease. Yet despite all indications of the gravity of the COVID-19 epidemic from WHO, CDC and even his own advisors, the U.S. president still insisted, "Stay calm, it'll go away."

Trump's reckless attitude towards public health is not new. In 2018, as part of the overall budget cuts that affected virtually every U.S. federal agency with the exception of the Pentagon, the barbaric biped fired the entire U.S. global health security team responsible for defense strategy against a pandemic. This imprudent act followed the abrupt departure of team head Rear Admiral Timothy Ziemer due to a reshuffling by then national security advisor John Bolton, as well as funding reductions to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), which cut the agency's capabilities to address global outbreaks by 80 percent. Among the countries worldwide affected by these irresponsible actions was China, the epicenter of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Among the other bungling actions by the current inept U.S. president is the decision to make all top-level meetings on the coronavirus classified. Consequently, many key U.S. government health professionals from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), a crucial player in the battle against the COVID-19 epidemic, were unable to participate due to not having the requisite security clearance insisted upon by the White House. As a result, the U.S. response to the pandemic may have been delayed on account of Trump's unjustifiable actions, which excluded many

HHS experts and created an atmosphere devoid of transparency. Yet incredibly, the White House national security spokesman, John Ulyot, insisted that all meetings on the COVID-19 situation were unclassified. According to him, the Washington regime "has cut red tape and set the global standard in protecting the American people under President Trump's leadership."

In fact, Trump himself has been exposed to persons who either had COVID-19 or had been in contact with someone infected with COVID-19. On Friday, March 6, he shook hands with Congressman Doug Collins (R-GA) and then flew on Air Force One with Congressman Matt Gaetz (R-FL), both of whom were in contact with someone who has since been diagnosed with COVID-19. Moreover, while at Mar-a-Lago that same weekend, he stood next to Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's communications director, Fábio Wajnarten, who has since tested positive for coronavirus. Nevertheless, Trump has not agreed to be tested for the disease. "The president has not received COVID-19 testing because he has neither had prolonged close contact with any known confirmed COVID-19 patients, nor does he have any symptoms," stated White House press secretary, Stephanie Grisham, explaining the lack of concern on the part of her boss.

■ U.S. not ready for pandemic

For his part, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, is very concerned. Testifying before the U.S. House of Repre-

sentatives House Oversight Committee, Dr. Fauci painted a grim picture of the epidemiological reality confronting the country. "The system is not really geared to what we need right now," he conceded. "The idea of anybody getting [tested] easily, the way people in other countries are doing it, we're not set up for that," he admitted. In 2018, software magnate and philanthropist Bill Gates had urged Trump to invest in technologies to be ready for a pandemic, but apparently his appeal was not heeded.

Likewise, the U.S. financial markets expressed their dissatisfaction with Trump's handling of the public health crisis by plummeting the day after he addressed the nation on national television, thereby ending an 11-year expansion that began in 2009. The main concern among investors, of course, is a fall-off in consumer spending and subsequent loss of corporate profits. Trump, as recently as February 11, had taken credit for boosting the stock market to record highs. In contrast to the well-heeled, low-income workers in the U.S., lack the necessary health insurance and sick leave to cope with the coronavirus crisis. Even public transportation, depended upon by these workers to get to their jobs, poses a threat of exposure to COVID-19.

So as a result of inaction by its leaders, Americans could be facing grave danger due to the strong possibility of a massive outbreak of COVID-19, similar to what has occurred in Italy. There is little doubt that the U.S. is on a collision course with the world's first coronavirus pandemic.

Instead of making accusations, Trump should review U.S. forces' presence in the region, Iran says

1→ Mousavi went on to say that the U.S. president should drastically avoid spreading the "virus" of accusation against others to justify Washington's "illogical behaviors".

According to USA Today, the Pentagon launched airstrikes Thursday targeting an Iraqi group believed to be responsible for the rocket attack on Wednesday that killed two Americans and a British stationed at the Camp Taji base north of Baghdad.

Multiple U.S. strikes targeted a Kataib Hezbollah weapons facilities inside Iraq, the Associated Press reported, citing an unnamed U.S. official. The strikes were a joint operation with the British, the official said. According to the Washington Post, the United States resumed airstrikes against the Iraqi group early Friday. The aerial bombardment took place around 1:30 a.m., according to the Iraqi military.

Another group, Harakat al-Nujaba, accused the United States of hitting militia and Iraqi army headquarters, as well as a civilian airport. In a statement early Friday, it said that further strikes could prompt retaliation involving an "eye for an eye."

A U.S. military spokesperson in Iraq confirmed three military coalition personnel died in the assault late Wednesday and that more than 15 small rockets hit the Camp Taji base. In a statement, Army Col. Myles Caggins did not provide further details but the Associated Press and other outlets reported that the attack killed a U.S. soldier, a U.S. contractor and a member of Britain's armed forces.

The U.S. has about 5,000 troops in Iraq. American troops regularly come under fire in Iraq from groups such as Kataib Hezbollah or other groups. Caggins said an investigation is ongoing.

According to the Hill, the Pentagon's top leaders on Thursday claimed that Iranian-backed militia groups were behind the rocket attack.

"Yesterday's attack by Iranian-backed Shia militia groups consisted of multiple indirect fires that originated from a stationary platform and was clearly targeting coalition and partnered forces on Camp Taji," Defense Secretary Mark Esper told reporters at the Pentagon.

On January 24, millions of Iraqi people convened in the capital city of Baghdad to deplore the U.S. military presence in the country.

People from "all of the Iraqi provinces" gathered in the ongoing rally to condemn the Americans' illegal presence in the country, after the U.S. assassinated top Iranian commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in Baghdad on January 3.

The protesters were carrying banners and chanting slogans calling for the expulsion of U.S. forces.

During the rallies, the influential Iraqi cleric Muqtada al-Sadr lashed out at the United States for its illegal military presence in Iraq, saying, "If the U.S. government does not agree to leave Iraq, it will be considered and treated as an occupying state and enemy."

Baghdad should revoke all security agreements with the U.S. and ban the U.S. from conducting military operations in its skies, he added.

Also, on January 5 the Iraqi parliament voted overwhelmingly in favor of a resolution calling for the expulsion of all U.S.-led forces in the country. The resolution was adopted two days after Washington assassinated Soleimani and Muhandis.

Analyst: U.S. sanctions 'act of war' on Iran

Michael Jones says Treasury is "hotbed of Zionism"

(Press TV) — The U.S. sanctions imposed on Iran are an "act of war" as they hamper the Islamic Republic's efforts to counter the new coronavirus pandemic, says an American writer and former university professor, adding that the U.S. Treasury Department, which is responsible for implementing restrictive measures against Tehran, is a "hotbed of Zionism."

E. Michael Jones, the editor of Culture Wars magazine, made the remark during a Thursday edition of Press TV's Debate program while commenting on Iran, which has accused the administration in Washington of "medical terrorism" after its unilateral sanctions severely stymied the country's ability to respond to the deadly virus outbreak and to protect the health and well-being of all Iranians.

Novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, is a new respiratory disease that emerged in China in December last year and has spread around the world, halting industries, bringing travel to a standstill, closing schools, and forcing the cancellation of public events.

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Wednesday declared COVID-19 a pandemic, pointing to the over 118,000 cases of the coronavirus illness in over 110 countries and territories around the world and the sustained risk of further global spread.

Iran, badly hit by the coronavirus, is encountering shortages of sanitizers and face masks, like other countries throughout the world, and has mobilized all in its power to fight the disease while at the same time it is facing unilateral U.S. sanctions.

"The sanctions are unjust, they are an act of war and they should be lifted; they should never have been imposed in the first place. The people imposing the sanctions; it's Secretary [Steven] Mnuchin of the Treasury office, it is the sanctions office in the Treasury which is a hotbed of Zionism and vindictive, political coercion," Jones told Press TV on Thursday. political coercion," Jones told Press TV on Thursday.

Asked whether the U.S. was politicizing the outbreak to put pressure on the Iranian people, the American writer said the officials in the administration of U.S. President, Donald Trump, have been "politicizing everything with the Iranian people," and that's part of "punishing" the Iranians over their 2015 nuclear agreement.

"The big issue here that no one can resolve at this point is whether this is a bio weapon that escaped from the laboratories in Wuhan or whether it's a kind of natural occurrence like the flu every year," Jones went on to say, referring to the Chinese city identified as the epicenter of the virus outbreak.

"The only reasonable response seems to be the quarantine, that's not something that costs any money, it's disruptive but it doesn't cost any money... Iran is perfectly capable of imposing quarantine without any type of outside help," he added.

The U.S. reinstated its sanctions against Iran in May 2018 after leaving a UN-endorsed nuclear agreement with Iran and the P5+1 group of countries.

Tehran sued Washington at the International Court of Justice afterwards. The tribunal ruled that the U.S. should lift its sanctions on humanitarian supplies.

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	520211.8
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	\$36.22/b
WTI	\$32.65/b
OPEC Basket	\$35.71/b
Gold	\$1,588.95/oz
Silver	\$15.83/oz
Platinum	\$807.60/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Policymakers ramp up support as coronavirus fears shred markets

Governments and central banks readied more emergency measures to tackle the economic impact of the coronavirus on Friday, helping financial markets pare some of their steep losses, while more major events were canceled or postponed.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's wife, Sophie, was among several thousand people newly diagnosed with the COVID-19 respiratory disease that has now infected almost 135,000 and killed more than 4,900 worldwide.



Experts warn that due to a lack of testing and unreported cases, many more people may be affected by the outbreak that emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan late last year.

A host of major sporting events were affected, with the Players Championship golf halted and the Australian Formula One Grand Prix scrapped.

Europe's leading soccer leagues were placed on hold, the top men's tennis circuit was suspended for six weeks, the National Hockey League shut down and cricket matches ordered to be played without fans.

Japan's Nikkei .N225 closed down 6% after Wall Street stocks slumped about 10% .DJI .SPX on Thursday, their worst day since the 1987 "Black Monday" crash. [.N]

But Asian markets were off lows for the day as policymakers stepped in to help ease a liquidity squeeze as cratering stock markets triggered a rush for cash.

Japan's central bank pledged to buy 200 billion yen (\$1.90 billion) of five- to 10-year Japanese government bonds and also inject an additional 1.5 trillion yen in two-week loans.

"We should see more action from central banks because what we need here is a short-term liquidity bridge," said Mohammed Apabhai, head of Asian trading strategy for Citigroup.

"The issue is that if we don't see that, then this situation risks becoming a more systemic problem."

The U.S. Federal Reserve on Thursday offered a hefty \$1.5 trillion in short-term loans to stimulate the economy and stabilize the financial system.

Australia's central bank followed suit, pumping an usually large amount of cash into the system on Friday as panic selling across global markets threatened to drain liquidity and push up borrowing costs.

Australia's home affairs minister, Peter Dutton, said he had tested positive for the virus.

Losing loved ones

Travelers in Europe rushed to board flights to the United States after U.S. President Donald Trump imposed sweeping restrictions on travel from the continent, a decision that angered European leaders and frightened investors.

Trump also suggested the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo could be delayed by a year.

"Maybe they postpone it for a year ... if that's possible," Trump told reporters. "I like that better than I like having empty stadiums all over the place."

Tokyo 2020 organizers insisted they were moving ahead with preparations to hold "safe and secure" Games on schedule, starting in July.

European leaders warned things would get worse before they get better.

"It's going to spread further," British Prime Boris Johnson told a news conference. "I must level with you, level with the British public - more families, many more families, are going to lose loved ones before their time."

French President Emmanuel Macron said the country was facing its worst public health crisis in a century and announced measures including the closure of schools, creches and universities from Monday.

In Italy, where the death toll passed 1,000 in Europe's deadliest outbreak, the government imposed a blanket closure of restaurants, bars and almost all shops except food stores and pharmacies.

By contrast, South Korea - where an outbreak surged at around the same time as Italy's - reported the number of people recovering from the virus outpaced new infections for the first time, raising hopes that Asia's biggest epidemic outside China may be slowing. (Source: Reuters)

Steel export up 28% in 11 months yr/yr

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — A recent report released by the WSA shows that Iran's crude steel output has increased 46.7 percent in January while the global average growth rate stood at 2.1 percent.

The report indicates that Iran has produced 2.895 million tons of crude steel in January of this year, which was 46.7 percent more than 1.971 million tons of product produced in January 2019.

WSA has also announced that Iran's crude steel production climbed 30 percent in 2019 while the average global growth in this sector stood at 3.5 percent.

Based on a previous report by the global

organization, Iran produced 31.9 million tons of crude steel in 2019, while the figure was 24 million tons in 2018.

The data and reports released by Iranian organizations also show that the country's steel sector is still experiencing growth in output and export.

The latest data released by Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry indicate that crude steel output during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019 – January 20, 2020) has risen 2.42 percent compared to the same period of time in the previous year.



Meanwhile, the country's steel products output stood at 11.27 million tons during the ten-month period of this year, jumping 97 percent from that of the same time span in the past year.

In terms of exports, the country has exported 5.884 million tons of steel during the first ten

months of the current year, rising 25 percent year on year.

The ten-month steel products export has also increased 45 percent to 4.4 million tons.

To curb the effects of sanctions in the steel industry, the country resolves to benefit from domestic potential and capability.

Iran's annual aluminum production to increase 60%

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The capacity of aluminum production in Iran is expected to reach 775,000 tons in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 19), 60 percent more than the figure for the previous year, IRNA reported.

According to the country's national development plan for the mining sector and based on the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry's four-year development program, the country's aluminum ingot production is expected to reach 629,000 tons by the end of the current Iranian calendar year, 244,000 tons more than the previous year's total production.

Iranian aluminum production capacity reached 422,000 tons in the Iranian calendar year 1396 (ended on March 20, 2018), while the production stood at 337,000 tons.

Last year (ended on March 20, 2019), the country's alumina powder production increased by 9,000 tons to 229,000 tons, and production of aluminum ingots increased 48,000 tons compared to the preceding year



to reach 385,000 tons.

Iran's major aluminum producers produced 221,223 tons of aluminum ingots during the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019-January 20, 2020), 17 percent less than the figure for the previous year's same time span.

As the country's biggest aluminum producer, IRALCO accounted for producing 53 percent of the total production in the past year.

As the world's 18th producer of aluminum, Iran plans to reach the annual production of 1.5 million tons of aluminum ingot by the Iranian calendar year 1404 (March 2025-March 2026).

Iran calls on ICC to exempt medical equipment from U.S. sanctions

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture has called on the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) for exempting the imports of medical and healthcare equipment and products from the U.S. sanctions amid the coronavirus outbreak.

In a letter to ICC Chairman Paul Polman on Tuesday, Gholam-Hossein Shafeie urged the ICC to take necessary measures to help Iran access to medical equipment to counter coronavirus, the ICCIMA portal reported.

