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## Screening shows %97 have no coronavirus symptoms



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## Iran unveils its first 6-speed manual gearbox

**TEHRAN** — Iran’s top automaker, Iran Khodro Company (IKCO), has unveiled the country’s first domestically designed six-speed manual gearbox, IRIB reported.

The gearbox was unveiled during a ceremony on Saturday with Iran’s deputy industry, mining, and trade minister for industry affairs and IKCO

Managing Director Farshad Moqimi in attendance.

According to Moqimi, the technology for building the mentioned gearbox has been fully indigenized and the gearbox will be mass-produced within the second half of the next Iranian calendar year (March 20-September 21, 2020). **→4**

## WHO says Iran’s strategies to control COVID-19 ‘in right direction’

A team of experts from the World Health Organization (WHO), GOARN partners, Robert Koch Institute in Berlin and the Chinese Center for Disease Control concluded a technical support mission on COVID-19 to Iran on March 10, 2020.

“After five days of extensive meetings and field visits, we see that Iran’s strategies and priorities to control COVID-19 are evolving in the right direction, a comprehensive coordinated approach is being applied, and solid work is being done especially in the areas of case management, laboratories, and risk communications. We are also impressed by the engagement from other sectors of the community.

Health officials and health workers are clearly working very hard, and are committed to controlling this outbreak and saving lives. **→9**

## Swiss ambassador summoned over Trump’s claim

**TEHRAN** — Iran’s Foreign Ministry has summoned the ambassador of Switzerland, whose country represents the United States’ interests in Iran, to protest Donald Trump’s unfounded claim that Iran was behind a recent attack on U.S. forces in Iraq.

“Following the U.S. president’s unfounded claim that Iran was responsible for the attack against a base of coalition forces in Iraq, the Swiss ambassador to Tehran was summoned to the Foreign Ministry,” Foreign Ministry spokesman

Abbas Mousavi said on Saturday.

He added that the Swiss ambassador was summoned on Friday, when he was notified of Iran’s strong protest to the U.S. president’s claims.

Mousavi said the Swiss ambassador was informed that the U.S. president, instead of accusing others, should accept that the U.S. wrong policies, its illegal presence in Iraq and its killing of Iraqi commanders and soldiers are the real reasons behind the Iraqi people’s hatred toward the United States. **→2**



### PERSPECTIVE

**Azadeh Abbaszadeh**  
Director of “Down Syndrome”  
cellular-molecular research  
center of Iran

**How many chromosomes should human beings have to be considered humans by UN!?**

Let’s just think about the difference between 47 and 46. Is your answer 1? You’re wrong, because the answer may sometimes be something other than 1. If you consider the difference between a 47-chromosome fetus with Down syndrome and a 46-chromosome fetus, the answer will not be 1; the correct answer will be an extra chromosome + an end.

During prenatal screening tests, if a fetus is diagnosed with Down syndrome, his/her chance of living on planet Earth is pretty slim. Fetuses with Down syndrome are usually aborted. In other words, they are killed.

Prenatal screening tests can determine the likelihood of having a fetus with Down syndrome and, based on their results and data, only those fetuses who are considered healthy are permitted to live and other fetuses who are considered as defective ones are usually aborted.

Now, the million-dollar questions are: To what extent do prenatal screening tests, which can assess the probability of having a fetus with Down syndrome, affect humans’ quality of life in the world? Can these screening tests tell us how much a fetus will not be afraid of telling the truth in the future? Can they tell us how well a fetus can have acceptable behavior in the future? Can such screening tests be 100% accurate in determining what kind of fetuses will not murder others, steal things, or cause corruption on planet Earth? Which of these screening tests can tell us how the quality of life of these fetuses, who are human beings, will be like or what kind of fetuses will live in a way that they will never disgrace human dignity? Can these prenatal screening tests indicate how the fetuses that are considered defective by carrying out these tests and based on their results would live and how they would influence other people’s lives and can they compare these fetuses’ impacts on the world around them with the influences of fetuses that are described as healthy fetuses who are regarded worthy of life in the future? **→7**

## ‘Russia, Iran, Venezuela can team up to confront U.S., SA triggered oil price war’

**By Zahra Mirzafarjouyan**

**TEHRAN (MNA)** — Mehmet Ogutcu, Chairman of London Energy Club believes that while the USA, Saudi Arabia, and the Persian Gulf countries can work together in the coming period to influence the markets, Russia can team up with important OPEC producers such as Iran and Venezuela and assume the leadership of non-OPEC producers.

While the spread of Coronavirus outbreak worldwide has already had a profound effect on the world economy and has led to a recession in many countries, Saudi Arabia has increased its oil production in an unprecedented way, following a dispute with Russia which has led to a sharp drop in oil prices.

To know more about the Coronavirus impact on the global economy and Saudi Arabia’s decision on the world economy and even on the political fate of the Saudi crown prince Bin Salman, we reached out to Mehmet Ogutcu, Chairman of London Energy Club.

Following is the text of our interview with him:

■ How do you see the effect of the coronavirus outbreak on the global economy?  
A: In this oil price and market share battle, the trigger has been pulled - it will most likely result in the further erosion in world energy of the fossil fuels’ share, including oil. This process already started with the rise of renewables and electric cars but now it will quicken the pace.

In my view, the Third World War has already

begun. New wars are no longer fought on the battlefield, with cannon, missile and fighter planes. Conventional wars have been replaced by asymmetrical, hybrid and proxy wars. We are experiencing artificial intelligence and technology wars. The trade wars, launched by Trump against the EU and China by his “America first” strategy, are still with us. Will the dollar continue to be an international reserve currency? Or will the ruble, renminbi, and euro be equally effective? How will cryptocurrencies progress? This is the currency war on the move. It is not prophetic to say that biological wars, water and food wars, and inter-civilization conflicts, as predicted by Huntington, will also intensify in the coming decades. **→7**

## Reducing oil price would benefit Russia to influence U.S. oil export: energy expert

**By Payman Yazdani**

**TEHRAN (MNA)** — Omid Shokri believes that Russia’s disagreement with cuts in OPEC Plus production could be a good opportunity for Moscow to influence US oil exports.

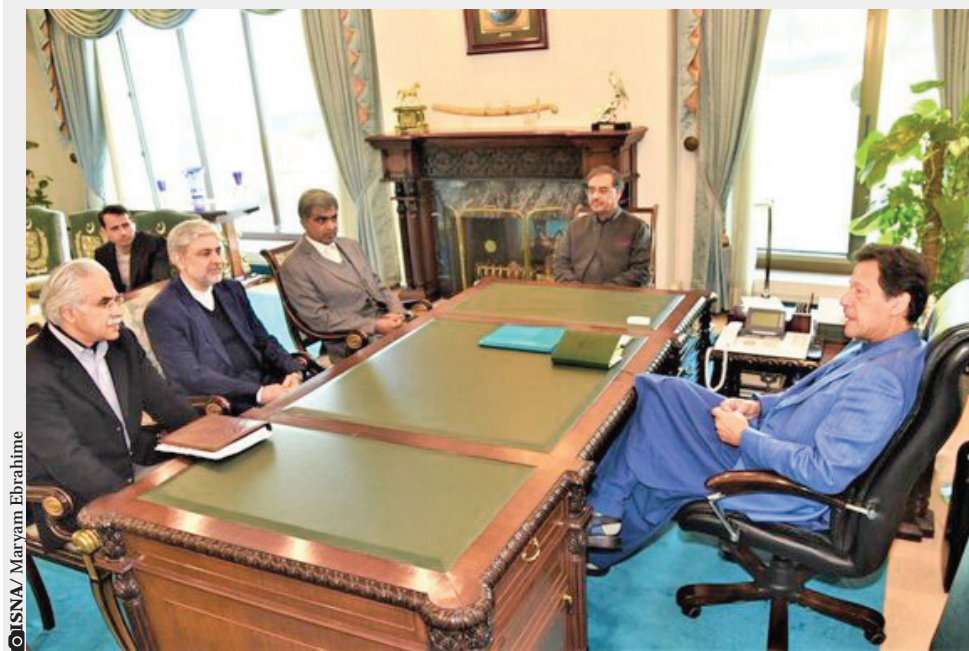
While the spread of Coronavirus outbreak worldwide has already had a profound effect on the world economy and has led to a recession in many countries, Saudi Arabia has increased its oil production in an unprecedented way, following a dispute with Russia which has led to a sharp drop in oil prices.