As head of the Iranian committee at the International Chamber of Commerce, Shafeie noted that international institutions can play a significant role in removing political sanctions under critical situations like the coronavirus outbreak.

"Supporting the Iranian government in the fight against this disease at the regional and global levels is



ICCIMA Head Gholam-Hossein Shafeie (R) and ICC Chairman Paul Polman

not only aiding the Iranian people, it will prevent the further spread of the virus to the region and the world," the ICCIMA head wrote.

Earlier this month, ICCIMA set up Coronavirus Containment Headquarters in the chamber for cooperation with organizations that are responsible battling the virus.

Shafeie has also called on the heads of chambers of commerce across the country to establish Coronavirus Containment Headquarters to carry out their social responsibility and to help people and organizations.

The death fatalities from coronavirus in Iran reached 429 by Thursday afternoon, the Health Ministry announced.

The ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour also said until this date 10,075 individuals have been confirmed contracted the deadly virus.

Since Friday afternoon 1,075 new cases have been added to the patients.

Halting China's economy was hard, restarting it is harder

By Keith Bradsher

China is starting to get back to work. More than six weeks after its leaders virtually shut down the world's second-largest economy to stop a relentless coronavirus outbreak, factories are reopening and offices are starting to fill.

That's little solace to Zhang Xu. Piles of windshields — some broken, others new and ready to be installed — sit untouched at his car repair shop in a blue-collar neighborhood in Shanghai. One of his two employees is still stuck in a faraway village. But that matters little, because Mr. Zhang has no customers.

"If we don't get sales, the distributor won't be able to order more from the factory and the factory won't be able to produce," Mr. Zhang said.

Stopping the Chinese industrial machine was painful for China and for the world — and restarting it may be even harder. Factories are well short of full capacity. Even the most successfully restarted cities are only halfway back. Tens of millions of laborers cannot get to work.

Even when workers come back, Chinese businesses may find overseas demand slumping for their exports because of worsening coronavirus epidemics in other countries.

Experts warn that Beijing needs to watch for fake restarts: companies that switch on factories to get government subsidies but that produce little or nothing because they lack workers or supplies.

China's difficulties could hold lessons for other countries looking for answers to the outbreak. Looking for a way to slow the virus without sinking the economy, the United States on Wednesday blocked travelers from Europe, and President Trump has said he wants to get consumers spending more. The Italian government imposed travel restrictions on Monday on the entire country. Other places, like South Korea, have intensified testing and monitoring without trying to shut down their industrial engines.

China is beginning to promote its management of the coronavirus as an endorsement of the authoritarian rule of the Communist Party. On Tuesday, Xi Jinping, China's top leader, appeared in Wuhan, the center of the outbreak, and declared through official media that



A shopping mall in Beijing. Even as businesses reopen, cash-strapped families may be reluctant to spend.

"we've achieved important interim results" but warned against easing containment measures too quickly.

Unquestionably, China has made progress starting up again. As supply chains in the West began to run dry, airfreight rates from China jumped suddenly last week, according to TAC Index, an air cargo pricing data company in Hong Kong.

"They need to be refilled now," said John Peyton Burnett, the company's managing director.

But factories in China are running at 50 to 60 percent of capacity, he said, and other measures show even less activity in many places.

Beijing has unleashed a series of top-down measures to get offices and factories humming again. Bankers describe almost daily phone calls from regulators, telling them to show leniency on debt repayments, particularly from smaller businesses. Insurers have been told to extend policies even when premiums are not paid on time.

The state-owned railway has halved a wide range of freight charges. The national education ministry has created 180,000 spaces at graduate schools next autumn for students graduating this spring with little prospect of a job. Shanghai alone says it has helped residents

and businesses with more than \$15 billion in loans and other credit assistance, mainly from the state-controlled banking sector.

Those measures face formidable hurdles. Local officials are under pressure to reduce new infections, making them nervous about allowing people to return to work.

Cash-strapped families may also be reluctant to spend. Household and corporate debts are huge after a decade of heavy lending by the state-controlled banking sector. Workers do not know whether their employers can pay them. Businesses do not know if other businesses will default on payments for goods and services.

The provincial authorities in southern China stepped in a week ago to rescue HNA Group, a debt-laden private sector conglomerate that has struggled to pay its bills.

"Wait for the defaults — they need cash flow and that's not happening," said Anne Stevenson-Yang, the research director of J Capital Research, a consulting firm specializing in China. "All that leverage, so little cash."

More than 50 million migrant workers have not yet returned to their jobs, according to official data. Some remain in quarantine. Others are stranded in rural areas where bus service has not resumed. Many are not yet needed by employers because consumers and businesses are barely spending.

Signs of fraud have already emerged, making it harder for officials in Beijing to figure out what is going on around the country. One scam involves businesses that turn on air conditioning and run machinery with no output, said Cao Heping, a Peking University economist. The goal is to burn enough electricity to qualify for restart subsidies.

"They need to warn the different regions. 'Don't do a numbers competition, look at real economic production,'" Mr. Cao said.

Businesses have been under intense pressure from landlords to reopen, sometimes with rent forgiveness as a lure. Rents are often much higher per day than salaries, making it cheaper for companies to open shops with no customers than leave them closed and pay rent.

Most car dealerships reopened by late February but remain largely empty. Car sales in China dropped 80 percent in February from the same month a year earlier. (Source: The New York Times)

Platform S1 of Salman joint oilfield installed

E N E R G Y
d e s k

TEHRAN – Platform S1 of Salman field, which Iran shares with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the Persian Gulf, was fully installed on its designated offshore place on Wednesday, Shana reported.

As reported, the 1000-ton structure was built and loaded by Iranian experts and engineers at Khorramshahr Yard less than two months ago.

According to the head of Iranian Offshore Oil Company (IOOC), which is in charge of development of the field, the installation

of this platform was significant due to the complexities of the operations, such as the difficulty of lifting due to the asymmetric weight of the platform, and the multiplicity and complexity of the platform's pipelines and subsea wirings.

"Installation operations were carried out in spite of all the complexities in full compliance with safety principles," Alireza Salmanzadeh told Shana.

The construction operations of this platform were started nearly five years ago and the topside platform was completed in early



January and was loaded at Khorramshahr Yard on January 13.

Khorramshahr Yard currently houses several workshops for building offshore platforms for Abouzar, Salman and Forouzan oilfields.

Salman oil field is located in the Persian

Gulf and jointly owned by Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The offshore shared field has high-pressure gas layers, too. Discovered about 45 years ago, the Salman field has since been supplying only oil.

Oil rises 2% but set for biggest weekly thumping since 2008

Oil prices were set for their worst weekly drubbing since the 2008 financial crisis, despite eking out a 2 percent on Friday, as investors eyed evaporating demand from the coronavirus pandemic and a production ramp-up by top producers.

Brent crude was up 70 cents, or 2.1 percent, at \$33.92 a barrel by 0540 GMT after falling more than 7 percent on Thursday. For the week, Brent is set to fall around 25 percent, the biggest weekly decline since December 2008, when it fell nearly 26 percent.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude rose 80 cents, or 2.5 percent, to \$32.30 after falling more than \$1 earlier in the session. WTI is set to drop more than 22 percent this week, also the most since the height of the financial crisis.

"It's been a very rough week and so it's not impossible people are locking in ahead of the weekend," said Michael McCarthy, chief market strategist at CMC Markets in Sydney.

"I would also point out that in the context of the recent moves it's not really a major move," he added, noting that "volumes are terrible" and down significantly on average.

Just as travel bans, cancelled events and other economic disruptions eat into crude demand, major oil producers are planning to add more crude to an over-supplied market.

A flood of low-priced oil from Saudi Arabia, the world's largest exporter, and the United Arab Emirates is intensifying the pressure on prices after the collapse of a price supporting agreement with Russia

last week.

"The surge in low-cost production is significantly larger than expected with the collapse in demand due to the coronavirus looking increasingly broad," said Goldman Sachs, which now expects what it said would be a record high oil surplus of 6 million bpd by April.

Russia, the world's second-largest producer, does not appear willing to return to its agreement with the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Domestic oil producers met with Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak on Thursday but did not discuss returning to the deal, with the head of Gazprom Neft saying they plan to raise output in April.

"Both Russia and the Saudis are digging in deeper," said Stratfor oil analyst Greg

Priddy.

Elsewhere equities markets retraced earlier heavy losses after U.S. markets fell by the most since Black Monday in 1987 on Thursday after U.S. President Donald Trump announced a ban on travel to the United States from Europe.

U.S. energy historian Daniel Yergin said it may be some time before oil markets are relieved as the coronavirus courses through the world and disrupts daily life while Saudi Arabia and Russia try to flood the market.

However, the price slump may be doing the work needed to reduce supply. Energy companies in the U.S., the world biggest crude producer, are preparing to cut investment and drilling plans because of the plunging prices.

(Source: Reuters)

Brazil's Petrobras sets record oil output at Buzios Field

Brazilian state-led oil company Petrobras set a fresh daily output record at the Buzios Field this week, marking the latest production advancement at the country's second-biggest gusher, the company said in a statement late Wednesday.

Buzios, which pumped first oil in April 2018, produced 640,000 bpd of crude and a total of 790,000 bpd of oil equivalent on Tuesday, Petrobras said. The field pumped 487,264 bpd and 18.2 million cu m/d for total hydrocarbons output of 601,704 boe/d in January, according to the latest production report from Brazil's National Petroleum Agency, or ANP.

"The Buzios Field, discovered in 2010, is the biggest deep-water oil field in the world," Petrobras said. "It's a world-class asset, with substantial reserves, low risk and low extraction costs."

The field features Brazil's top-six production wells, including three that produce more than 50,000 boe/d, according to the ANP.

The record-setting performance, however, will likely be undermined in coming weeks, with Petrobras starting a massive maintenance program that will shutter each floating production, storage and offloading vessel, or FPSO, installed in the subsalt region expected to be



shuttered for 15-20 days. The unprecedented program will improve efficiency and check the integrity of subsea systems in the region, which are subject to intense pressures and the corrosive effects of contaminants such as carbon dioxide and sulfuric acid.

Despite the field's relatively recent startup, Buzios will be included in the program, company officials said in February.

Production at Buzios has surged since mid-2019, when Petrobras finally resolved technical issues related to natural gas processing plants onboard the FPSOs installed at the field. The field features high pressures and volumes of associated gas, but is largely free of the high levels of contaminants seen at other subsalt reservoirs.

Petrobras installed four FPSOs capable of pumping up to 150,000 bpd and processing 6 million cu m/d each at Buzios, starting in early 2018. The FPSOs P-74, P-75, P-76 and P-77 handle output at the field. Petrobras plans to install fifth and sixth FPSOs, which will be slightly larger with installed production capacity of about 180,000 bpd, in 2022 and 2024, respectively.

The recent turmoil in global markets related to the oil-price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia as well as the coronavirus outbreak is unlikely to upset Petrobras' development plans at Buzios. Buzios and Lula, Brazil's top producing oil field, have breakeven costs at less than \$35/b, according to Petrobras. Lifting costs for the entire subsalt region were \$5.60/b in 2019, down from \$6.50/b in 2018, according to the company's 2019 earnings statement.

(Source: Platts)

The pitiful oil market the Saudis and Russia are fighting over

Oil demand growth forecasts have been slashed to their lowest in more than a decade, just as OPEC producers and their allies abandon their four-year-old attempt to limit supply and prop up prices. One of the world's leading oil forecasting agencies already saw stockpiles soaring this year, even before producers embark on boosting output.

The International Energy Agency, the U.S. Energy Information Administration and OPEC — the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries — have taken an axe to forecasts for oil demand this year, cutting year-on-year growth to the lowest levels since the financial crisis of 2008-09. The IEA was the first of the three to predict that the world will use less oil in 2020 than it did in 2019. OPEC is the only one of the three that sees stockpiles being drawn down this year - but that was before its de facto leader, Saudi Arabia, decided to open the taps and flood the world with crude in a price war that has no quick end in sight.

As the Covid-19 virus spreads around the world, demand forecasts have been slashed. The biggest reductions have been made to the first quarter, when the virus is likely to have its most significant impact in Asia. As the disease spreads to Europe and the Americas in the second quarter and its impact on Asia potentially eases, the effect on global oil demand is lessened, although that view may change if governments continue to respond with widespread travel bans like the one imposed by President Donald Trump on flights into the U.S. from Europe.

■ Demand slashed

Forecasts of global oil demand in the first quarter of 2020 have been cut by between 1.22 million barrels a day (EIA) and 2.17 million barrels (IEA). The reductions for the second quarter show a similar pattern, with the IEA making the biggest revision and the EIA the smallest. Demand forecasts



for the third and fourth quarters have also been trimmed. Although the reductions are smaller, none of the three agencies is predicting an economic rebound in the second half of the year that's strong enough to lead them to raise their forecasts for oil demand.

The revisions mean that year-on-year demand growth has all but disappeared. The IEA now sees the world using almost 100,000 barrels a day less oil this year than it did in 2019, while OPEC still sees demand being marginally higher than last year. The IEA is the most optimistic of the three, but even it now expects oil use to increase by just 360,000 barrels a day, down from a forecast of 1.43 million barrels in December.

■ gone

The biggest hit to demand growth is seen in the current quarter and the picture is forecast to improve as the year goes on and the impact of Covid-19 is expected to weaken. Forecasts for the second quarter of the year vary between a small year-on-year increase in demand (up 90,000 barrels a day

according to the EIA) and a second quarter of modest decline (down by 360,000 barrels a day according to OPEC). Growth should return to oil demand in the second half of the year, with all three agencies seeing an increase of close to 1 million barrels a day over consumption levels in the same period of 2019.

■ It's going to get better

Without a corresponding cut in supply, global stockpiles are expected to swell. But instead of a cut we now look like getting a massive increase, at least in the short term. That supply surge doesn't appear in any of the three outlooks. The EIA is the only one of the three to project OPEC production and it has it rising, but only back to the level seen in December.

In the absence of agency forecasts for oil production, we examine what would happen to global inventories if the group's production remains flat at its most recent monthly level. For the IEA that is 28.34 million barrels a day, for the EIA 28.49

million and for OPEC: 27.77 million. The reason for the big difference between the OPEC figure and the others is that it's the only one of the three to have removed Ecuador from the total after the country left the group in January.

■ Stockpile movements

With output unchanged going forward, the IEA already saw the global stockpile building at a rate of more than 1 million barrels a day, more than double the previous month's estimate of less than half a million barrels. OPEC on the other hand, saw stockpiles falling. Not surprisingly, given the changes to their oil demand outlooks, all three agencies expected stockbuilds in the first half of the year to be followed by draws in the second half.

■ Before the flood

The Saudi decision to abandon output restraint and flood the market with crude has made the agencies' projections of global supply-demand balances redundant. Crude production could initially surge by as much as 4.5 million barrels a day, if announcements from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Nigeria and Russia are taken at face value. But lower oil prices will almost inevitably lead to a slowdown in some production elsewhere as the year progresses. These changes have not been factored into the latest outlooks from the three big agencies.