To know more about the Coronavirus impact on the global economy and Saudi Arabia’s decision on the world economy and even on the political fate of the Saudi crown prince Bin Salman, we reached out to Dr. Omid Shokri.

■ How do you see the effect of the Coronavirus outbreak on the global economy?

A: The spread of the coronavirus since early January has been one of China’s biggest socio-economic and security challenges. Most countries in the world have taken special measures to combat the spread of the virus and have evacuated their citizens from China. Some major companies in the world, including Apple, have closed their factories in China. Economic experts report that one reason for the decline in demand is the reduction of air transit. Based on the assumption that domestic and international air transport in China has always had a serious impact on China’s economy, there can be a direct correlation between the decline in air travel and transfers and China’s economic-trade indices.

In addition to being a major consumer of energy, China is also one of the largest exporters of industrial products. Any interruption in the production of industrial plants in the country will make exporting a major challenge. Any crisis in the country, if not managed and controlled effectively by the government, will have a negative impact on the country’s economic growth in the short and medium-term. Economic experts report that one reason for the decline in demand is the reduction of air transit. Based on the assumption that domestic and international air transport in China has always had a serious impact on China’s economy, there can be a direct correlation between the decline in air travel and transfers and China’s economic-trade indices. **→7**



©ISNA/Maryam Ebrahime

## Imran Khan meets Iranian ambassador

**TEHRAN** — Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan met with Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Mohammad Ali Hosseini on Friday.

Khan said Pakistan attaches great importance to expansion of relations and cooperation with Iran.

Noting that it is essential to remove impediments to development of ties, Prime Minister Khan said Islamabad is committed to strengthen relations and cooperation with Iran in various areas.

He also praised Iran’s stance on the Kashmir issue.

Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since their partition and independence from Britain in 1947. The disputed region is claimed in full by both sides, which have fought three wars over it. **→3**



### ARTICLE

**Bahman Vakhshour**  
Tehran Times journalist

## “Khorasaniyat”, new year gift from two legends

Khorasaniyat is a recently released work by two Iranian music legends, singer Mohammadreza Shajarian and the late composer Parviz Meshkatieh.

The work with Khorasan’s folklore and maqami atmosphere has been created with lyrics by Baba Taher Oryan and Malek osh-Shoara Bahar. It was recorded in 1987 and has presented to Iranian music lovers after about 33 years.

The album was performed by Aref Ensemble featuring Meshkatieh on santur, Mansour Sinki on tar and bamtar, Jamshid Andalibi on ney, Mohammad Firuzi on oud, Ardeshtir Kamkar on kamancheh and qaychak, Bijan Kamkar on rubab and Arjang Kamkar on tombak.

“Khorasaniyat” may be regarded as one the most special and distinct collection by Aref Ensemble, as Shajarian and Meshkatieh both are from the Khorasan region. On the other hand, the poems, which are selected among the works of two great Khorasani poets, were sung with Khorasani dialect to create a different and unique feeling.

Why the album was not released the same year is not very important issue. The notable point is that after over three decades, the work is considered a valuable and magnificent new year gift to all Iranian music lovers, even at a time that Meshkatieh has passed away years ago and master Shajarian is on his sickbed.

The album consists of 8 tracks based on the dastgahs, which in first part raast-panjgah and Rock and in the second part shur and dashti are performed. **→12**

### condolences

Dear Farshad Mahdipour,  
Director of the Sobeh-No  
newspaper,

We were greatly saddened to hear about the death of your father. May his soul rest in peace.

Tehran Times management and staff

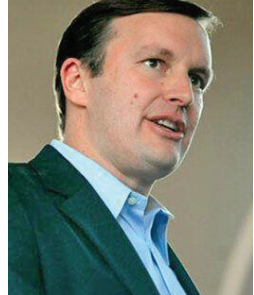


## Trump's policy has made Iran stronger and U.S. weaker: senator

**POLITICAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — U.S. Senator Chris Murphy has said that U.S. President Donald Trump's policy has made Iran stronger and the United States weaker.

"Trump's Iran policy has done nothing but make them stronger and America weaker," he tweeted on Friday. He also noted, "Time to change course."

In another tweet, Murphy said that strike on Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani "was supposed to restore deterrence against Iran", adding, "It didn't."



"The idea that killings another Iranian general will end the escalation is contradicted by the facts," he added in his tweet.

On January 3, U.S. President Donald Trump ordered airstrikes that martyred General Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), in Baghdad's international airport.

In the early hours of January 8, the IRGC fired dozens of ballistic missiles at a military airbase hosting U.S. forces in Iraq as part of its promised "tough revenge" for the U.S. terrorist attack.

In an interview with NBC News on February 14, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Trump was misled to believe his country would get away with the assassination of Soleimani.

Trump believed that the assassination would augment U.S. security but it worked the other way around, Zarif said.

"Iran responded in a proportionate way against the base from which the operations against Soleimani were carried out," said Zarif.

He explained that Iran's retaliatory attack was intended to show to the United States that they cannot bully Iran and that actions against Iran will have repercussions.

The Pentagon announced on February 21 the total number of U.S. service members who suffered brain injuries in the strike on the airbase has increased to 110.

Wendy Sherman, the former undersecretary of state for political affairs who led the U.S. negotiating team that concluded the Iran nuclear agreement, has said that assassination of Soleimani was an extraordinary risk.

"I think the president took an extraordinary risk and I don't think we've seen the end of that risk yet," WUSF News quoted her as saying in a news conference before the Ringling College Library Association Town Hall lecture series.

She added, "After he [Soleimani] was murdered by the United States government, they [the Iranian people] were in the streets protesting America. That's not in our national security interest."

She said that the assassination of Soleimani and the subsequent retaliation by Iran against U.S. troops in Iraq brought the two countries close to war.

Professor of Government and International Affairs at George Mason University Edward Rhodes has said that Iran's retaliatory action against the assassination of Soleimani shows the Islamic Republic has the conventional forces necessary to make the continued U.S. presence in the region untenable.

In an interview with ILNA in February, Rhodes confirmed that Iran's retaliation successfully conveyed two messages: "The first is that Iran does not seek to provoke a war with the United States and the second is a reminder that Iran does indeed possess the conventional forces necessary to make the continued U.S. presence in the region untenable, and that it has the ability to force upon the United States a decision either to withdraw militarily from the region or to go to war against Iran."

Rhodes added, "Certainly the Iranian people have legitimate grievances against the behavior of the U.S. government."

Bassam Abu Abdullah, an expert on international relations at Damascus University, has said that assassination of General Soleimani was a "miscalculation" by the United States.

"They thought this action will lead to annihilation of the axis of resistance, but if we study response to this assassination, we will see that Washington miscalculated," ISNA quoted Bassam Abu Abdullah as saying on February 23.

## Iran summons Swiss ambassador over Trump's claim

**1 →** The U.S. president told reporters on Thursday that he had been working on what to do about the attack which occurred on Wednesday night.

"They've sent a lot of rockets now. It hasn't been fully determined it was Iran," Trump said.

He added, "It was a rebel group, but most likely it looks like it could be backed by Iran."

The U.S. carried out airstrikes on Thursday and Friday against what it called multiple Iranian-backed militia sites in Iraq, according to the U.S. Defense Department.

The strikes came one day after the U.S. assessed "an Iranian-backed group" was responsible for a rocket attack on a base where coalition forces are located, killing two American service members and one British service member.

The UK government expressed support for the U.S. airstrikes, with the UK's Defense Secretary Ben Wallace saying "we support the right of the United States to defend themselves, as they have done tonight."

Hash al-Shaabi, also called the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), vowed to exact revenge for U.S. strikes. In the U.S. strikes on the PMF positions five Iraqi soldiers and a civilian were killed. In his remarks, Mousavi said the Swiss ambassador was also informed that it was in fact the wrong policies of the U.S. in Iraq that has led to current tensions and that "American authorities, especially Mr. Trump, cannot shirk their responsibility through such unfounded, baseless and dangerous remarks."

He also warned the U.S. of the consequences of any reckless action against Iran. Iraqi security officials said on Saturday that a barrage of rockets hit a base housing U.S. troops north of Baghdad. It came three days after a similar attack.

There was no immediate word on casualties at Camp Taji, according to the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, Fox News reported.

The officials said over a dozen rockets landed inside the base. The attack was unusual because it occurred during the day. Previous assaults on military bases housing U.S. troops typically occurred overnight.

# Rouhani calls for transparent report on coronavirus to counter rumors, fake news

‘We are tasked to calm the society through timely, accurate and transparent report on the virus’

**POLITICAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani on Saturday called on media outlets and relevant officials to produce in time, accurate and transparent reports on the COVID-19 outbreak in order to block the way on fake news and rumors which are intended to undermine the society's psyche.

In a meeting with his close team that included the government spokesman, the presidential chief of staff, his advisor and communications director among others, Rouhani said some ill-wishers are trying to damage the society's mental tranquility.

He added, "Besides criticizing the short-ages, we are obliged to highlight the medical staff's sacrifices and honest efforts to contain coronavirus outbreak and save the lives of the infected people."

"Media sector plays a very important role in such cases. They should try to avoid politicizing and polarizing the country's current atmosphere," Rouhani underscored.

He added that no country in the world can resist against coronavirus outbreak under maximum pressure of sanctions but Iran has thus far been capable to mitigate the disease's consequences.

Rouhani said the measures taken so far to contain the pandemic disease in Iran is acceptable.

On Friday, top commanders of the IRGC, Army and police gathered together on how to contain the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

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 Abdolrahim 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 would be screened to identify people suspected of the coronavirus infection.

He said the screening would 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.

According to the general, these steps were to go into force from Saturday afternoon.

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.

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Wednesday declared the rapidly spreading coronavirus outbreak a pandemic, acknowledging 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 Saturday, 120 countries have reported that 140,000 have contracted COVID-19, over 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 Saturday that totally 12,729 nationals have been confirmed infected by the virus, out of whom 611 have lost their lives.

According to the Health Ministry, the health condition of 4,339 patients have improved.

## Iranian people, government will never forget friends of hard days



**POLITICAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — In a post on his Twitter account on Saturday, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman underlined that his country's people and officials will never forget those who assisted them in hard days of the coronavirus outbreak.

"Following (Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad) Zarif's

tweets and phone calls as well as the Iranian embassies' efforts, in addition to aid provided by China, Turkey, the Emirates (UAE), Germany, Britain and France, the country has received more medical equipment and financial assistance from Japan, Qatar, the Republic of Azerbaijan and Russia," Abbas Mousavi wrote, appreciating the countries which have assisted Iran in containing the pandemic disease.

"The Iranian government and people will never forget friends of hard days," he reiterated.

On Friday, Mousavi was quoted by IRNA as elaborating on the measures taken in fighting coronavirus and also the foreign contributions.

Speaking to reporters, Mousavi appreciated the Chinese government and people for their aid.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry also put on agenda supporting nationals in other countries, he said, adding that during the period of the virus outbreak in China, all efforts were made for helping the Iranian students in Wuhan.

After doing investigations, the students were transferred to Iran by Mahan Airlines.

Mousavi said after the outbreak of coronavirus in Iran, the

Foreign Ministry focused its efforts on accepting voluntary aid from friends and also from international organizations.

Following is the list of aid received by the Iranian Health Ministry from China till Friday:

1. About 350,000 coronavirus test kit
2. About 2,400,000 face-masks
3. About 130,000 isolation gown
4. About 120 ventilators and respirators
5. About 2,800 thermometers and pulse oximeter
6. About 13,000 protective goggles
7. About 160,000 face and head protectors
8. About 50 boxes of special anti-COVID19 drug

Mousavi went on to say on Friday that many contributions, including about 32,000 kg of packed aid were waiting for the next flights to be transferred to Iran.

Head of the public relations office at the Ministry of Health and Medical Education Kianoush Jahanpour said on Saturday that so far 12,729 Iranians citizens have been infected with the deadly coronavirus. Jahanpour added so far 611 of the infected citizens have died and 4,339 have recovered.

## Serbia voices solidarity with Iran in fight against coronavirus

**POLITICAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic, in a phone call on Friday night with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif, has voiced Belgrade's solidarity with the Iranian nation and government in their fight with coronavirus.

The two foreign ministers discussed the latest efforts to combat the novel coronavirus, according to the Foreign Ministry website.

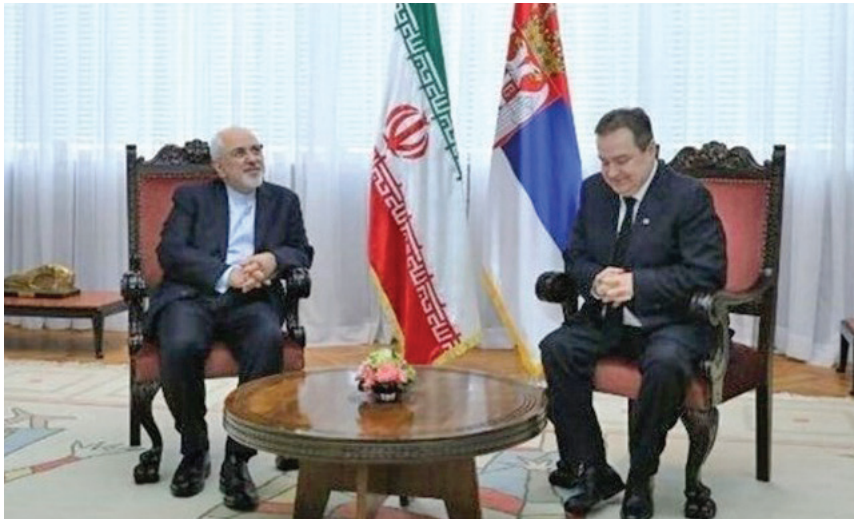
The novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, is a new respiratory disease that emerged in China last December and has spread around the world, halting industries, bringing travel to a standstill, closing schools, and forcing the cancellation of public events.

Iran is currently battling the world's second deadliest outbreak of the coronavirus outside China.

As of Saturday, 12,729 Iranians were confirmed to have been infected with the virus. Of this number, 611 have lost their lives.

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."

Observers say the U.S. sanctions imposed on Iran are an act of war as they

hamper Tehran's efforts to counter the coronavirus outbreak.

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.

In part of his letter, Zarif said, "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 combatting the spread of the virus; and, ultimately, in defeating it, by the campaign of economic terrorism perpetrated by the Government of the United States."

Also on Thursday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei 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".