■ Peaking production

The EIA has begun to cut its forecast for U.S. crude production, which it now sees peaking as soon as April and then beginning to fall. Its latest outlook shows production in December 2020 back where it was at the end of last year. The drop could become much steeper if rival nation producers who have spare capacity begin to utilize it to the full and oil prices fail to recover from their current level near \$30 a barrel.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Abadan Refinery upgrading project halted temporarily due to coronavirus

E N E R G Y

TEHRAN – Managing Director of National Iranian Oil Engineering and Construction Company (NIOEC) says all the operations of the Abadan Refinery's upgrading project (phase 2) have been halted to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

"In order to prevent the spread of Coronavirus, the second phase of the Abadan refinery project will be halted from next week until mid-Farvardin (first Iranian calendar month which starts on March 20)" Saeid Sattari Naeini said.

In December 2017, China's Sinopec Engineering (Group) Company, signed a deal with National Iranian Oil Engineering and Construction Company to contribute to engineering, procurement and construction of phase II of Abadan refinery upgrading project.

The Chinese group was supposed to bring, approximately, 6.86 billion yuan (\$1.05 billion) of investment into the project.

In January 2019, Alireza Sadeq-Abadi, the managing director of National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC), put China's investment in the development project of Abadan Refinery at about \$2 billion.



The official noted that NIORDC is in talks with several other renowned foreign companies in order to attract investment for renovating and overhauling refineries of the country.

Located in Abadan near the coast of the Persian Gulf in southwestern Iran, Abadan refinery was built by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (later BP), it was completed in 1912 and was one of world's largest oil refineries.

Oil shock threatens to take wind out of sails for renewables shift

The oil crash unleashed instant panic across financial markets, but Saudi Arabia's decision to start a price war may yet have profound consequences for the world's embrace of cleaner energy.

"It will definitely put downward pressure on the appetite for a cleaner energy transition," Fatih Birol, head of the International Energy Agency, said of the historic fall in crude prices.

Analysts warned that the oil price shock could hurt demand for electric vehicles and dim the appeal of energy efficiency measures because the turmoil — allied to a slowing global economy — had a chilling effect on the most ambitious renewable plans.

Unlike the period of low oil prices during 2014-16, many countries including the UK and the EU have set out ambitious targets to cut net emissions to zero in the coming decades that require a huge shift in energy use.

Birol said the situation would be "a good test" of all the climate commitments that government and companies had been making recently. "Observers will be quick to notice if governments' and companies' emphasis on the transition dies down when market conditions become more challenging."

Cheap petrol is likely to make electric vehicles less attractive to consumers, at least in the short term. The global electric vehicle market had already suffered a slowdown last year because of weaker demand in China and the Americas. It is a picture that the spread of coronavirus risks exacerbating as the global economy stumbles.

"The vehicle market is already shrinking and is now hit by potential supply chain shortages and lower consumer confidence," the research group Bloomberg NEF noted in a recent report. "We now expect EV sales in China to take a hit in 2020?..?..This could still fall further as the full impact of the coronavirus becomes clear."

Increasing the threat to the energy transition is that low energy prices often reduce the economic incentives to conserve it and find ways of using it more efficiently.

"Cheaper energy always leads to using energy in a less efficient manner," said Mr Birol. "Low energy prices will make the economics of energy saving less attractive due to cheap oil and gas, and this will definitely not be good news."

For the power sector, the effect of cheaper oil looks set to be more mixed.

Power generation is not directly affected by shifts in the oil price because crude is rarely used for power generation. However, government policies that will shape the future of renewable energy could shift because of the current shock.

While the cost of wind and solar power have plummeted over the past decade, the level of government subsidy for them has also been declining in many countries. Even before the economic shock of coronavirus, investment in clean energy peaked in 2017 and fell slightly in 2018 and the first half of 2019.

"Oil price shocks a few years ago did lead to downward pressure on most investment by oil and gas companies," said Helen Mountford vice-president for climate and economics at WRI. "I think we are in a different world today, and I think we will see a different result," she added, pointing to the lower prices of wind and solar.

Another factor that could shape the outlook for clean energy is that oil and gas companies find it harder to fund the investments in renewable energy they had planned.

Valentina Kretschmar, head of corporate research at Wood Mackenzie, points out that low oil prices also make it less attractive for producers to make big investments in new exploration projects.

"The argument that oil and gas companies will leave value on the table if they invest in renewables, that argument really does not hold at \$35 per barrel," she said. Analysis by Wood Mackenzie suggests that at current oil prices, more than 85 percent of oil and gas projects globally would yield a return of less than 15 percent.

However, some believe that the move towards cleaner energy has enough momentum to see off any challenge posed by lower oil prices.

While renewable energy projects typically generated lower returns than oil and gas exploration, they also offered long-term price stability that could become more attractive in the current market, said Mark Lewis, head of climate change investment research at BNP Paribas Asset Management.

(Source: Financial Times)

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Take an in-depth look at Algeria's New Republic

1 → Another political rendez-vous was set on July, 4th, however, the Algerians still boycotted it as millions of them continued to protest every week rejecting the holding of elections by the state institutions, remnant of the previous regime.

Responding to these demands, Algeria put off the presidential election planned for July 4th, due to the lack of valid candidates, as announced by constitutional council, which added that the files submitted by the two candidates – Abdelhakim Hamma-di, a doctor specializing in pharmacy, and Hamid Touahri, a retired aircraft maintenance engineer – had been rejected for not meeting the requirements.

The first postponement of the election, constitutionally mandated to replace the former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, is considered, on the one hand, a win for protesters, and, on the other hand, the country will come into lull pause and enter a constitutional vacuum, as this roadmap adopted, till then, by the Constitutional Council have met several constitutional articles, such as: seven, eight, 102 and 193.

Seven and eight state that the whole power is granted to people as this latter is 'the source of all power' and that they have the right to exercise their sovereignty 'through the institutions themselves'.

While the last two (102 and 193), respectively, indicate that the president of the Council must assume the office of Head of State for a three-month period, at most, till the organization of a new elections.

However, this case, ie the "second postponement of July 4th election" is not mentioned in the constitution. Consequently, the Constitutional Council interfered, again to avoid the chaos likely to result from this political deadlock, issuing a ruling extending Bensalah mandate until the next presidential elections, held in December.

■ What were the reforms introduced by the government? Did they satisfy the protesters?

In fact, the government found itself at a dead lock in face of huge protests, dubbed by observers as the largest and purposeful one, where people called for deep political reforms and the removal of all officials belonging to the old guard. The only solution for it to get out of the political crisis was certainly dialogue and negotiations between the regime and protesters. The Army managed to take actions against corrupted officials from the previous guard, tipping the balance of power in favor of the protesters. They launched "Clean Hands" campaign with a view to root out corruption linked to top tycoons and high-ranked government officials.

Several high-ranking officials, former Prime Ministers, including Ahmed Ouyahia and Abdelmalek Sellal, Ex- and current Ministers, tycoons from powerful families with links to the former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, and Heads of major companies and financial institutions were being questioned on corruption-related cases and then given huge sentences. Different investigations into corruption, customs-related violations and other financial wrongdoing have been launched too, targeting the most powerful tycoons in Algeria, most of them were remanded in custody.

In addition to investigations into hampering the well-functioning of the army and State targeting members of the ruling elite, namely; Said Bouteflika, the former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika's youngest brother and two former intelligence chiefs, the Generals Bachir Athman Tartag and his predecessor, General Mohamed Madine, aka Gen. Toufik. A military court convicted the brother of ousted President Bouteflika, Said Bouteflika, who had wielded enormous influence as gatekeeper to his ailing brother while in office. He was seen as the linchpin of an opaque clique of politicians and business leaders who influenced decision-making at the top of the gas-exporting North African country. The advisor and key aide of the former President of the Republic Bouteflika, is incarcerated in Blida prison and sentenced to heaving prison term alongside the other co-defendants - two former intelligence chiefs.

Ex-Prime Ministers, namely: Ahmed Ouyahia and Abdelmalek Sellal were, also, imprisoned for multiple accusations; embezzlement of public money, abuse of office and granting of undue privileges. Other officials and Ex and current Governors are due to appear before the investigating judge at the Supreme Court.

These actions illustrate the government, under the leadership of the late Army chief of staff Ahmed Gaid Salah's will to respond to the protesters' demands and purge corrupt politicians, oligarchs and military officials so as to restore the confidence of the people.

■ How Algeria's Dec.12 Presidential Vote was decided?

As a response to protesters' claims who demanded dialogue and the involvement of the all stakeholders in the political life, the Algerian Head of State Abdelkader Bensalah set up a panel to oversee a national dialogue with a view to hold a presidential election, already postponed twice, aimed at ending the political deadlock, prevailing in Algeria since February, 22nd.

This panel's plan of action consisted in rounds of dialogue with different stakeholders to develop proposals, to be discussed at the national conference, where the date of the election was determined. Several meetings were on the agenda bringing under one roof national personalities in charge of leading the national dialogue, including civil society organizations, political parties, national figures as well as young people and activists of Al-Hirak (the popular protest) from different provinces of the country. In contrast, the state, in all its components, including the military institution, were not part of this dialogue, restricting its role in observing the strictest neutrality throughout the course of this process.

Dialogue was in full swing, allowing the participants to express their respective positions in relation to the peaceful people's movement, but especially to make their arguments to transcend the current political stalemate. The objective was to bring together the points of view of each other in order to synthesize the proposals to reach a consensual platform, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to draw up a roadmap.

In this sense, the participants insisted on the need to set a date for the presidential election as soon as possible and take necessary measures to ensure transparent and fair election, in addition to the setting-up of a national independent authority in charge of preparing, monitoring and announcing the final results of the election.

The need to avoid the constitutional vacuum in order to preserve the State's institutions has been widely highlighted, considering that the presidential polls of Dec. 12 was crucial steps for building the rule of law, and a passage that will lead the North African country to a new bright and promising era, where the Algerian people would finally be able to achieve their legitimate aspirations for a decent life, in a country whose glory will be made by its loyal sons.

However, the national personalities debated too the conditions, the political, legal and institutional dimensions to bring



credibility to the next presidential election to ensure the organization of the election under the best conditions.

■ Did Presidential Election holding end Algeria's political deadlock?

Former Prime Minister Abdelmadjid Tebboune has won Algeria's decisive presidential election without the need for a second-round runoff, replacing the long-serving president Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The presidential election was, as I mentioned before, the only way out of the political deadlock the nation has been going through since Feb. 22.

Upon his inauguration as 8th president of Algeria., Mr. Tebboune extended his hand to the protesters, stressing he was ready to meet with protest leaders to listen to them (and) respond to their concerns. He said that his priority was to revise the constitution to establish a new Algeria that corresponds to the aspirations of the movement, a project that would be put to a referendum. He promised to include young men and young women in his new government.

■ Did the newly-elected President fulfill his commitments?

Colossal efforts are being made. The President is exerting huge efforts with a view to responding to the protesters' claims and constructing a new Algeria in fidelity to the oath made to the Chouhada of the War of liberation and to the Declaration of the First November.

Regarding his priorities as President of the Republic, Tebboune said that, at the political level, he intends to carry out a profound and extensive constitutional reforms, involving academics, intellectuals, specialists and members of the national community living abroad, and effectively, the President had started consultations with a number of national figures and political parties within the framework of a broad dialogue without exclusion on this important issue. The presidents and representatives of different political parties have expressed their "readiness" in their respective statements to the enrichment of the text which is currently submitted to a committee of experts for the preparation of a first version with a view to enriching it, considering that this approach goes in the direction of building a new Algeria, promised by President Tebboune during his electoral campaign for the presidential election of December 12, 2019.

It is, thus, expected that the committee of experts will complete its mission around March 15 and will present a first version of the Constitution which will be subject to debate and enrichment, in accordance with the agenda adopted by the President of the Republic.

Between 500 and 700 copies of this first version will be distributed to all stakeholders concerned by the revision of the country's Basic Law, in addition to publication on a website dedicated to the constitutional revision and on social networks so as to allow all citizens to debate and enrich the text.

At the end of the month-long debates, the draft will again be submitted to the Committee of Experts, which will carry the proposed amendments and modifications before submitting the text to Parliament and then to a popular referendum.

As a reminder, the President of the Republic had emphasized compliance with the agenda adopted for the revision of the Constitution, the Committee of Experts having been set up on January 8, 2020 and divided into seven working groups, in accordance with the seven axes contained in the mission letter sent by the Head of State to the Committee.

The Head of State had outlined, in a mission letter addressed to Mr. Laraba, seven axes of proposals and recommendations around which the Committee must reflect.

These axes concern "the strengthening of citizens' rights and freedoms", "the moralization of public life and the fight against corruption", "the consolidation of the separation and balance of powers", "the strengthening of power of control of the Parliament", "the consolidation of the independence of the judiciary", "the consolidation of the equality of the citizens before the law" and "the constitutional consecration of the mechanisms of organization of the elections".

The President, through the amendment of the constitution, seeks to fulfill the demands of the people and address their grievances, including decrees that reduce the powers of the President, reduce the presidential terms to one, able to be renewed once, protect Algeria from falling into individual rule and create a balance between institutions, ensuring separation of powers, build a strong State where citizens, equal before the law, exercise their rights freely and lawfully and establish the rule of law and equal opportunities that will be the essence of the new Algeria, committing to setting radical change of the governing system, through deepening democracy and the rule of law, reinforcing social justice, and protecting human rights.

Besides, during his presidential campaign, the President promised to include young ministers, a promise that came true.

With respect to economy, Tebboune voiced his will to establish a diversified economy that generates jobs and wealth. He periodically chairs meetings with the new members of government to start developing an action plan to be presented to Parliament with a view to saving economy from collapse and reform education, universities, and the health treatment system. He appointed the technocrat Abdelaziz Djerad as Prime Minister on Sec.28, 2019 and banned the practice of addressing the President as "His Excellency".

He promised, also, to tackle the corruption and vowed to make the judiciary independent and distanced from officials' meddling and power. This later has released large number of the detainees who were arrested in relation to the long-running anti-regime protests since the end of 2019, like on Jan 02, 2020,

76 people, including an elderly war of independence veteran Lakhdar Bouregga whose arrest has attracted particular anger were released. President Tebboune, also, decreed a presidential pardon (February 2020) that included 3471 people incarcerated in various jails across the country. This pardon, usually, decreed on July, 5, which is the commemoration of the Independence Day, coincided, this time, with the month marking the beginning of the popular movement against the old guard.

Other reforms are entrusted to 17-member panel of experts with three-month time to draw up a list of suggested changes which will, then, be put to the parliament and a referendum.

The conclusion is that President Tebboune is working on reforms in various spheres of life; economy, education, housing etc, apparently to appease the protesters because, it is worth mentioning that the Hirak is still taking place. Regular smaller anti-regime protests continue with protesters skeptical about the extent of constitutional and other reforms formulated under this government and whether they will lead to a genuine democratizing reform of the country. They seek a sweeping political reforms for meaningful democratic change.

Tebboune, for his part, has dubbed this popular movement, of which the first anniversary was celebrated weeks ago by the Algerians, as a "salutary phenomenon," warning against any attempt at internal or external infiltration. He further sealed a decree enshrining 22 February a national holiday named +the National Day of Fraternity and Cohesion between the people and their Army for democracy. On different occasions, Tebboune reaffirmed that the blessed Hirak has preserved the country from a total demolition. According to him, the collapse of the national state is synonym for the demolition of all its institutions and all the indicators pointed to such a scenario. Thanks to their maturity, the people thwarted the plot by fulfilling many of their claims.

As regards the remaining demands of the Hirak, Tebboune asserted that he is working on them because he personally committed to meeting them and changing the management method and improving the piteous image of the State, which, in fact, was very far from his concerns.

According to the President, protesting is the right of all citizens and it is even the foundation of democracy, a fortiori when it comes to people demonstrating in an organized manner, without destruction or disturbance. He repeatedly highlighted that he has nothing to reproach because it has spared the country a disaster and without it, efforts would be, today, underway to resolve the crisis in Algeria as is the case in Libya. However, he keeps warning the protesters, who demonstrate on Fridays, dubbing them as his children, to be vigilant against the infiltration of their movement because there are signs of infiltration both from inside and outside.

■ What do you suggest as economic reforms?

Well, this week, a working meeting on the assessment of the economic situation, in the aftermath of the drastic fall in oil prices impacted by the global economic slowdown caused by coronavirus outbreak and the unilateral decision by some OPEC member countries to sell their crude oil output with particularly aggressive discounts, was held under the chairmanship of the President, where this latter gave guidelines to face a situation which remains difficult but which the State possesses the national means to face.

In this regard, the President of the Republic instructed the members of the Government, present in this meeting, to take all the necessary measures to curb the effects of this unfavorable situation for the national economy, while stressing on the need to preserve the citizens' revenue and living standards.

The minister of finance has been instructed to immediately submit a first draft of the Complementary Finance law to remove some inconsistencies in the 2020 Finance Law. The objective is to include measures capable of countering the financial effects caused by the crisis and collect the unrecovered taxes and customs revenue. He has also been entrusted with speeding up the process of creating private Islamic banks.

The President of the Republic firmly rejected the resort to foreign borrowing and unconventional financing.

Instructions have been given to the minister of commerce to undertake judicious management of imports without affecting citizens or the national economy. With sufficient resources for the years 2020 and 2021, the State is not likely to suffer shortages in industrial inputs or necessary products.

Also, the head of the State instructed the minister of agriculture to increase national production in order to at least halve the import of produces destined for human and animal consumption, especially corn and red meats.

The Industry and Mines Minister has been instructed, for his part, to immediately set up all the arrangements leading to a national production with 70% integration rate for the light industry, hitherto artificially applied by the CKD/SKD formula, and re-launch mechanical engineering with a 35% integration rate at least.

He has also been instructed to encourage, without any restriction, the creation of micro, small businesses and start-ups and to remove all forms of regulatory and bureaucratic obstacles to their expansion.

As for him, the Governor of the Central Bank was instructed to accompany this steps aiming at reviving economic activity, just as he was tasked with transferring into the legal gold reserve all customs seizures as well as the National Solidarity Fund which had been frozen for several decades.

Likewise, he has been entrusted with ensuring the repayment of loans granted by banks to private investment holders. Finally, the President of the Republic ordered members of the

government to continue to closely follow, under the authority of the Prime Minister, the situation with a view to taking all the necessary measures in the event of prolonged deterioration of the economic situation so to protect citizens."

I think, this meeting covered different economic aspects. As we know, Algeria faces the herculean task of transforming its economy to meet the pressing demands of a young, growing, and increasingly restless population. Despite the country's favorable demographics, its economy remains almost entirely dependent on oil and natural gas, which account for 95% of merchandise exports. Unfortunately, Algeria's economy is in trouble. It is facing the effects of nearly decades of energy-sector dominance and, in some cases, mismanagement.

Algeria's tighter economic circumstances have hindered the state's ability to provide services properly. Inflation and a concomitant increase in the cost of living have made it more difficult for many to secure daily needs.

Energy consumption is also rising at a fast pace in the country, so much that the national gas company, Sonatrach, estimates that it will exceed domestic production by 2025, if better efficiency and new fields are not found. Algeria is, therefore, in dire need of economic diversification.

Tebboune's government is entitled to carry out the required economic reforms to end the economy's reliance on oil through the new economic growth paradigm, empowering the private sector and reshaping the social contract. Former governments have sought to implement similar reforms, but their bids fell short of achieving the goals.

Success of the new government in overcoming the above challenges hinges on a number of factors, such as:

Introducing a new development model based on economic diversification away from oil. However, economic diversification requires the reshaping of a growth model to include competitive economic sectors, such as: tourism, manufacturing industries, and the auto industry in particular. It also requires gradual liberalization of fiscal, monetary and trade policies to promote revitalization of the private sector. In addition to empowering this latter, as Algeria must encourage this sector to contribute in all economic activities. This is essential for easing the huge fiscal burden that the government had to bear over the past years.

■ What about Algeria's foreign policy?

In his first speech since being sworn into office, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune confirmed Algiers' previous stances on various policies, stressing on Algeria's fundamental principles, namely: the defense of national independence, the recovery of national identity, the denial of any form of interference, refusal of any foreign military base on its soil, rejection of alliance policy and military pacts, and active participation in the struggle against underdevelopment and poverty, principle of reciprocity, the non-interference in other countries' internal affairs and the peaceful settlement of crises.

As all we know, Algeria is a pivotal country at the African, Mediterranean and Arab levels. It will continue to play a leading role in the settlement of different crises as it did in the past in Mali where an agreement was signed in Algeria's capital "Algiers" bringing the warring parties together. It categorically rejects the formulation of alliances to attack sovereign countries, for instance it refused, in the strongest terms, to join the Saudi-led Military Alliance, considering it as an act of aggression.

Regarding Western Sahara, Tebboune highlighted Algiers' policy towards this conflict, renewing the country's unwavering and unconditional support for the legitimate right of the Sahrawi people to self-determination through a free and fair referendum, and to stand by its side to reach a permanent solution to its just cause in accordance with international law and legitimacy, in line with the United Nations doctrine of decolonization.

Broaching the situation in Libya, Algeria is still attached to the stability of this country, refusing to be kept out of the settlement process.

Algeria, under the leadership of President Tebboune, will continue to play a leading role in the resolution of the crisis in Libya. The main principles of the Algerian initiative are known. The solution can only be political and peaceful and can only come from the Libyans themselves with the international support and notably neighboring countries.

Algeria has, as part of its efforts aimed at reaching a solution to the Libyan crisis, relaunched several mechanisms given the effects of the Libyan conflict on this country. Algiers hosted, on January 13th, the foreign minister meeting of Libya's neighboring countries (Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Chad, Sudan and Niger) to establish coordination and promote dialogue between these countries and the international players so that to accompany the Libyans in the revitalization of the political settlement process of the crisis through an inclusive dialogue between the different Libyan parties.

Besides, Former Algerian foreign minister Ramtane Lamamra is being considered as UN envoy to Libya, after Ghassan Salame resigned from the post earlier this month. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has been consulting with U.N. Security Council members about appointing former Algerian Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra as his new Libya envoy, Lamamra served as Algeria's foreign minister from 2013 to 2017 and as African Union commissioner for peace and security from 2008 to 2013. He has been a mediator in several African conflicts, notably in Liberia.

With respect to Arab causes, President Tebboune remains stressing that the Palestinian issue is a constant of the foreign policy of the Algerian state. Algeria will remain a support for Palestine and its people who are fighting against a brute colonial force until the achievement of its independent state.

More recently, Algeria voiced rejection of the Middle East peace plan sponsored by US President Donald Trump, which gives Israel the right to have Jerusalem as its capital.

Besides, Algeria still asks the League of Arab States to end the freeze on Syria's membership and to re-represent it again in its meetings and activities, especially that this year's Summit will be held in Algeria. Syria has been suspended from the Arab League since 2012, when a coalition of countries, led by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, voted to suspend their membership.

According to Algerian Radio, Boukadoum said: "the absence of Syria has caused great harm to the League and the Arabs." He would add that "we must push for the return of Syria's membership and work for Damascus to return to the League of Arab States."

■ What about Algeria's participation in the works of the African Union (AU)?

The works of the African Union (AU) Summit held in Addis Ababa marked Algeria's return to the African arena, with the President of the Republic Abdelmadjid Tebboune reaffirming commitment and immutable positions towards the resolution of conflicts in Africa and the world.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Coronavirus: EU condemns Trump over U.S. travel ban from 26 Schengen countries

The European Union has condemned the announcement by Donald Trump of a near ban on travel from 26 Schengen countries over coronavirus, saying it had been imposed “unilaterally and without consultation.”



EU Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the pandemic is “a global crisis, not limited to any continent and it requires cooperation rather than unilateral action.”

The EU “disapproves” of Trump’s announcement, they said, insisting the EU was “taking strong action to limit the spread of the virus.”

In a television address peppered with errors, Trump said travel from Schengen countries to the U.S. would

be impossible for 30 days starting at midnight on Friday.

After days of playing down the coronavirus threat, he blamed Europe for not acting quickly enough to address the “foreign virus” and claimed that U.S. clusters were “seeded” by European travelers.

“We made a lifesaving move with early action on China,” Trump said. “Now we must take the same action with Europe.”

Trump said there would be exemptions for “Americans who have undergone appropriate screenings.” He said the U.S. would monitor the situation to determine if travel could be reopened earlier.

The State Department followed Trump’s remarks by issuing an extraordinary global health advisory cautioning U.S. citizens to “reconsider travel abroad” due to the virus and associated quarantines and restrictions.

Trump spoke after days of confusion in Washington and in the face of mounting calls on the president to demonstrate greater leadership. At times, though, his remarks contributed to the uncertainty.

While Trump said in his address that all European travel would be cut off, Homeland Security officials later clarified that the new travel restrictions would apply only to foreign nationals who have been in the Schengen Area at any point for 14 days prior to their scheduled arrival to the United States. The 26-nation border-free travel zone includes France, Italy, Germany, Greece, Austria, Belgium and others, and the White House said the zone had recorded the highest number of confirmed COVID-19 cases outside of mainland China.

The restrictions don’t apply to legal permanent residents, immediate family of U.S. citizens or others “identified in the proclamation” signed by Trump.

■ EU will assess Trump’s decision

The European Union says it will assess Trump’s decision amid deep concern over the move’s economic impact, with markets already heavily hit by the new virus.

“We will assess the situation today. Economic disruption must be avoided,” European Council President Charles Michel, who chairs summits of EU presidents and prime ministers, said in a tweet Thursday.

Michel underlined that Europe is taking all necessary measures to contain the spread of the virus.

(Source: euronews)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Mill Network at Kinderdijk-Elshout

The outstanding contribution made by the people of the Netherlands to the technology of handling water is admirably demonstrated by the installations in the Kinderdijk-Elshout area.

The Mill Network at Kinderdijk-Elshout is a group of buildings in an exceptional human-made landscape in which the centuries-long battle of the Dutch people to drain parts of their territory and protect them against further inundation is dramatically demonstrated through the survival of all the major elements of the complex system that was devised for this purpose.

Construction of hydraulic works for the drainage of land for agriculture and settlement began in the Middle Ages and has continued uninterruptedly to the present day.



The property illustrates all the typical features associated with this technology: polders, high and low-lying drainage and transport channels for superfluous polder water, embankments and dikes, 19 drainage mills, 3 pumping stations, 2 discharge sluices and 2 Water Board Assembly Houses.

The beautifully preserved mills can be divided into three categories: 8 round brick ground-sailers, 10 thatched octagonal smock mills, and one hollow post mill.

The installations in the Kinderdijk-Elshout area demonstrate admirably the outstanding contribution made by the people in Netherlands to the technology of handling water.

The landscape is striking in its juxtaposition of its horizontal features, represented by the canals, the dikes, and the fields, with the vertical rhythms of the mill system. There is no drainage network of this kind or of comparable antiquity anywhere else in the Netherlands or in the world.

(Source: UNESCO)

Imam Mosque: A grand, impressive jewel of Isfahan

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – At the southern end of Isfahan’s main square stands the big, grand and impressive Imam Mosque, which is not only impressive because of its sheer size and incredible decorations, but also helps to get a good impression of the needs and challenges of always on-going restoration works.

The craftsmanship continues and is intricate with amazing views both on the façade and the interior. The monuments boasts perfect proportions and iconic blue-tiled mosaics.

Visitors to the mosque are mainly overwhelmed with good views of the main dome with its glorious profusion of turquoise-shaded tiles.

Originally named Masjed Shah (“the Shah Mosque”), its construction began in 1611 during the rule of the Safavid King Shah Abbas the Great who reigned from 1588 to 1629. The mosque’s topmost dome was completed in the last year of his sovereignty.

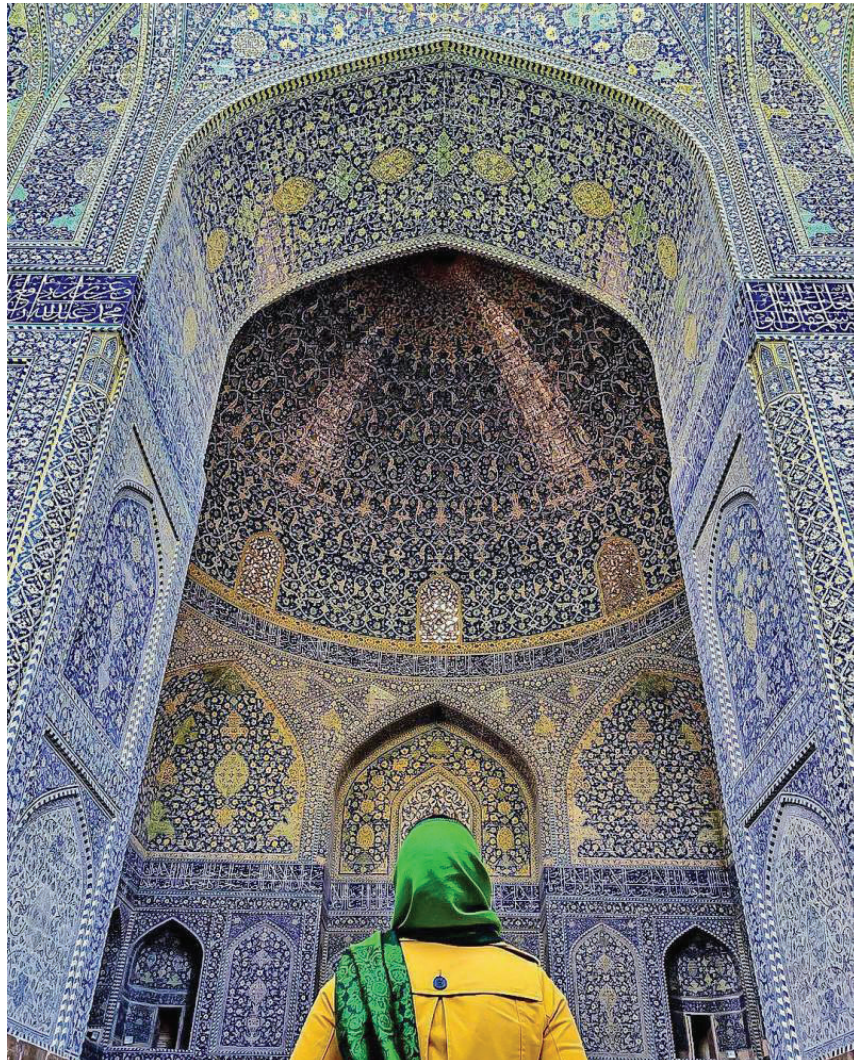
A very picturesque huge entrance portal welcomes people to the mosque. It is built to face the square though the mosque is oriented towards Mecca. A short corridor connects the square to the inner courtyard that is surrounded by four imposing iwans (porticos) with a pool dedicated to ritual ablutions nesting in the middle.