"While commending the services that the Armed Forces have so far provided to the dear people [of Iran], and while emphasizing the need for those services to further expand and continue, it is necessary that these services be organized in the form of a health and treatment base," the Leader wrote in his edict.

## Xi sends sympathies to S. Korea, Iran, Italy over coronavirus outbreak

BEIJING — President Xi Jinping has extended condolences to South Korea, Iran and Italy over the novel coronavirus pneumonia outbreak on behalf of the Chinese government and people.

Xi conveyed these sincere sympathies to the government and people of the three countries in his messages respectively to his South Korean counterpart Moon Jae-in, Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani and Italian counterpart Sergio Mattarella.

In the message to Moon, Xi said China will continue to provide assistance within its capacity to support South Korea's fight against the COVID-19 outbreak.

He said the Chinese side stands ready to join hands with

the South Korean side to win the fight against the epidemic at an early date, so as to protect the life and health of the people of the two countries and the wider world.

In the message to Rouhani, Xi said China will continue to provide as much assistance as it can for Iran in the latter's fight against the COVID-19 outbreak.

He said China stands ready to step up cooperation with Iran to contain the novel coronavirus epidemic.

In the message to Mattarella, Xi said that at this difficult time, China is willing to cooperate with Italy and offer assistance, and that the Chinese government and its people firmly support Italy's fight against the outbreak.

(source: China Daily and Xinhua)





# Ban on medicine imports by Iran is an instance of ‘war crime’, legislator says

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — The spokesman for the Parliament Health Committee has deplored Washington for slowing down efforts by Iran to contain the new coronavirus through its sanctions, describing the sanctions on Iran’s medicine sector as nothing but a “war crime”.

“This measure by the U.S. is tantamount to a war crime and the international community must react to this issue,” Akbar Torki told Tasnim.

In the current situation caused by the outbreak of the coronavirus, the entire world is being threatened, he said, adding that the virus knows no boundaries or religions and therefore all countries should cooperate to eradicate the infectious disease.

Pointing to the American statesmen’s moves to hamper the delivery of medical supplies to Iran as a violation of human rights, Torki said, “International courts must prevent these human rights abuses by the U.S. because the medicines and equipment are used to prevent and treat the coronavirus in Iran.”

In his regular news briefing on Saturday, Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour put the number of Iranians infected with the virus at 12,729.

Of this number, Jahanpour added, 611 patients have died and 4,339 recovered.

From Friday afternoon up to Saturday afternoon, 91 persons were added to the number



of the people died from coronavirus in Iran.

More than 140,000 have been infected globally, according to the WHO. Of those, over 68,000 have recovered.

Foreign Minister Zarif has called the U.S. ban on sale of medicine as an instance of

“medical terrorism”.

In a letter to United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Thursday, Zarif said, “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 highly contagious Covid-19 viral disease, with my country among the worst impacted so far.”

In another part of his letter, Zarif said, “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.”

In a letter to number of world leaders on Saturday, President Hassan Rouhani of Iran said countering coronavirus entails “regional and international coordination and cooperation”.

Rouhani said containing this “great and dangerous crisis” is not possible by a single country.

The president also said the U.S. sanctions on Iran and obedience to these bans by certain countries is not only “illegal and in contravention of the (UN) Security Council Resolution it is also immoral and anti-human.”

Rouhani also said today it is necessary to counter the U.S. economic terrorism against Iran which is showing its “ugly and ant-human face” more than any other time.

## Sanctions showing their ugly and anti-human face more than ever, Rouhani tells world leaders

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — In a letter to number of world leaders on Saturday, President Hassan Rouhani of Iran said countering the coronavirus outbreak entails “regional and international coordination and cooperation”.

Rouhani said containing this “huge and dangerous crisis” is not possible by one country.

“The management of this huge and dangerous crisis is not possible by a single country, let alone a country (Iran) which is facing numerous problems in accessing international financial markets and providing its needed goods,” the president asserted.

The president said the U.S. sanctions on Iran and observance of these bans by certain countries is not only “illegal and in contravention of the (UN) Security Council Resolution

it is also immoral and anti-human.”

Rouhani also said today it is necessary to counter the U.S. economic terrorism against Iran which is showing its “ugly and ant-human face” more than any other time.

Iran, which is under unprecedented sanctions in history, is facing a burgeoning rise in the number of people infected with the deadly coronavirus called Covid-19.

Iran is the most affected country in the Middle East.

In a regular news briefing on Saturday, Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said number of Iranians infected with the virus has reached 12,729.

The number shows that the Iranians infected by the virus now account for about 9 percent of the cases across the world.

Of this number, Jahanpour added, 611 patients have died and 4,339 recovered.

Saturday was the deadliest day since the virus was first diagnosed in Qom, a city 130 kilometers south of the capital Tehran.

In 24 hours, from Friday afternoon up to Saturday afternoon, 91 persons were added to the number of the dead.

Foreign Minister Zarif has called the U.S. ban on sale of medicine to Iran as an instance of “medical terrorism”.

In a letter to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres released on Thursday, Zarif said, “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.”

## Nationwide screening shows %97 have no coronavirus symptoms: Rouhani

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — The Health Ministry has conducted a screening plan asking millions of Iranians about symptoms of coronavirus epidemic that fortunately about %97 of the respondents answered they had no symptoms, President Hassan Rouhani announced on Saturday.

Rouhani made the announcement as he attended a session of National Headquarters for Fighting Coronavirus via video conference.

He also appreciated Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei for proposing the establishment of a health and treatment headquarters by the military to battle the virus, hoping for better cooperation and coordination among the relevant bodies.

■ **Rouhani agrees to limit road traffic in 11 provinces to counter virus outbreak**

Rouhani also agreed with a proposal by Health Minister Saeed Namaki to set up road traffic control teams in 11 provinces.

However, the president said, “We must be accurate in specifying controlling points in the proposed provinces; in the meantime, the controlling teams should act carefully in order to avoid any problem for road traffic. People should be informed about any development in advance.”

There was no mention of the provinces which will be subject to road traffic limitation.

Rouhani added that a meeting will be held on Sunday to review the negative impacts of the virus on the economy which will be attended by members of the economic headquarters and representative of the private sector.

On Friday, top commanders of the IRGC, Army and police gathered together on how to contain the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

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 Abdolrahim 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 would be screened to identify people suspected of the coronavirus infection.

He said the screening would be done

either through social media, telephone and if necessary in front of people’s homes.

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

The commander said about 1000 mobile and fixed clinics would 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 would be limited.

In a decree on Thursday, Leader 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.

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, acknowledging 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 Saturday, 120 countries have reported that 140,000 have contracted COVID-19. over 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 Saturday that totally 12,729 nationals have been confirmed infected by the virus, out of which 611 have lost their lives.

According to the Health Ministry, the health condition of a sum of 4,339 patients have improved.

## U.S. sanctions impeding Iran’s efforts in fighting coronavirus: UN envoy

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Majid Takht-Ravanchi, Iran’s ambassador to the United Nations, has said that the United States’ sanctions impede Iran’s efforts in fighting the coronavirus outbreak.



“Returned to New York from Tehran last night. People and government of Iran working hard to defeat Covid-19, but the U.S. sanctions impeding their efforts,” he tweeted on Friday.

He added, “High time for the U.S. to de-politicize this humanitarian endeavor and lift sanctions. International crises necessitate genuine international efforts.”

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

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

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has sent a letter to the United Nations chief Antonio Guterres urging the largest international body to disregard Washington’s sanctions on Tehran amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Zarif broke out the content of the letter to Guterres in a Tweet on Friday night, writing, “I urge the world body—and member states—to disregard inhuman U.S. sanctions on my country. And insist that they be lifted.”