The walls of the courtyard feature sunken porches framed by seven-colored tiles of deep blue and yellow. Each iwan leads into a vaulted sanctuary covered with particularly fine floral motifs on a blue background.

Many believe each of the mosque’s parts is a masterpiece that leaves a lasting impression. This palace of devotion owes its splendor mostly due to being covered with seven-color mosaic tiles and symmetrical calligraphic inscriptions.

On other side of the square stands the very delicate Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque which was dedicated the ruler’s father-in-law, Sheikh Lotfollah, a revered Lebanese scholar of Islam who was invited to oversee construction of the Shah Mosque.

Following the Iranian traditional mosque



A traveler looks at the main portal of Imam Mosque in Isfahan, central Iran.

plan, the Shah Mosque has a court (50 by 67 meters) surrounded by a two-story arcade on four sides with four iwans, one at the center of each side, and a domed sanctuary behind the southwest iwan, oriented towards Mecca, according to ArchNet, which is collaborative digital humanities project focused on Islamic

architecture and the built environment of Muslim societies more generally.

The mosque’s plan, however, presents an interesting variation: behind each lateral iwan (on the northwest and southeast) is a domed chamber. The domed sanctuary behind the southwest iwan is flanked by

rectangular rooms (36 meters by 18 meters each) functioning as winter prayer halls that are entered from the domed sanctuary aligned on the northeast-southwest axis.

These halls are covered by eight domes and connect to two rectangular arcaded courts serving as madrasas (22 by 44 meters each) also aligned on the northeast-southwest axis and are only accessed from the domed chambers behind the southeast and northwest iwans, respectively. Both the main portal iwan, overlooking the maydan (square), and the sanctuary iwan are flanked by a pair of soaring cylindrical minarets 34 meters in height. These minarets are decorated with tile mosaics of epigraphic elements.

On the exterior, the bulbous dome is covered with a spiraling beige arabesque on a light blue background. The dome rises on a high drum and a sixteen-sided transitional zone. The interior of the dome is ornamented with a sunburst at the apex from which descend tiers of arabesque. The eight domes in each of the prayer halls adjacent to the domed sanctuary are decorated with mosaic tilework of concentric medallions in floral motifs. The arches on which these domes rest ascend from undecorated octagonal columns that divide the space of these halls into eight bays.

The mosque’s interior and exterior walls are fully covered with a polychrome, mostly dark blue, glazed tile revetment above a continuous marble dado. Throughout the whole mosque, with the exception of the sanctuary dome and portal iwan, Shah ‘Abbas was keen to minimize labor costs and time by introducing a novel technique called “haft-rangi” (seven colors).

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. Profusion of tree-lined boulevards, Persian gardens and important Islamic buildings give Isfahan a highly touristic appeal that is unmatched by many other Iranian cities. In addition, the city is home to many versatile artisans who underpin its reputation as a living museum of traditional culture.

Italy extends visa for Iranians up to 60 days

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – The Italian government has agreed to significantly extend short-term visas for visiting Iranians, saying they will have “no problem” to stay up to 60 days more after their visa expiration dates, Tehran’s embassy in Rome has said, IRNA reported.

The extension will suit Iranian nationals who have to stay more than their [original] visa validity due to problems posed by the coronavirus in the European country as its government has banned all non-essential travel and public gatherings until April 3 and closed schools and universities nationwide.

Based on the recent decision, all foreigners who are

currently present in Italy will not be included in the expulsion law until 60 days after the expiration of visa, the report said.

Italian prime minister announced on Tuesday that his country has been quarantined to prevent coronavirus outbreak. “The right decision is to stay at home,” Giuseppe Conte said when he imposed the lockdown on Monday.

Most Italians are following his advice, with streets and squares deserted up and down the country of 60 million people, sources say.

According to official statistics, the coronavirus has so far affected 15,113 and 11,364 persons in Italy and Iran, respectively, killing 1,016 and 514 ones in the two countries.



Kang where roof of one house is yard of another



TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Photos depict the hill-stepped village of Kang where roof of

one house is yard of another on the highlands of Mount Binalud in northeast Iran.

Kang, with an antiquity of more than 3,000 years, is situated at a distance of some 30 km from Mashhad, the capital of Khorasan Razavi province. The village is also adjacent to Neyshabur, known for its turquoise handicrafts and mines.

The village offers its visitors a bizarre scene of architecture that can more or less be found in other parts of the country; each house is built on another’s rooftop, most of which having porch-balconies and earthen roofs.

Upon getting there and all along the way towards atop, sightseers can perpetuate their visit by capturing amazing pictures of hospitable people and their hillside houses.

Kang is a contender as ‘Khorasan’s Masuleh’ that is also a homogenous stepped village of stacked mud-brick homes in northern Iran.

The country plans to try its luck on registering the



millennium-old Masuleh as a UNESCO World Heritage site in the coming years.

Coronavirus: Norwegian Air to suspend half its staff

Norwegian Air is set to cancel 4,000 flights and temporarily lay off about half of its staff because of the coronavirus outbreak.

The budget airline said the changes would apply until the end of May and numbers may increase.

Its boss said new restrictions on travel between the US and mainland Europe put “extra pressure on an already difficult situation”.

Analysts say airlines have been dealt another “body blow” by the travel ban.

Jacob Schram, chief executive of Norwegian, said this was “an unprecedented situation”.

He called on “international governments to act now to ensure that the aviation industry can protect jobs and continue to be a vital part of the global economic recovery”.

The airline has decided to ground 40% of its long-haul fleet and cancel up to a quarter of its short-haul flights.

The company, which is looking for a cash injection, employs 1,200 people in UK.

But all routes between London Gatwick and the US will



continue to operate as normal.

■ Economic hit for airlines

The airline industry is already facing an economic hit of \$113bn (£88bn) from the effects of the outbreak on passenger numbers.

Analysts predict this financial loss could grow substantially from the new travel ban.

There are fears that some weaker airlines could go bust.

On Wednesday, U.S. President Donald Trump announced sweeping travel restrictions on 26 European countries in an attempt to combat the spread of coronavirus.

The ban applies to travelers from countries that are members of the Schengen border-free travel area.

The UK, Ireland and other non-Schengen countries are unaffected. U.S. citizens are also exempt.

“It is another body blow for many airlines in need of central government support in these incredibly difficult times,” said John Grant from global travel data firm OAG.

“It is just a decision that hurts the industry and the wider economy as travel and trade will be frustrated,” he said.

Many airlines are already under the cosh from the effects of coronavirus, and thousands of flights have been cancelled worldwide.

Korean Air has warned that the coronavirus impact could threaten its survival, and UK airline Flybe, which was already struggling, collapsed last week, saying the coronavirus outbreak was partly to blame.

(Source: BBC)

Chinese people, firms send new anti-corona aid to Iran

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The fourth batch of sanitary and medical equipment provided by Chinese people and companies was sent to Iran on Thursday. The consignment consists of protective clothing and glasses, face masks, pulse oximeters, and medicine, IRNA reported. “While the cruel sanctions of the United States have faced the Iranian people with problems in fight against the coronavirus and has revealed the true face of the American statespersons to the world, Chinese people are continuing to send aid to our country in

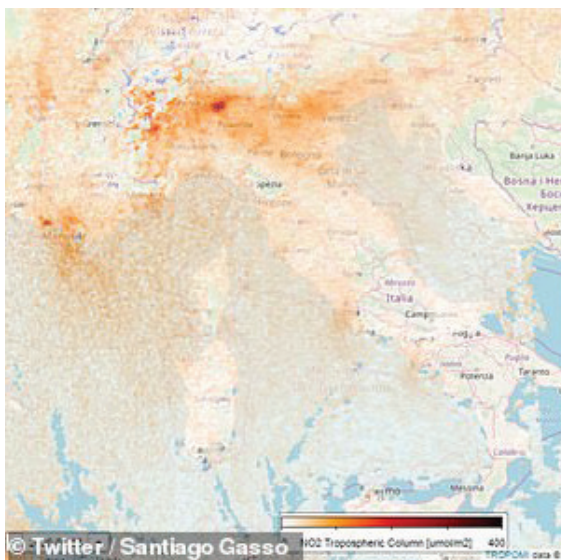
large amounts,” Ramezan Parvaz, the consul general of Iran to Shanghai said. The Chinese government and people have so far sent nine consignments of sanitary and medical equipment to Iran, according to the report. Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has sent a letter to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, urging the need to lift all U.S. sanctions on Iran which are impeding the country’s combat against coronavirus. On March 2, Chinese Ambassador in Iran,



Chang Hua, said he believes that Iran would overcome the crisis of coronavirus outbreak. “We believe that by sending humanitarian aid, Iran will overcome the crisis,”

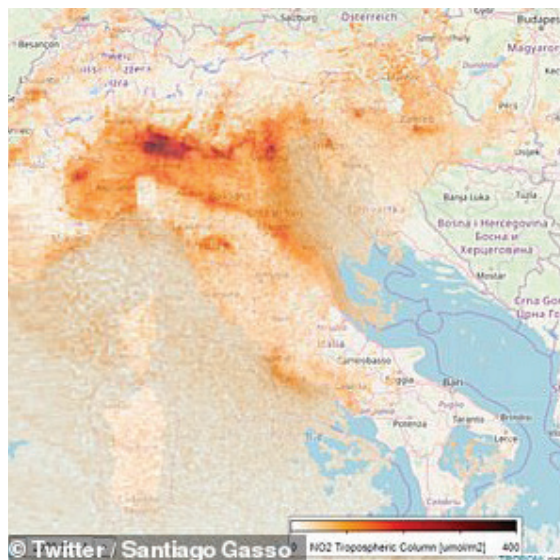
IRNA reported. The number of coronavirus cases in the country has risen to 11,364, with 3529 recovered and 514 dead.

Satellite images show how coronavirus dropped smog pollution in Italy



Smog has dropped in northern Italy after almost a month of coronavirus restrictions, according to new satellite images. The levels of nitrogen dioxide - highlighted in dark orange - appear to have decreased in the photos from the Sentinel 5 satellite of Europe’s Copernicus Programme, run by the European Commission and the European Space Agency. The progress of the air pollution in the European country was documented over the course of three weeks, on the dates February 14, February 24, March 4 and March 8. The photos were uploaded on Twitter by Santiago Gasso - a researcher at the University of Washington and NASA - on Wednesday, the same day World Health Organization classified coronavirus as a pandemic. Following his findings, he penned on his social media account: ‘In one month, there is a clear decrease of NO2 levels (a pollution marker) in northern #Italy according to the satellite sensor.’ Earlier this week, Italy implemented a nationwide lockdown in a desperate bid to contain the spread of COVID-19. There have been 1,016 deaths from 15,113 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the European country - the most anywhere outside of mainland China.

(Source: The Daily Mail)



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.”

Prof Brian Hoskins, of Imperial College London, said: “The report is a catalogue of weather in 2019 made more extreme by climate change, and the human misery that went with it. It points to a threat that is greater to our species than any known virus - we must not be diverted from the urgency of tackling it by reducing our greenhouse gas emissions to zero as soon as possible.”

The WMO said its report provided authoritative information for policymakers on the need for climate action and showed the impacts of extreme weather.

A heatwave in Europe was made five times more likely by global heating, and the scorching summer led to 20,000 emergency hospital admissions and 1,462 premature deaths in France alone. India and Japan also

sweltered and Australia started and ended the year with severe heat and had its driest year on record. Australia had “an exceptionally prolonged and severe fire season”, the WMO noted.

Floods and storms contributed most to displacing people from their homes, particularly Cyclone Idai in Mozambique and its neighbours, Cyclone Fani in south Asia, Hurricane Dorian in the Caribbean, and flooding in Iran, the Philippines and Ethiopia. The number of internal displacements from such disasters is estimated to have been close to 22 million people in 2019, up from 17 million in 2018.

The US saw heavy rains, with the total from July 2018 to June 2019 being the highest on record. Total economic losses in the US for the year were estimated at \$20bn, the WMO said.

Unpredictable climate and extreme weather was a factor in 26 of the 33 nations that were hit by food crises in 2019, and was the main driver in 12 of the countries. “After a decade of steady decline, hunger is on the rise again - over 820 million suffered from hunger in 2018, the latest global data available,” the report says.

The WMO said unusually heavy precipitation in late 2019 was also a factor in the severe desert locust outbreak in the Horn of Africa, which is the worst for decades and expected to spread further by June 2020 in a severe threat to food security.

Prof Dave Reay, of the University of Edinburgh, said: “This annual litany of climate change impacts and inadequate global responses makes for a gut-wrenching read. Writ large is the ‘threat multiplier’ effect that is climate change on the biggest challenges faced by humanity and the world’s ecosystems in the 21st century.”

(Source: The Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Iran breaks U.S. monopoly on aviation navigation charts

Iranian researchers have succeeded to produce aviation navigation charts, known as Inflight AIP (Aeronautical Information Publication), which was monopolized by the United States, IRNA news agency reported on Sunday.

Prepared by Iran’s Army, the Inflight AIP was unveiled in Tehran with Air Force Commander Brigadier General Aziz Nasirzadeh and Vice President for Science and Technology Sourena Sattari in attendance.

Digital aeronautical charts, including instrument flight rules (IFR) and visual flight rules (VFR), is a high-quality knowledge-based product which was solely produced by Jeppesen Company and was not available for Iranian airlines due to U.S. sanctions.

ایران انحصار آمریکادر نقشه‌های هوانوردی را شکست

ایران با تولید نقشه‌های هوانوردی (INFLIGHT AIP) که پیش از این در انحصار آمریکا بوده به موفقیت چشمگیری در زمینه صنعت هوانوردی دست یافت.

به گزارش ایرنا، روز یکشنبه با حضور امیر سرتیپ خلبان عزیز نصیرزاده فرمانده نیروی هوایی ارتش و سوزنا ستاری معاون علمی و فناوری ریاست جمهوری از نقشه‌های هوانوردی (INFLIGHT AIP) تولید داخل رونمایی شد.

چارت‌های هوایی دیجیتال شامل نقشه‌های پروازی IFR و VFR یک محصول دانش بنیان با فناوری بسیار بالا است که پیش از این انحصار آن در اختیار آمریکا و شرکت جیسن (Jeppesen) قرار داشت که به دلیل اعمال تحریم‌های ظالمانه شرکت‌های هواپیمایی ایرانی از دسترسی به این نقشه‌ها محروم شده بودند.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-dom”

- **Meaning:** state, condition, quality
- **For example:** we do have some **freedom** of choice.

PHRASAL VERB

Pull in

- **Meaning:** to move to a designated place at the side of the road
- **For example:** A police car signaled to me to pull in.

IDIOM

Do a double take

- **Explanation:** to look at someone or something again because you are very surprised by what you saw or heard
- **For example:** Colleagues often walked past me in the hallway, then stopped and did a double take.

Iran thanks Japan for \$23.5m help against COVID-19

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Embassy in Japan thanked the Government of Japan for its decision to provide Iran with \$23.5 million in aid to help the country in fight against the coronavirus.



Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in an undated photo

“I am deeply grateful that the Japanese government has decided to provide Iran with 2.5 billion yen (around \$23.5 million) of medical support to curb the coronavirus outbreak,” Iran’s Ambassador to Japan Morteza Rahmani-Movehhd wrote on the embassy’s Twitter account on Friday.

“Global solidarity is needed for full control of the spread of the new coronavirus infection,” the tweet added, IRNA reported.

Critically endangered snapping turtle program breeds hope for survival

The Beller River snapping turtle is one of the rarest turtles on the planet after a virus wiped out more than 90% of the adult population in 2015, but a captive breeding program is bringing hope that a healthy population can be restored in the wild.

Thirty-five turtles have hatched at the special breeding facility at Taronga Zoo since the beginning of this year.

The turtles are being housed in a nursery facility where they are fed and keepers monitor their health and growth.

“We release as many back into the wild as possible but some will stay in the breeding program,” said Adam Skidmore, Taronga Zoo’s senior reptile keeper.

“In the river there are still some smaller ones growing up but they don’t start breeding until the age of 11 or 12, so, until that happens, we breed here so we can supplement the population. “Hopefully one day they can self-sustain. That’s the goal.”

It is the fourth breeding season for the Beller River snapping turtle captive breeding program.

About 100 turtles are now at the zoo’s quarantine facility. A further 20 have been released into the wild in the upper Beller River in the mid north coast region of New South Wales.

The animals have tracking devices and are monitored by scientists working for the state government’s Saving our Species program.

A cure has not yet been found for the virus, known as the Beller River virus, that wiped so many of the animals out in 2015.

But Gerry McGilvray, a project officer on the program, said the survival rate for the released turtles so far was high.

Of the 20 animals, 17 are still being actively tracked. One turtle has died, but not as a result of the virus, while the tracking devices on two others have failed and their whereabouts is uncertain.

During the warmer months, scientists recapture the released turtles to check their health, growth and shell measurements, and swab for the virus. In the most recent check-up a week ago, 16 of the turtles were captured and tested and rereleased.

“The animals captured a week ago appear to be in good health and there’s no evidence of exposure to the virus,” McGilvray said.

The disastrous bushfire season, which has been followed by heavy rainfall, has raised concern that sediment washing into waterways would affect the turtle’s habitat and food sources.

(Source: The Guardian)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Palestinian suicide bomber attack

(April 30, 2003)

A Palestinian suicide bomber has blown himself up outside a bar in Tel Aviv bar, killing at least 3 people and injuring 55. Only hours before, the new Palestinian cabinet had promised to control violence. This report from David Chazan:

The attack happened at one o’clock in the morning when a live band was playing. There were about a hundred young people **packed** into Mike’s Place, a popular **night-spot** on Tel Aviv’s beachfront next to the American Embassy. It could have been much worse if a security guard standing outside the bar hadn’t stopped the bomber from entering. **Witnesses** say the guard **threw himself onto** the attacker.

The bombing came hours after Palestinian **legislators** approved a cabinet headed by the new Palestinian prime minister, Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen. He’s called for an end to the campaign of violence in order to **pave the way for a resumption** of the peace process, but the militants have rejected his strategy. They say he’s **bowing to American** and Israeli pressure to stop attacks without guarantees of a **viable** Palestinian state.

Israeli officials have reacted angrily. They say the new Palestinian government has failed its first test, but the Americans, who are sponsoring efforts to get peace negotiations **underway**, are determined to continue their efforts.

■ Words

packed: crowded
night-spot: a place where people can enjoy themselves late into the night
witnesses: people who saw what happened
threw himself onto: moved suddenly, with a lot of force onto
legislators: people who make and pass new laws
to pave the way for: to create a situation which makes it possible for something else to happen more easily
resumption of: the resumption of something is when it starts again after a pause
bowing to: reluctantly agreeing to
viable: if something is able to do what it is supposed to do, it is viable
underway: started, begun

(Source: BBC)

Al Khalifa's political exploitation of coronavirus, ignoring its obligations

→ **1** Al Khalifa violated human rights after adopting such measures. Various countries around the world provided essentials means of returning their nationals and by law, put them in quarantine for two weeks to ensure their health and well-being. Al Khalifa refused to follow such an approach.



The widespread criticism and pressure from Bahraini political activists eventually prompted the Al Khalifa regime to reduce its hostile policies towards its nationals in Iran and paved the way for their return. In this regard, the first group of Bahraini citizens in Iran recently went back to Bahrain after the mediation of some regional countries such as Kuwait and Oman.

Clearly, Al Khalifa is using coronavirus outbreak to pursue its political goals in Bahrain in an effort to make some changes in the population of the country.

In the process of altering the structure of the population, Al Khalifa focuses on revoking the citizenship of Bahraini nationals. It seeks to strengthen its social base in Bahrain by granting Bahraini citizenship to foreigners. In line with this policy, Al-Khalifa's courts have renounced the citizenship of hundreds of Bahrainis since 2012 and conferred citizenship to many foreigners.

The fact is that the Al Khalifa has come to the conclusion that it can take advantage of the current opportunity to intensify the process of revoking citizenship in Bahrain, thereby almost 1500 Bahraini nationals in Iran would lose their citizenship. It goes without saying that the coronavirus has become a tool for Al Khalifa to exert pressure on Bahraini citizens and consequently repress them, which means that the tribalism virus has reached its peak in Bahrain.

Moreover, the hostile policies of the Al Khalifa regime after the outbreak of coronavirus are not merely limited to domestic factors. The truth is that Bahraini authorities follow Saudi Arabia in this regard and strive to promote Iranophobia.

The British role in Indian policy against Muslims

→ **1** Britain seemed victorious in pursuing its policy, as after a while the conflicts between Hindus and Muslims increased to the point that India authorities were desperate to unite them.

It should be noted that the policy of causing disunity also affected Mahatma Gandhi. But how?

In 1921, Gandhi launched the civil disobedience movement. Based on the movement, any cooperation with the British government was forbidden, people should not go to courts and they should not join the army. The first group that joined Gandhi in this movement were the Indian Muslims. After some time the Hindus took part in the movement, everything was ready for a great unity that could help the Indian people to reach their goal, which was India's independence.

Following a strange event, Gandhi dropped the movement forever. Jawaharlal Nehru, one of India's great activist, said, "The order to stop the campaign at a time that seemed we had strengthened our positions and progressed in all aspects made us angry. After months of worry and anxiety, the government breathed a sigh of relief and took the initiative".

Ayatollah Khamenei analyzed the reason of cancelling the movement, saying, "Gandhi assumed that the national movement of India would soon be fruitful, and as Muslims had more prominent role in this public movement, they have a greater history of effort and promotion, after the victory, they would maintain their superiority... and this is not something a Hindu (though this person is Gandhi) can easily tolerate. Gandhi would have preferred India to continue to be a British colony, but the Muslims would not govern it".

This is what can be noticed from Gandhi's remarks as well, "if you dissect me, I will not be separated from my religion. I love Hinduism even more than my life".

It seems that Hindu Supremacism roots in Britain's policies and has continued to this day. Extremist Hindus today, with the help of the Hindu government, are trying to deprive Indian Muslims of citizenship under the CAA. The law that has been associated with the silence of human communities.

Indian Muslims are not "blonde" and "blue-eyed" so the widespread killing has not concerned any human communities, in other case killing 40 and wounding 200 people in one day (February 23, known as Black Sunday), would be a hot button issue for media outlets everywhere in the world.

Iraq condemns U.S. assault, summons Washington, London envoys

→ **1** The Pentagon had announced earlier on Friday that the strikes targeted five weapons stores used by Iraqi groups that "targeted US forces".

Iraqi resistance groups denied such accusations even though they supported fighting occupying US forces.

The attack came only a day after more than a dozen Iraqi fighters were killed in airstrikes targeting an area in Syria's Eastern province of Deir Ezzur.

The attacks are the most provocative since the US assassinated Iran's top anti-terrorism commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and Iraq's PMU commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in an airstrike at Baghdad airport in January.

Iraqi groups have pledged to take revenge for the assassination and ultimately drive out US troops from the country.

After the assassination, the Iraqi parliament voted to expel American troops, prompting President Donald Trump to threaten that the US would seize Iraq's oil money held in a bank account in New York if it was forced to withdraw.

China does not rule out U.S. role in coronavirus outbreak

PRESS TV — The Chinese Foreign Ministry has not ruled out the possibility that the United States was to blame for the spread of the new coronavirus in the Asian country.

Geng Shuang, the ministry spokesman, sidestepped questions on Friday about whether Beijing viewed Washington as responsible for the deadly virus outbreak in China, a day after another spokesman suggested the US army could have engineered it.

Speaking at a news conference in the Chinese capital, Geng refused to directly comment when asked whether his colleague Zhao Lijian's comments were consistent with Beijing's official stance on the virus.

"In fact, the international community, including people within the US, have different opinions about the origin of the virus," Geng told reporters at the presser.

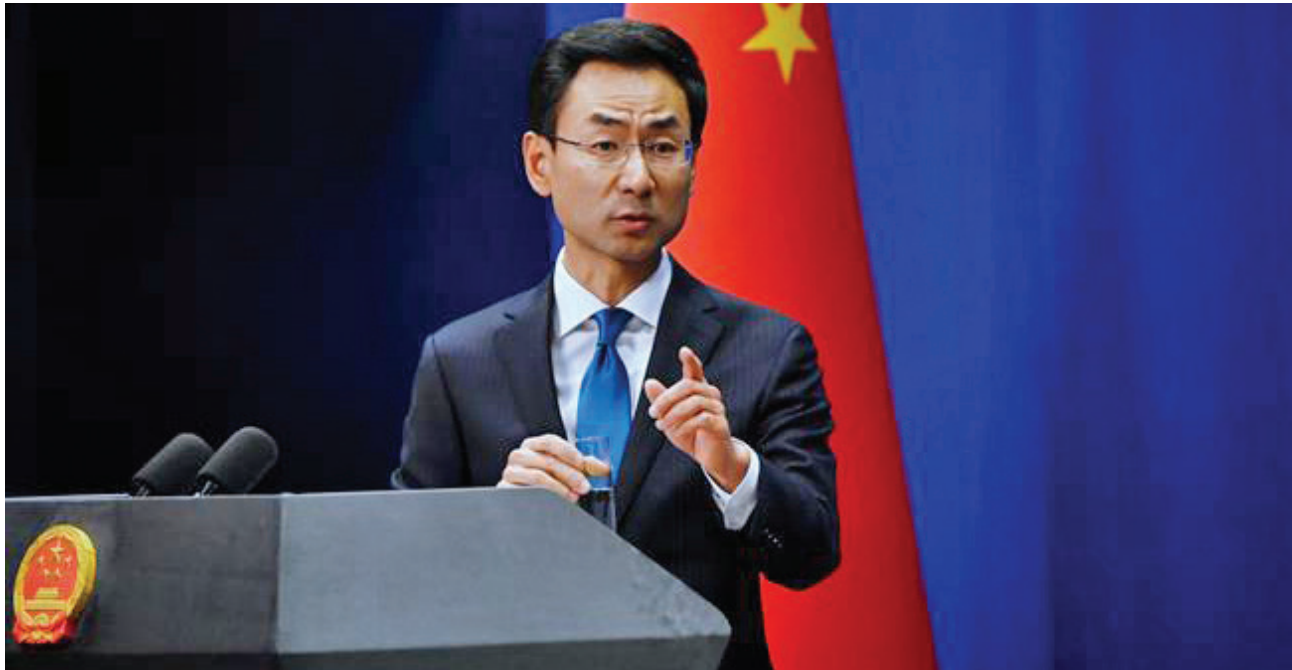
"As I have been saying for a few days, China has always seen this as a matter of science, and scientific and professional opinions must be heard."

Geng went on to say, "You're very interested to know if Zhao Lijian's views represent the views of the Chinese government."

"I believe that perhaps you would be better off first asking whether or not recent comments from a number of senior US officials attacking or smearing China represent the US government's position."

In a strongly-worded tweet, written in English, Zhao blasted the US on Thursday for what he called lack of transparency in official reports regarding the coronavirus outbreak in the US.

He suggested that the US military might



have brought the new coronavirus to the Chinese city of Wuhan, the birthplace of the current global pandemic.

"When did patient zero begin in US? How many people are infected? What are the names of the hospitals? It might be US army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan. Be transparent! Make public your data! US owe us an explanation!" Zhao wrote.

The Chinese government had been criticized by Western media and particularly by US officials for what was alleged to be a slow response to the outbreak and of not being sufficiently transparent.

Beijing has, however, been taking strict measures since the outbreak began, including locking down Wuhan, a city of roughly 11 million people, which appears to have paid off.

The COVID-19 disease, caused by the new coronavirus, emerged in the provincial capital of Hubei late last year and is currently affecting 131 countries and territories across the globe. It has so far infected over 137,000 people and killed more than 5,000 others.

The World Health Organization has declared the coronavirus outbreak a global pandemic.

Hamas slams U.S. for refusing to acknowledge Palestinian residents in East al-Quds

PRESS TV — The Palestinian Islamic resistance movement of Hamas has lambasted the US State Department's annual human rights report for referring to Palestinians living in the occupied East Jerusalem al-Quds as "Arab" and "non-Israeli residents," describing the labeling as yet "another crime committed by the US against Palestinian people."