“As the #COVID19 ravages Iran, we should recognize that viruses don’t discriminate. To fight them, neither should humans,” he added, posting the following two-page letter as attached photos.

## Imran Khan meets Iranian ambassador

1➔ Kashmir was the scene of fresh protests and placed under a lockdown ever since Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government revoked the Indian-administered region’s special status in August 2019.

India claimed the decision to strip the Muslim-majority region of its semi-autonomy was necessary for economic development in Kashmir and to stop “terrorism.”

Ayatollah Khamenei, leader of the Islamic Revolution, in August urged India to follow a “fair policy” toward the Kashmiri people.

“We maintain good relations with the Indian government, but the Indian government is expected to adopt a fair policy toward the decent people of Kashmir so that the Muslim people of the region are not put under pressure,” the Leader noted.

■ **Iranian ambassador calls terrorism a common threat**

For his part, Hosseini said that terrorism is a common threat to the regional countries and noted that it is essential to counter it.

During a speech at a security conference in Islamabad in January, Hosseini said that Iran seeks security for all and will remain harbinger of regional peace, security and development.

“Obviously, steps by all neighbors, especially Pakistan, are very important on this path,” the ambassador said.

## Washington Post hypes fake news on coronavirus ‘burial pits’ in Iran

(Press TV) — The Washington Post has turned to publishing fake news about Iran’s response to the coronavirus outbreak, claiming that Iran has dug mass “burial pits” for victims of the disease and was covering the true number of deaths.

As countries across the world grapple with the COVID-19 outbreak, Iran’s struggle to contain the deadly disease has attracted more than usual attention from mainstream outlets in certain countries.

Despite numerous statements from World Health Organization officials praising Iran’s efforts against the outbreak, certain outlets have focused on erringly similar themes regarding Iran; that the country is in chaos, is mishandling the outbreak and that it’s “putting other countries at risk”.

The Washington Post has specifically published a string of exclusively conspiracy-minded and politicized reports about the coronavirus outbreak in Iran.

Its latest reports include headlines such as “Iran’s government is lying its way to a coronavirus catastrophe”, “Iran struggles to contain coronavirus outbreak, putting Middle East countries at risk” and “Coronavirus pummels Iran leadership as data show spread is far worse than reported”.

In its latest article on Iran – titled “Coronavirus burial pits so vast they’re visible from space” – the U.S. daily claims satellite images showed newly-dug “trenches” the size of a “football field” to accommodate bodies of the coronavirus victims.

The satellite images purportedly illustrate a cemetery near Iran’s epicenter city of Qom. The paper proceeds to cite dubious reports and videos circulating over the internet about Iran covering up its coronavirus deaths.

The report concludes that the graves have been dug to “accommodate the rising number of virus victims in Qom”.

Many observers, however, have been quick to point out inconsistencies and flaws in the report, with some highlighting the unprofessional reporting used in the article; using hyped expressions such as “seen from space” to portray a false image of mass graves.

Observers have pointed that the overall length of the purported 100 yards of “burial pits” in the satellite images cannot accommodate more than about 75-100 graves, not significantly higher than the official death toll announced for the city.

Others have presented evidence showing that the vacant graves in the area are not specifically related to the coronavirus outbreak and that long rows of graves had been also dug long before the outbreak.

## Senior MP blasts U.S. for war crime against Iranians by medical sanctions

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — Rapporteur for the Iranian Parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Hossein Naqavi Hosseini condemned Washington’s medical sanctions against Iran that is engaged in a fight against coronavirus as a violation of human rights and an act of war crime.

“Unfortunately, the U.S. sanctions against the health and hygiene and treatment equipment needed in the campaign against coronavirus is part of the American statesmen’s actions in violation of human rights and war crime against the great Iranian nation,” Naqavi Hosseini told FNA on Saturday.

He said that Washington showed by attempts to prevent dispatch of drugs to Iran that it attaches no value to humanity and health of nations.

Earlier this week, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that the U.S. sanctions on legal trade and hampering sales of medicine and medical equipment have created serious obstacles for Iran’s fight against coronavirus.

In his letter to Guterres, Zarif called for an end to the sanctions imposed by the U.S. government, which he slammed as a major obstacle to Iran’s battle with the coronavirus outbreak.

“Excellency, 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 highly contagious Covid-19 viral disease, with my country



among the worst impacted so far,” Zarif wrote in his letter.

He went on to say that 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 combatting the spread of the virus; and, ultimately, in defeating

it, by the campaign of economic terrorism perpetrated by the Government of the United States,” Zarif added.

The Iranian foreign minister said that 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,” he added.

Zarif further said that 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, including as follows: Illegal U.S. secondary sanctions have made it increasingly difficult for Iran to export its oil as well as manufactured items, thereby targeting not only the public sector—which must provide subsidized food, medicine and other necessities for the Iranian people, and particularly the most vulnerable segments of the population—but our entire private sector which provides goods, services and employment for the Iranian people.”



STOCK MARKET

|        |          |
|--------|----------|
| TEDPIX | 502703.8 |
| IFX    | 6583.93  |

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

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

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

|             |               |
|-------------|---------------|
| Brent       | \$35.44/b     |
| WTI         | \$31.73/b     |
| OPEC Basket | \$33.25/b     |
| Gold        | \$1,534.25/oz |
| Silver      | \$14.97/oz    |
| Platinum    | \$770.35/oz   |

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Japan’s economic policymakers now factoring in Olympics cancellation, sources say

Even as Japan has stressed that the Olympics will proceed as planned, government and central bank officials are more seriously weighing the risk of cancellation when making projections for this year’s economic outlook, sources said.

The Bank of Japan is expected to loosen monetary policy next week to ease the hit to business sentiment from the coronavirus outbreak and the subsequent market volatility.



Such a move would still be based on an assumption that the economy will make a quick V-shaped recovery, fueled in part by a boost in demand from the Olympics in July.

However, policymakers assessing the scale of the damage fear an Olympic cancellation will upend even their most pessimistic scenario on the prospects of such a recovery, according to multiple sources.

“You need to be prepared for the chance of a cancellation and the loss that could cause,” said an official with direct knowledge of the government’s deliberation on the matter.

“The government’s economic package, to be compiled in April, will probably take into account this risk,” the official said.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s government has repeatedly stressed that the Tokyo Olympic Games will go ahead as planned. However, there are growing doubts as the coronavirus outbreak worsens around the globe, prompting quarantines, travel restrictions and cancellations of sporting events.

On Thursday U.S. President Donald Trump floated the possibility of a one-year postponement for the Games, although he later praised Japan’s “magnificent” venue.

The damage to the economy from a cancellation would be huge, marking a severe blow to household and corporate sentiment, already souring from event cancellations, slumping tourism and travel curbs, the sources say.

“In times like now, keeping public sentiment from cooling too much is extremely important,” another official said on condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to speak publicly.

“If the Olympics is cancelled, consumption could freeze.”

Some analysts had believed the world’s third-largest economy was already in danger of tipping into recession before the virus outbreak worsened.

Crunch time

Some ruling party lawmakers and government officials see the need to prepare for the risk of a cancellation.

The crunch time for policymakers is around end-April, when the BOJ meets for another rate review and issues fresh quarterly economic projections. Their hope is that by then, the epidemic will have subsided and Tokyo can host the Games as planned.

If not, the rosy projections of Japanese policymakers - that the economy will rebound in the latter half of this year and sustain a moderate recovery - could unravel, the officials say.

“It will be a huge problem if little progress is made in containing the virus by end of next month,” a third official said. “If the Olympics is cancelled, the economy could crumble.”

With the market rout already denting morale, the BOJ is expected to downgrade its assessment of the economy next week from the current view that it is “expanding moderately as a trend,” sources familiar with its thinking say.

Government and BOJ economists have yet to firm up estimates on how much an Olympics cancellation could cost the economy. But some say private forecasts of around 7 trillion yen (\$66 billion) - or 1.4% of gross domestic product - may be too optimistic.

Even a postponement of the Olympics would be damaging. The economy shrank in October-December due to the hit from last year’s sales tax hike, and it could contract again in the current quarter as the virus curbs global trade and tourism.

“If conditions (regarding the epidemic) are bad enough to cancel the Olympics, that in itself is a huge problem for the economy,” said a fourth official. “It will be a completely new shock to the economy.”

(Source: Japan Today)

Iran, Japan, UNIDO to cooperate on fishery development in Chabahar

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran, Japan and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) have signed a trilateral agreement to cooperate on the third phase of a project for developing advanced fishery in the port city of Chabahar in southeastern Iran, IRNA reported on Saturday.

Valued at €180,000, the said agreement was signed as a part of five cooperation documents between UNIDO and Japan at UNIDO headquarters in Vienna, in presence of permanent representatives of Iran, Japan, Iraq, Pakistan, South Africa, and Uganda.

Japan had previously provided some €680,000 to finance the first and second phases of the project.

In his statement during the signing ceremony, Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran’s ambassador to the Vienna-based international organizations, underlined the strategic position of Chabahar Port.

According to the official, Chabahar Port provides facilities for transiting commodities between countries located at the northern side of the Indian Ocean and Central Asian countries. He stressed the significance of international



Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran’s ambassador to the Vienna-based international organizations, delivers speech at UNIDO headquarters in Vienna.

Steel ingot output climbs 4%

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s major steel companies produced over 18.5 million tons of steel ingots during the 11-month period from March 21, 2019 to February 19, 2020, registering a four-percent growth from the figure for the same period in the previous year, IRNA reported on Saturday.

These producers’ output although fell three percent to 1.493 million tons during the eleventh Iranian calendar month of Bahman (January 21-February 19), the same report confirmed.

Iran has defined 16 development projects in the steel sector which are aimed to boost the country’s output of steel products by 17.3 million tons in a course of five years.

These projects are for constructing production units each with the capacity of 600,000 tons, while some other projects have been also defined to set up some units with under 500,000-ton capacity that to-



gether with the 600,000-ton capacity units will add 19.1 million tons to the country’s annual steel products output.

In its latest report, the World Steel Association (WSA) has announced that Iran’s crude steel production increased by 30 percent in 2019 while the average global growth in this sector stood at 3.5 percent.

Based on the WSA report, Iran produced 31.9 million tons of the mentioned commodity during 2019 compared to the last year’s nearly 24 million tons.

Nearly 38.5m tires produced in 11 months

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Tire production in Iran stood at 38.475 million during the eleven-month period from March 21, 2019 until February 19, 2020, IRNA reported.

As reported, the figure shows a five-percent growth compared to the same period of time in the past year.

Having the annual production capacity of 426,000 tons of tire, Iran accounts for 41 percent of tire output in the West Asian region, according to the deputy director of non-metal industries office of Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry.

Mohsen Safdari has said that 11 tire production units are active in the country creating jobs for 14,500 people.

The official said 426,000 tons is the nominal capacity, while the real output is less than this figure as some units are working with 60-70 percent of their capacity.

He put the country’s imports of tires at



97,000 tons worth \$320 million and exports at 8,500 tons valued at \$30 million in the past Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2019) and said the export figure is low as the Industry Ministry decided to ban the export of this product due to regulate domestic market since the second half of the previous year.

“Iranian tire industry is dependent on foreign raw materials by 40 percent, so we are self-reliant by 60 percent in this field”, the official announced.

Iran unveils its first 6-speed manual gearbox

**1 →** “By the end of the next Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2021) over 10,000 vehicles will be equipped with the mentioned gearbox,” Moqimi said.

Increasing the Iranian engineers’ and designers’ capability in designing and manufacturing gearboxes, improving drivability, improving gearbox quality, increasing customer satisfaction and reducing after-sales service costs are mentioned to be some of the benefits of the production of such gearboxes.

Using the new six-speed gearboxes is going to reduce the automobiles’ fuel consumption by at least 1.5 percent comparing to the current five-speed gearboxes, the official said.

IKCO is also going to produce automatic six-speed gearboxes in the Q4 of the next Iranian calendar year.

According to the IKCO head, 60 percent of the knowledge and equipment used in the automatic gearboxes will be domestic.

“By the end of the next year 1000 automatic six-speed gearboxes will be produced and installed on various vehicles,” Moqimi said.

According to the official, Marketing studies show that at least 100,000 manual and automatic gearboxes are needed each year in the Iranian market, and Iran Khodro has considered this demand in its product development roadmap.



Coronavirus: China’s small factories brace for ‘big hit’ as pandemic erodes overseas demand

By He Huifeng

Most Chinese manufacturers are on track to resume normal operations in April after months of crippling coronavirus restrictions, but the rapid spread of the pandemic is sapping international demand and presenting new challenges for under pressure businesses.

Weeks of quarantine and transport limitations that forced the closure of businesses across the country are gradually being lifted as the number of new infections drops, indicating Beijing’s unprecedented controls have helped stem the spread of the virus.

While this has allowed Chinese firms to begin ramping up production, some contract manufacturers that rely on overseas customers say orders from the United States and Europe have started to dry up as the virus ripples through the global economy.

Others fret that the outbreak may prompt multinational companies to reduce their reliance on Chinese-made products, accelerating a shift to alternative manufacturing bases.

Meanwhile, an expected decline in consumer and business incomes due to work lost during the outbreak could mean domestic manufacturing and service demand will remain weak for some time to come.

Claudia Luo, an executive with a Guangdong-based manufacturer of automotive parts and industrial moulds, said the situation in Europe was “very worrying”.

“Last month, we were mainly worried about the problems on the production side, thinking that the problems would be solved if Chinese factories resumed production. But now that the epidemic has spread across the world, we are beginning to worry that international demand will take a big hit as a result,” said Luo, who asked that her company not be identified.

“We originally set a sales target of 200 million yuan (\$28.6 million) for the first quarter of this year, and now we are at less than half of that,” she said. “Most of the orders are from Southeast Asia, there are no orders from the US and Europe yet.”

Less than half of her 9,000-strong workforce had returned to their jobs, though production would recover fully by the end of the month, she said.

The central government has prioritized getting factories running at full speed again and will send 29 teams to check on progress across the country this month.

Some 60 percent of the country’s small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have resumed operations, but 95 percent of large businesses were back up and running, including in Hu-



bei province, the epicenter of the outbreak, said Xin Guobin, a deputy minister at the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology at a press conference in Beijing on Friday.

However, even among large firms only 80 per cent of the workforce had returned, he added.

In the construction sector, 58 percent of housing and infrastructure projects had restarted as of March 8, said Ni Hong, vice-minister of housing and urban-rural development earlier this month.

More than 80 percent of China’s migrant workers had returned to China’s cities to resume work after an extended Lunar New Year holiday as of March 12, according to a survey by Tsinghua University’s Information Technology Research Institute.

The level of employment in commercial and office areas in major cities was 68.8 percent of the level in December as of March 12, the survey said.

While local governments have claimed that most factories have resumed production, many small businesses said the picture on the ground differed from official announcements.

“Suppliers in Guangdong and Zhejiang [provinces] began to make small shipments in the first week of March. But suppliers in central and northern China, such as in Anhui, Henan, and Hebei provinces, have not yet received approval by local governments to resume work,” said Jason Ding, who runs a trading firm in Guangzhou city purchasing car parts in bulk from factories in Dongguan and then shipping them to Africa.