Qasem further noted that all Israeli-US bids to change the identity of Jerusalem al-Quds city and its demographic population, and chip away at local residents' respect for holy sites there are doomed to failure.

Separately, Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad Maliki strongly criticized the US labeling of Palestinians in occupied Jerusalem al-Quds as "Arab residents," stating that Washington has adopted terminology used by the extremist right-wing government in Israel.

Maliki said on Thursday that adoption of such a term "disregards all international and United Nations reports issued by independent investigation and fact-finding committees — namely the findings of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, that Israel plus its occupation army and officials violate international law, commit war crimes, and target and kill Palestinian civilians deliberately."

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki gestures



during a press conference organized by the Geneva Association of United Nations Correspondents (ACANU) at the UN Office in Geneva, Switzerland, on February 26, 2020. (Photo by AFP)

The top Palestinian diplomat then strongly rejected the US labeling, stressing that "Palestinian people are the owners of this land for tens of thousands of years, and that they are rooted in it and continue to remain in their land

in historical Palestine, and therefore any attempt to label them as residents when they are the indigenous people of Palestine and Jerusalem is unacceptable."

The change in US terminology comes amid increased tensions over US President Donald Trump's announcement of the so-called deal of the century on the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict on January 28. The proposal was negotiated with Israel but without the Palestinians.

Palestinian leaders, who severed all ties with Washington in late 2017 after Trump controversially recognized Jerusalem al-Quds as the capital of the Israeli regime, immediately rejected the plan, with President Abbas saying it "belongs to the dustbin of history."

Thousands of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and besieged Gaza Strip poured onto the street in immediate condemnation of the plan.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has said "a thousand no's" to the plan.

He said the Palestinians remain committed to ending the Israeli occupation and establishing a state with its capital in east Jerusalem.

"We will not kneel and we will not surrender," Abbas said, adding that the Palestinians would resist the plan through "peaceful, popular means".

Israeli aerial attacks in Syria only escalate tensions in region: Top Russian official



PRESS TV — A senior Russian official has strongly condemned recurring Israeli airstrikes inside Syrian territory, emphasizing that such acts of aggression by the Tel Aviv regime only exacerbate tensions and destabilize the situation in the region.

She added, "The latest such attack was carried out by Israeli warplanes on March 5 from Lebanon's airspace. As a result, one Syrian soldier was killed and more than 10 were wounded." Syria's official news agency SANA, quoting an unnamed military source as saying, reported early on March 5 that Syrian air defenses had intercepted Israeli missiles over strategic Quneitra province in the country's southwest.

"At 00:30 on Thursday (2230 GMT Wednesday) our air defense monitored Israeli warplanes coming from northern occupied Palestine toward Saida, and several missiles were fired from Lebanese airspace toward the central area," the source added. The missiles were intercepted successfully, he pointed out.

The following day, Lebanon condemned incessant Israeli violations of its airspace, and filed a complaint at the UN Security Council over serious and numerous breaches of the Lebanese sovereignty and UNSC Resolution 1701.

Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants Nassif Hitti discussed the latest developments in southern Lebanon as well as Beirut's commitment to the resolution during a meeting with the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Jan Kubitsch, on March 6.

Hitti then expressed his great resentment over violation of Lebanon's airspace by the Israeli regime.

Israel violates Lebanon's airspace on an almost daily basis, claiming the flights serve surveillance purposes.

Lebanon's government, the Hezbollah resistance movement and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) have repeatedly condemned the overflights, saying they are in clear violation of UN Resolution 1701 and the country's sovereignty.

UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which brokered a ceasefire in the war of aggression Israel launched against Lebanon in 2006, calls on Tel Aviv to respect Beirut's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

In 2009, Lebanon filed a complaint with the United Nations, presenting over 7,000 documents pertaining to Israeli violations of Lebanese territory.

Iraqi MP: U.S. using Iraqi airspace to threaten neighboring countries



TEHRAN (FNA) — A senior Iraqi lawmaker criticized the destructive role of the US in using Iraq's airspace, and called on the Baghdad government to prevent Washington's threatening move.

"The US has completely taken control of Iraq's airspace due to the silence of the Iraqi government," Member of Iraqi Parliament's Security and Defense Commission Badr al-Zobadi told the Arabic-language al-Maloumeh news website.

Al-Zobadi called on Baghdad to seriously deal with Washington's breaching Iraq's law, and said that most of the American fighter jets are used for posing threat to Iraq's neighbors.

The Iraqi legislator pointed out that tens of US drones take off from Iraq anytime they want while the Iraqi government does not take a resolute stance in this regard.

In a relevant development on Thursday, warplanes struck an area in Eastern Syria near the Iraqi border, killing at least 18 members of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), hours after

a rocket attack against US-led coalition forces in Iraq reportedly left three members of the coalition dead.

Syrian media said unidentified jets hit targets Southeast of the Syrian town of al-Bukamal along the border with Iraq in the early hours of Thursday morning.

Reports said at least 18 Iraqi popular forces were killed in the border area in Eastern Syria.

Meanwhile, multiple reports by local media said that an area in Iraq's Anbar province, on the border with Syria, also came under attack by unidentified warplanes.

The attacks came shortly after the US-led coalition confirmed three of its personnel - two Americans and one Briton - had been killed in a rocket attack on the Taji military camp in Iraq.

Several sources reported that the strikes on the Syrian and Iraqi territory were launched by the US in retaliation for the attack on the Iraqi base, and targeted the positions of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units in Anbar, RT reported.

Iran football federation's elections deferred

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — The Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) elective General Assembly was postponed.

FIFA had already ordered FFIRI to postpone the elections until the national governing body amends its current statutes.

World football's governing body had sent a letter to the Iranian federation on Feb. 24, stressing that the event should be delayed.

The elections were scheduled for March 15 (Sunday).

The FFIRI provided some documents and appealed to FIFA so that the General Assembly could be held as planned.

The documents were not enough and FIFA asked FFIRI officials once again to revise the statutes before holding the elections.

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

On Monday, Iran's Minister of Sport and Youth Masoud Soltanifar had expressed hope that FIFA would agree with FFIRI elections to be held on the scheduled time because the country faces a national emergency due to coronavirus outbreak.

In January, Soltanifar had a meeting with FIFA President Gianni Infantino in the Swiss city of Lausanne during the Winter Youth Olympic Games.

Heydar Baharvand is currently the FFIRI Acting President.

Since the middle of last month, at least 400 people have died and 10,000 have been infected across the nation.

With this in mind, Soltanifar believes FIFA should reconsider its stance.

«We are facing an emergency, a national emergency,» Soltanifar said.



Iran's Keikha into FIG World Cup final

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Saeedreza Keikha from Iran qualified for the final of the pommel horse at the FIG Artistic Gymnastics Apparatus World Cup - AGF Trophy 2020 on Friday.

The Iranian gymnast finished in third place with 14,500 points behind China and Japan gymnasts.

On the second day, there were qualifying competitions for men in vault, pommel horse and horizontal bar exercises. Women competed to reach the finals in floor and balance beam exercises.

The FIG Artistic Gymnastics Apparatus World Cup -

AGF Trophy 2020 is being held at the National Gymnastics Arena in Baku from March 12 through March 15. This World Cup also qualifies for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.

According to the list of applications, 158 athletes from 42 countries are taking part in the World Cup.

There are qualifications on the first two days of four-day competitions, while the finals will take place on the next two days.

In the tournament, the traditional «AGF Trophy» will be presented to the gymnasts who get the highest execution score.

Japan says Olympics on track as Abe and Trump talk on coronavirus

TOKYO (Reuters) — Japan on Friday said it was determined to hold a «safe and secure» Tokyo Olympics on schedule, after U.S. President Donald Trump suggested a one year delay because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Lawmakers later granted Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe emergency powers to close schools and halt large gatherings. His economy minister also pledged «bold and unprecedented steps» to lessen economic fallout as financial market panic pushed the Nikkei .n225 stock market benchmark 6.1 percent lower.

Abe and Trump talked by phone for about 50 minutes Friday morning, agreeing to «strengthen cooperation» on fighting the novel coronavirus, but did not discuss postponing the Olympics or holding them without spectators, Japanese officials said.

After the call, Trump tweeted that he told Abe «that the just completed Olympic venue is magnificent. He has done an incredible job, one that will make him very proud. Good things will happen for Japan and their great



Prime Minister. Lots of options!»

On Thursday, Trump told reporters in the White House that he «just can't see having no people there,» referring to the Tokyo Games. «I think if you cancel it, make it a year later that's a better alternative than doing it with no crowd.»

In response, Japan Olympic minister Seiko Hashimoto told reporters, «the IOC and 2020 organizers are not at all considering cancelling or postponing the Games. I've

heard they are proceeding with preparations for safe and secure Games as planned toward the opening day of July 24.»

The IOC stands for the International Olympic Committee.

There were 1,387 confirmed infections in Japan, including 697 from a cruise ship that was docked in the port city of Yokohama for several weeks, according to public broadcaster NHK. By Friday morning, the virus had killed 26 in the country, including 7 from the ship, the tally showed.

Japan has sought to quash speculation that the games, which have cost it at least \$12 billion in preparations and attracted more than \$3 billion in domestic sponsorships, could be canceled or postponed as the number of people infected has reached 127,000 worldwide.

The outbreak has already crippled global travel and hit Olympic qualifiers and other sports events. Japan has shuttered schools. Public health officials have discouraged large gatherings to curtail the spread of the highly

contagious disease, and major soccer tournaments, National Basketball Association games and other sports have been halted.

The Tokyo 2020 organizing committee said it was monitoring the pandemic with the IOC, receiving advice from the World Health Organization, and coordinating with the government and the Tokyo authorities.

Japan's government and the central bank shared a «strong sense of concern» over how the virus could affect the games. A sponsor representative said the plans were confidential and were not being shared with the companies.

Tokyo 2020 chief Yoshiro Mori vehemently denied the games would be canceled, but added at news conference in the wake of Takahashi's comments, «I am not saying there won't be any impact. I think there will be. On that, specialists in each field are looking into what to do.» On Thursday, the prelude to the games got underway with the lighting of the Olympic Torch in a scaled-down ceremony behind closed doors.

Coronavirus: Australian Grand Prix called off

The Australian Grand Prix has been called off after teams and drivers forced the hand of Formula 1's bosses.

A decision to cancel the race was made in the early hours of Friday morning after a McLaren team member tested positive for the coronavirus in Melbourne.

The race's abandonment was not made official for another eight hours.

By that time Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel and Alfa Romeo's Kimi Raikkonen had flown home.

And McLaren said later on Friday that 14 further team members had been placed in quarantine in their hotel for the next 14 days because of their close contact with the infected employee.

The decision throws into doubt the rest of the F1 season, with the Bahrain Grand Prix due to take place next weekend without spectators the next race to come under scrutiny.

BBC Sport understands Ferrari were the first team to make it clear they were not prepared to race in Melbourne in the circumstances.

Confirmation of the abandonment in from the FIA and F1 came after Mercedes sent a letter requesting the cancellation of the race.

Mercedes said: «We share the disappointment of the sport's fans that this race cannot go ahead as planned. However, the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our team members and of the wider F1 community are our absolute priority.

«In light of the force majeure events we are experiencing with regards to the coronavirus pandemic, we no longer feel the safety of our employees can be guaranteed if we continue to take part in the event.

«If organizers try to press ahead with the weekend it appears at this stage as if not all the teams will take part.»

The statement cancelling the race said a majority of teams suggested overnight they felt the race should not go ahead.

Events developed rapidly following McLaren's decision to pull out of the race after their team member's positive coronavirus test.

On Friday morning, with a statement cancelling the race still not forthcoming, Australian GP organizers initially told



local media the race was going ahead as planned.

But Victoria state premier Daniel Andrews then announced if the race went ahead it would be without spectators.

Legal complications delayed the announcement of the cancellation but the farcical situation will be seen by many to have damaged the reputations of both the F1 and the FIA.

World champion Lewis Hamilton said on Thursday at the official F1 news conference he was «very, very surprised» the sport was pressing on with plans to continue with the race while the outbreak of the virus worsened and other sports suspended or cancelled events.

An initial meeting of team bosses with F1 and FIA officials on Thursday night, after a tense day in the paddock at Albert Park, broke up with an agreement to carry on with Friday practice as normal and review the situation later that day.

But the plans changed later in the evening as several insiders - including leading drivers - expressed their concerns about the idea of racing amid the risk of further cases of coronavirus in the tight-knit F1 paddock.

The decision was reviewed at later meetings and eventually, at around 0200 Friday local time (1500 GMT on Thursday), the decision was made to call the race off.

Iran candidate to become Best National Team in the World

Iran's senior men's futsal team have been candidate to become the Best National Team in the World.

According to the Futsal Planet website, Iran will vie with nine other teams to win the one of the most traditional prizes of futsal.

Best National Team in the World

Nominees

(In strict alphabetical order!)

Brazil, Brazil Women, Iran, Japan Under 20, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Spain Under 19, Spain Women, Thailand

Dragan Skocic leaves Iran

TASNIM — Iran national football team head coach Dragan Skocic left Tehran on Wednesday following the cancellation of Team Melli's training camp.

FIFA and AFC have postponed upcoming Asian qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 in mid-March due to coronavirus concerns.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has caused sports events to be suspended or postponed in Asia and Europe, including both domestic and international events.

The Team Melli's training camp was due to be held starting from March 18 in Tehran but Skocic left Tehran after the cancellation of the camp.

Mohammadi nominated for Best Goalkeeper in the World

Iran national futsal team player Sepehr Mohammadi of Iran has been nominated to win the Best Goalkeeper in the World.

According to the Futsal Planet website, Mohammadi will compete with the nine other goalkeepers to win the award.

Gelareh Nazemi (referee), Sara Shirbeigi (woman futsal player) and Farzaneh Tavasoli (woman futsal goalkeeper) have been already nominated to win the award in their own categories.

Nominees

(In strict alphabetical order!)

*Miodrag Aksentijevic (SRB)

*MFK Tyumen (RUS) - ACCS Futsal Club (FRA) - SERBIA N.T.

*Carlos Barrón Redondo (ESP)

Palma Futsal (ESP) - SPAIN N.T.

*Djony Mendes (BRA)

Pato Futsal (BRA)

*Lucas Hernan Farach (ARG)

Club Atlético Boca Juniors (ARG) - ARGENTINA N.T.

*Thiago Mendes Rocha «Guitta» (BRA)

Sporting Clube de Portugal (POR) - BRAZIL N.T.

*Leonardo De Melo Vieira Leite «Higuita» (BRA/KAZ)

Kairat Almaty (KAZ) - KAZAKHSTAN N.T.

*Juan José Angosto Hernández «Juanjo» (ESP)

Barca (ESP) - SPAIN N.T.