“I will only be able to export two containers at a value of about 1.2 million yuan (\$171,000) this month, which is far less than this time last year,” he said, adding that between January

and November in 2019 he exported goods worth a total of 50 million yuan (\$7.1 million).

Ding said the value of this month’s exports would be around a quarter of what they were on average each month between January and November last year.

■ **Coronavirus: from mysterious origins to a global threat**

“The international epidemic is likely to have a new impact on our orders in the second and third quarters this year,” he said. “If the global epidemic lasts until June or longer, foreign buyers will become conservative and global demand will shrink.”

Ramping up production has proved more difficult than expected in some regions, said Peng Peng, executive chairman of the Guangdong Society of Reform, a think tank associated with the province’s government.

“So far, even in [the major manufacturing cities of] Guangzhou and Dongguan, local governments at the sub district level still have strict rules on migrant workers, requiring a 14-day mandatory quarantine,” he said, referring to the two-week timeout period required before employees could return to work.

“In addition, the cost of treatment for an infected worker can be up to 200,000 yuan (\$2,800), which firms are also required to pay. This cost is just unaffordable for small factory owners and it scares them.”

Tom Zhong, who runs a contract manufacturing businesses in Dongguan that makes parts for bags and suitcases for US and European brands, said he had originally estimated his factory would be back to normal this month, but has had to push his plans back.

“The only thing we need is orders – and our orders have fallen drastically since 2018,” he said. “Now we worry about the spread of the virus around the world and that orders for Olympic-related and tourism-related products will be gone. Orders from domestic brands will also decrease a lot.”

Large European and American firms are likely to postpone their 2020 procurement plans in response to the outbreak, said an independent observer that helped international companies monitor work at Chinese contract manufacturers.

“The epidemic is quickly developing beyond expectations around the world,” said the industry expert, who requested anonymity because the Guangdong government ordered him not to talk to foreign media. “Demand will definitely slow down and orders will definitely decrease.”

(Source: South China Morning Post)



# 30b cubic meters of water stored behind Iranian dams: IWRM

**E N E R G Y** **TEHRAN** — Managing director of Iran Water Resources Management (IWRM) company says currently more than 30 billion cubic meters of water is stored behind the dams across the country and there is no problem regarding water shortage during the summer.

Speaking to IRNA on Saturday, Mohammad Rasouliha noted that although regarding the resources there is no problem but people should manage their consumption during peak hours.

"Although there is no problem in resources, the conditions vary in terms of distribution, since the capacity of the water network and

reservoirs vary within the 24 hours," Rasouliha said.

According to the official, in terms of supply, the country's surface and groundwater resources are in good condition and considering the recent rainfalls the dams have been nearly filled.

Following the coronavirus outbreak in Iran, water consumption has increased dramatically, so that the energy minister has recently urged people to manage their consumption in peak consumption hours.

Earlier in February, Iran's deputy energy minister had said that over 50 percent of the capacity of the country's dams were filled



and the rest was kept for flood management.

Speaking on the sidelines of an exhibition in Tehran, Ghasem Taghizadeh Khamesi expressed hope that considering the recent heavy snowfall, the country won't be facing any water shortage in the upcoming hot seasons.

Last year, the volume of water behind

Iran's dams went so down that the country faced serious problems regarding power generation by hydro-electric power plants.

The current water year, however, kicked off with great rainfalls across the country which even caused some floods in northern, southwestern and, eastern provinces.

## Saudis sell oil at \$25 in market share grab from Russia: Reuters

Saudi Arabia is preparing to flood markets with oil at prices as low as \$25 per barrel, specifically targeting big refiners of Russian oil in Europe and Asia, as its price war with Moscow heats up, sources told Reuters news agency on Friday. This comes as oil closes on its worst week since the 2008 financial crisis amid a coronavirus outbreak that continues to threaten demand and crude producers promising more supply.

The sources speaking to Reuters, from oil majors and refiners that process crude in Europe, said Saudi state oil company Aramco told them it would supply all requested additional volumes in April.

Oil prices have halved since the start of the year. Last Friday, tensions between the world's top oil producers, Saudi Arabia and

Russia, flared into an all-out price war after Russia and OPEC failed to reach a new deal on supply cuts. Riyadh retaliated by opening its taps and pledging to pump record volumes of oil into the market.

Sources previously told Reuters that Saudi Arabia is also seeking to replace Russian oil customers with Chinese and Indian buyers, although not all refiners received volumes for which they had asked. Tanker rates soared as Saudi Arabia provisionally chartered around 31 supertankers to take extra oil, including to the United States, where Russian oil is usually less in demand.

Russia has so far said it is not planning to come back to the negotiating table despite feeling the pressure from the extraordinary Saudi moves. Russian Energy Minister Alexander

Novak said on Friday that his country saw no grounds so far for returning to discussions with its OPEC+ partners, and can increase its oil production by a modest 200,000 barrels per day (bpd) in April.

By contrast, Saudi Arabia has pledged to raise output by 2.6m bpd in April. Fellow Persian Gulf producers such as the United Arab Emirates have joined in the battle for market share and announced production increases. Saudi Arabia has made a deep cut to its official selling prices for oil. Arab Light and Arab Medium barrels were offered at selling prices of \$25 to 28 per barrel on a CIF Rotterdam basis, traders said.

Russia's main blend, Urals, has been offered slightly higher than \$30 per barrel on a CIF Rotterdam basis, according to Refinitiv

Eikon data.

"We are happy with our allocation. The requests for April were confirmed. I look forward to May if prices remain that attractive", a trader with a European oil company involved in the talks told Reuters.

European oil refiners including Total, BP, Eni and SOCAR have all had allocations for additional Saudi crude oil supplies in April confirmed, the sources said.

Goldman Sachs said it now expected a record high oil surplus of 6 bpd by April, in a global market that usually consumes about 100 million bpd.

"The avenues for a quick off-ramp to the Saudi-Russia price war appear to be closing," RBC Capital Markets analyst Helima Croft said. (Source: Aljazeera)

## Global jet fuel demand to slump 11% amid coronavirus outbreak

Jet fuel demand will be the hardest hit fuel sector as the coronavirus outbreak spreads across the world, countries impose travel restrictions, and airlines continue to cancel thousands of flights, Rystad Energy said in a new report on global demand for oil and fuels.

Jet fuel demand is set to slump by 11 percent year on year in 2020, from last year's demand of around 7.2 million bpd. Global air traffic is expected to plunge by 16 percent on the year, according to Rystad.

"U.S. President Donald Trump yesterday announced a ban on air travel between Europe and the US, which will further impact an aviation industry that has already been suffering as the virus has spread. Many distressed airlines will now face heavy cost cuts, and many non-profitable routes are likely to be closed," the analysts noted.

Rystad Energy now expects global oil demand to drop by 600,000 bpd this year, or by 0.6 percent, compared to 2019.

"This is a severe downgrade compared to previous estimates and takes into account the quarantine lockdown in Italy, massive cancellations of flights by airlines, the travel ban between Europe and the U.S. that was



announced yesterday, and our simulations of the virus' growth patterns this year," the energy research and analytics firm said.

Major organizations and international bodies have already dramatically cut expectations for this year's global oil demand as the Covid-19 outbreak results in restricted travel and slowing economic activity.

OPEC, for example, now sees global oil demand rising by mere 60,000 bpd in 2020 after it has slashed its forecasts by 920,000 bpd from just a month ago. The International Energy Agency (IEA) warned this week that oil demand was set to drop this year for the first time since the financial crisis in 2009 due to the coronavirus outbreak and its impact on economies. The IEA now sees global oil demand falling by 90,000 bpd year on year in 2020.