*Stefano Mammarella (ITA)

Acqua e Sapone Unigross (ITA) - ITALY N.T.

*Sepehr Mohammadi Kamalabadi (IRN)

Giti Pasand Isfahan FSC (IRN) - Gazprom Ugra (RUS) - IRAN N.T.

*Yushi Sekiguchi (JPN)

Nagoya Oceans (JPN) - JAPAN N.T.

(Source: Futsal Planet)

Reza Asadi linked with Buriram United

TASNIM — Tractor football team player Reza Asadi has been linked with a move to Buriram United FC of Thailand.

Media reports suggest that the 24-year-old defensive midfielder has received a USD 1 million offer to join the Thailand's top-flight football team.

The Iranian tractor has reportedly rejected the transfer.

Asadi, who started his playing career in Sepahan in 2015, has also played in Iranian clubs Naft and Saipa.

«I've received Buriram's offer but I want to stay in Tractor. To be honest, I have received offers from overseas clubs but I am concentrating on my current team,» Asadi said.



EFL suspends all Championship, League 1 and League 2 games over coronavirus

The EFL have agreed to suspend all matches until at least 3 April in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

The board were unanimous in their decision which will see two full rounds of fixtures postponed across the Championship, League One and League Two at the minimum.

The Premier League have agreed to the same meaning all elite football in England will be postponed until at least the first week of April with the likelihood of a longer hiatus.

A statement read: «The FA, Premier League, EFL and FA Women's Super League and FA Women's Championship have collectively agreed to postpone the professional game in England until 3 April at the earliest.

«This action, which will be kept under constant review, has been taken due to the increasing numbers of clubs taking steps to isolate their players and staff because of the Covid-19 virus.»

As things stand the first game back will be Blackburn Rovers vs Leeds on Friday 3 April, although the situation remains very much in flux.

(Source: Independent)

(Source: BBC)

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■ Managing Director: Mohammad Shojaeian
■ Editor-in-Chief: Mohammad Ghaderi

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
editor@tehrantimes.com
» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000
» Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051450
» Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807
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No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran
P.O. Box: 14155-4843
Zip Code: 1599814713



GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

The envy of a friend is a sign of the weakness of his friendship.

Imam Ali (AS)

Iranian films win awards at India's Third Eye festival

A R T TEHRAN — "I'm Not My Body", a co-production between Iran and the UK by Iranian director Nima Akbarpur, was named best short at the 18th Third Eye Asian Film Festival in Mumbai, India last week.



A scene from "I'm Not My Body" by Iranian director Nima Akbarpur

The film tells the story of an immigrant Iranian news anchor, who works for a Persian TV channel in the UK. His personal pictures go viral on social media and he tries to remove them.

"Cover" by Iranian director Vahid Alvandifar shared third prize in this section with "Written By?" by Kankana Chakraborty from Bangladesh.

"Cover" is about two workers who are carrying the body of their dead colleague, Ahmad, to his home when he unexpectedly returns from the dead. As the three men drive through the mountainous roads to get home, Ahmad does everything in his power to escape his past life.

WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES

Note: The following art exhibitions are being organized online in order to prevent the spread of novel coronavirus.

Multimedia



■ Vista Gallery is hosting an exhibition of paintings, photos and sculptures by a large number of artists, including Gandom Amiri, Azin Rostami, Sormeh Arab, Behnam Kamrani, Babak Kazemi, Sheida Gorji and Ahmad Morshedlu.

Entitled "From the Spring's Frame", the exhibition will run until April 10.



■ A collection of 80 artworks by a group of artists, including Yazdan Sadi, Reza Afsari, Reza Alizadeh, Saba Salehi, Sara Keshmiri, Mina Sabzi and Farshid Lotfi, is on display in an exhibition on Shamideh Gallery's Instagram page @shamidehgallery.

The exhibit named "Kado Art" will run until April 10.



■ Calligraphy works and paintings by several artists are on display on Negar Gallery's Instagram page @negaronline_artgallery.

The exhibition will be running until March 20.



■ White Line Gallery is showcasing a collection of paintings, drawings and sculptures by several artists, including Farnaz Akhlagi, Sadeq Adham, Farah Osuli, Alaleh Amini, Pegah Jamali and several other artists during an online exhibition. The exhibition will run until April 6 on the gallery's webpage whiteline.onlineartgallery.ir.

Sony Pictures postpones "Peter Rabbit 2" to August from March due to movie market disruption

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Sony Pictures on Tuesday said it was postponing the release of movie "Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway" to August from March, citing disruptions in movie markets.

The decision followed the announcement last week that the new James Bond movie "No Time to Die" would be postponed to November from its previously scheduled April release because of disruptions to movie-going in China and other parts of Asia due to the coronavirus.

Iran's coronavirus cartoon contest receives submissions from over 40 countries

A R T TEHRAN
d e s k

— Iran's We Defeat Coronavirus International Cartoon Contest has so far received submissions from 46 countries, the director of the Art Bureau's Visual Arts Office, Masud Shojaei-Tabatabai, has said.

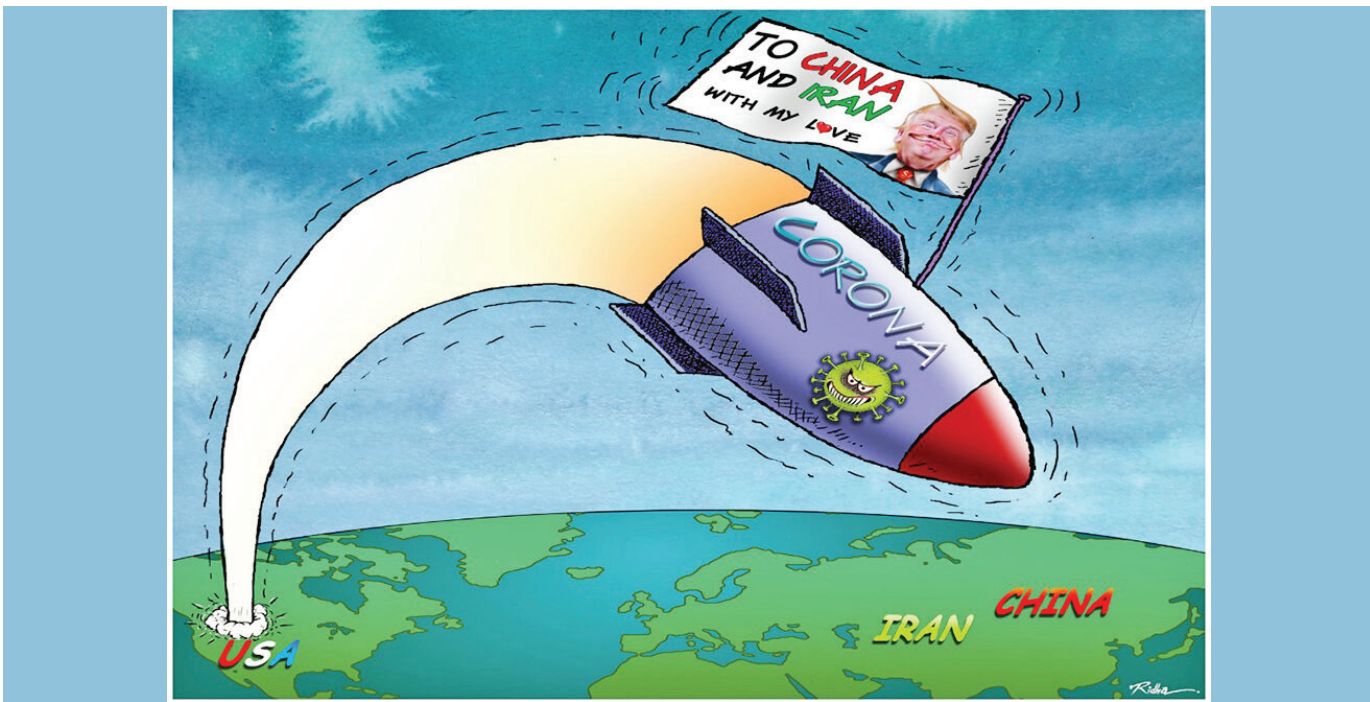
Chinese artists with 32 cartoons have warmly received the competition, and dozens of cartoons have also come from India, Poland, Serbia and Ukraine, he added.

Ridha from Germany, Toso Borokovic from Serbia and Paolo Dalponte from Italy are among the artists competing in the contest.

He said that a selection of submissions will be put on display on irancartoon.ir, a major Iranian website for cartoon news.

Interested applicants are asked to submit their works to the Art Bureau before March 30.

The contest has been launched by Iran's Art Bureau in collaboration with the Health Ministry.



A cartoon by Iraqi-German artist Ridha is competing in the We Defeat Coronavirus International Cartoon Contest in Iran.

IIDCYA to screen "Harmonica" online for children quarantined due to coronavirus



A scene from director Amir Naderi's 1974 drama "Harmonica".

CULTURE TEHRAN — New York-based Iranian filmmaker Amir Naderi's 1974 movie "Harmonica" will be available on the web portal of Iran's Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) today to entertain children who have been kept in quarantine at their homes over the past three weeks due to the new coronavirus epidemic in the country.

The film is set on the sun-drenched southern coast of Iran. It is about a young boy who receives a musical present from abroad. Fascinated and envious, his friends make him to the leader of the pack, as they compete for the privilege of holding the harmonica or even blowing

a few notes. No one is more obsessed than Amiru, gentle and heavy-set, who seems willing to do anything to get close to the harmonica and its owner.

Following the closure of Iranian schools in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak in the country, the IIDCYA has been screening a lineup of its productions online.

"A Non-Profit Police Station" by Yadollah Samadi and "Hamun and the Sea" and "The Water Urn", both by Ebrahim Foruzesh are among the films screened by the IIDCYA.

Each film will be available for 24 hours on omid.kpf.ir, free of charges.

The institute has also offered some of its books and audiobooks on the website.



A scene from the comedy "Paytakht 6" by Sirus Moqaddam.

IRIB to air four comedy series during Noruz holiday

A R T TEHRAN
d e s k

— Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) will air four comedy

TV series during the Noruz holiday beginning on March 20. The sixth season of the popular TV series "Paytakht" by director Sirus Moqaddam will be aired on Channel 1 every night.

The TV comedy drama "Paytakht" began with Naqi Mamuli and his family from Aliabad that faced problems following their migration to Tehran.

"Paytakht 6" begins with the death of Naqi's father, Baba Panjali, and continues with the return of his sister's husband

Behbud Fariba from Africa.

"Truck" by Masud Atyabai is a comedy to be aired on channel 2. It centers on a veteran footballer who is working as a truck driver. He visits three university students who have a problem with their landlord when they are not able to afford the rent on their own.

Channel 3 will show "Doping" by Reza Maqsudi. The comedy centers on two separate individuals.

"Shortcut" by Yazdan Fotuhi will also be aired on channel 5. The series is about clashes among several families living in a building.

Short stories on animals from world literature published in Persian



A copy of "The Red Cat, the Black Cat", a collection of short stories on animals and human-animal relationships from world literature translated into Persian by Asadollah Amrai.

CULTURE TEHRAN — A collection of short stories focusing on animals and human-animal relationships by writers from around the world has been published in Persian in a book entitled "The Red Cat, the Black Cat".

Published by Gooya, the collection, which includes 24 stories, has been rendered into Persian by eminent Iranian translator Asadollah Amrai.

The book carries stories about people who don't let animals enter their homes or treat them violently, Amrai wrote in a preface to the collection.

This is the first time a collection is published with stories about animals and human-animal relationships in

Persian, he said.

American writer Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat" and German writer Luise Rinser's "The Red Cat" are among the stories.

The collection also has "The Rooster" by Italian writer Massimo Bontempelli, "The Lion" by German author Christoph Meckel, "The Elephant" by Polish writer Slawomir Mrozek and "Papa's Parrot" by American writer Cynthia Rylant.

Stories by French author Guy de Maupassant, German-American writer Ursula Hegi, Italian author Dino Buzzati-Traverso, and American writers Spencer Holst, Erskine Preston Caldwell, Michael Delp and Arthur Miller have been selected for the book.

Tom Hanks, wife Rita Wilson test positive for coronavirus in Australia

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Oscar-winning actor Tom Hanks and his wife, actress Rita Wilson, have both tested positive for coronavirus in Australia, the actor said on Twitter.

Hanks said that he and Wilson, both 63, were tested in Australia, where he is working on a film, after they felt tired and achy with slight fevers.

"To play things right, as is needed in the world right now, we were tested for the coronavirus and were found to be positive," Hanks said in the tweet.

The film star said that he and Wilson would be "tested, observed and isolated" for as long as required.

The couple are the first major U.S. celebrities known to have contracted COVID-19. The coronavirus has infected more than 1,000 people in the United States.

"Not much more to it than a one-day-at-a-time approach, no? We'll keep the world posted and updated," Hanks tweeted.

Hanks had traveled to Australia to begin filming an upcoming movie about Elvis Presley. He is set to play Presley's manager, Colonel Tom Parker, in the Warner Bros. production.

"We have been made aware that a company member from our Elvis feature film, which is currently in pre-production in The Gold Coast, Australia, has tested positive for COVID-19," Warner Bros said in a statement.

"We are working closely with the appropriate Australian health agencies to identify and contact anyone who may



26th Screen Actors Guild Awards - Arrivals - Los Angeles, California, U.S., January 19, 2020 - Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson. (Reuters/Monica Almeida/File Photo)

have come in direct contact with the individual.

"The health and safety of our company members is always our top priority, and we are taking precautions to protect everyone who works on our productions around the world," the studio said.

The Warner Bros statement did not mention Hanks.

The actor is staying on the Gold Coast, east coast of

Australia, which has one of the country's main Hollywood studios and where filming was to take place.

"The Elvis biopic filming has been closed down. I understand it will be 14 days quarantine and testing and ... our heart goes out to Tom and his wife," Tom Tate, mayor of the Gold Coast, said in a press conference.

The couple's son Chet took to Instagram to say he had spoken with his parents on the phone and that both were fine and there was no cause for major concern.

"Yeah, it's true, my parents got coronavirus. Crazy," he said in a video message. "They're not even that sick. They're not worried about it, they're not trippin but they're going through the necessary health precautions obviously."

Wilson appeared on Monday on a chat show of free-to-air broadcaster Nine Entertainment Co Holdings Ltd. The network said employees who had been in contact with her would be tested for the coronavirus and quarantined for 14 days.

Hanks won best actor Academy Awards for his role in 1994's "Philadelphia" in which he plays a man stricken with AIDS, and "Forrest Gump" the following year. Wilson has appeared in such films as "Sleepless in Seattle" and "Runaway Bride".

The coronavirus has infected more than 121,000 people in 118 countries while over 4,300 people have died due to the virus, a Reuters tally shows. In the United States at least 37 people have died from the respiratory illness.