(Source: oilprice.com)

## Trading giant Vitol is looking to buy Venezuelan oil again

Vitol Group, the world's biggest independent oil trader, is negotiating a purchase of Venezuelan crude, according to documents and emails reviewed by Bloomberg. This would be the first time Vitol dealt with the Latin American nation's oil after the U.S. ratcheted up sanctions in January 2019 in a bid to oust Maduro.

The proposed deal would be for a cargo of about 500,000 barrels, which Vitol may take it to its ATPC refinery in Antwerp, the documents show. The Rotterdam-based energy trader is considering buying the oil from Libre Abordo SA de CV, a little-known Mexican company that says it's providing humanitarian aid to Caracas in exchange for crude. That would allow Vitol to steer clear of the U.S. sanctions.

Merchants can strike lucrative deals from doing business with countries like oil-rich Venezuela, troubled by economic collapse and sanctions that have undercut its ability to sell the commodity that is its main source of income. Unable to sell its oil and navigate the global financial system, Venezuela has resorted to cashless barter deals that bring food and gasoline.

"Vitol operates its business in full compliance with all relevant laws and

regulations, including sanctions relating to Venezuela," the company said in a statement. "Vitol would only consider receiving product of Venezuelan origin if it had the relevant assurances that it could do so lawfully."

Libre Abordo didn't return a phone call and email seeking comment.

The proposed deal was being discussed by a Vitol trader based in London, the documents show. The cargo was expected to be priced at \$15.50 a barrel below Dated Brent benchmark, with payment to be made in euros or Mexican pesos against invoices of humanitarian goods, one document shows. In another document, Vitol says that if all goes well the company "could look at additional volume going forward."

OPEC founding member Venezuela, once Latin America's largest oil producer, now churns out less oil than North Dakota. Plagued by widespread corruption, triple-digit inflation and a refugee crisis almost as bad as war-stricken Syria, the country struggles to sell its oil after sanctions cut off access to the U.S., the biggest destination for its crude.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## Oil crash is a double-edged sword for LNG projects at risk

Oil's rout may have been an unexpected boon for the biggest buyers of liquefied natural gas, but its knock-on effects may come back to bite them.

That's because more than a dozen proposed LNG export projects from the U.S. to Mozambique are at risk of being delayed or scrapped as crude careened to levels that make most of them unprofitable. If fewer of them come to fruition, that would ease a widening LNG supply glut later this decade and potentially lift prices amid breakeven demand growth in Asia.

The multibillion-dollar export terminals typically sell their output at a price linked to crude. While projects are financed based on long-term models, because they take years to build and then operate for decades, if oil and gas prices stay at current levels throughout the year, it could force backers and financial institutions to rethink their plans.

Almost 20 proposed export plants are vying for a shrinking pool of capital after a record number of terminals reached final investment decisions last year. Even before crude's drop, developers were under pressure from a slump in global gas prices, milder winter temperatures and demand restraints from the coronavirus.

"With significant downward pressure on spot LNG prices and oil prices, it could be the double-whammy that really starts to make some projects seem uneconomic," Jeff Moore, an analyst with S&P Global Platts, said in an email. "If oil prices stay low for much of this year, I would imagine it could have a material impact on supply projects looking to reach FID this year."

Before oil's recent crash, BloombergNEF had marked four projects as highly likely to reach FID in 2020, while another 15 were seen as potential candidates or "wildcards," according to a report published last month. BNEF is currently reassessing the timeline for potential FIDs in light of the market crash and coronavirus outbreak.

"It has been: 'times are tough now, but the world will need this LNG, so we can't let these short-term fundamentals affect the longer-term strategic decisions,'" Angus Rodger,



a Singapore-based research director at Wood Mackenzie Ltd., said in an interview earlier this week. "If we continue rattling at the bottom, it will have an impact at some stage on companies' willingness to make large capital commitments."

Most developers are looking to sell LNG at \$8 per million British thermal units, which has become difficult under market prices, according to Trevor Sikorski, head of natural gas, coal and carbon at London-based industry consultant Energy Aspects Ltd. Brent crude's forward curve shows oil hitting about \$55 per barrel by 2029, a price level that isn't profitable for any of the proposed LNG projects, except for a planned expansion in Qatar, according to Sanford C. Bernstein & Co.

On the flip side, fewer LNG projects taking a FID in 2020 and 2021 will likely translate into lower global supply between 2024 and 2027, Giles Farrer, research director at WoodMac, said Wednesday in a report.

A crowded field of competing U.S. projects could be the most at risk, as developers had already been struggling to attract buyers amid the ongoing trade war with China, the fastest-growing market for the super-chilled fuel. Without supply deals or portfolio players willing to agree to purchase potential exports, it is challenging for a project to clinch

a final investment decision.

The oil collapse "in my mind is the nail in the coffin" for some U.S. LNG projects and will lead to delays for existing terminals looking to expand, said Madeline Jowdy, senior director of global gas and LNG for S&P Global Platts. Much of the industry pegged hopes for signing contracts on Chinese buyers, but they may have to rethink the Asian giant's appetite for gas in the wake of the coronavirus, she said.

It will be "tougher" for U.S. LNG terminal developer Cheniere Energy Inc. to finalize contracts for an expansion at its Texas export terminal, Chief Executive Officer Jack Fusco said on a call with analysts last month. The Houston-based company, the U.S.'s largest exporter, won't greenlight its next project until contracts are in place.

Meanwhile, shares of Tellurian Inc., another U.S. developer, have tumbled after the company failed to finalize a key supply deal with a potential Indian customer late last month for its \$29 billion Driftwood export project. The company was forced to slash almost 40% of its workforce as part of a cost-cutting move and a final investment decision could be delayed by at least a year.

The potential drop in supply "could be good news, as this ultimately will help bring the market into balance," Sanford C. Bernstein analysts said Thursday in a report. "And the longer it takes for projects to be approved, the better the price recovery will ultimately be for the market."

Futures for the Japan-Korea Marker, a benchmark for LNG delivered to northern Asia, are down about 50% over the last year to \$3.140 per million Btu. Meanwhile, an LNG contract with a 12% slope to Brent crude is currently at about \$3.93, compared with \$8.27 in early January.

"Companies looking to sanction new investments, both large one and smaller ones, will be running them on a much lower scenario, at least in the short term," said Woodmac's Rodger. They will be making "decisions based on maybe lower oil price scenarios. In which case a lot of investments just won't happen."

(Source: Bloomberg)

## Solution to Germany's renewables gridlock adjourned due to coronavirus talks

As the German government aims for a quick response to the coronavirus outbreak, talks to resolve an impasse over expanding renewable energy sources have been adjourned. A government coalition row over minimum wind turbine distances, which has curbed the expansion of onshore wind, and a planned cap on solar power were the subject of talks scheduled for 12 March between Chancellor Angela Merkel and the heads of Germany's 16 states.

Instead, the rapidly evolving virus situation reshuffled their agenda, turning it into an emergency meeting on ways to contain the outbreak. "We had the opportunity to turn the conference between the government and states, which was scheduled to deal with energy questions, into a broad discussion about the situation our country is now facing," Merkel said at a press conference after the coronavirus crisis meeting. She also urged everyone in Germany to reduce social interaction to a minimum to slow the virus's spread and promised that the government will do everything in its power to minimise its economic impact.

Energy news website Recharge News reported that the Bavarian state premier ahead of the conference with Merkel acknowledged there still was a "considerable need for discussion" on energy transition questions. According to the article, some in Merkel's conservative party CDU as well as some of the federal states are still insisting on the controversial 1,000 metre minimum distance rule for turbines from residential areas, widely seen as a major obstacle to the continued expansion of wind power in the country. Moreover, the parties could not find an agreement on lifting the cap on solar power support, which currently is set at a total capacity of 52 gigawatts, a value that is likely to be achieved in a matter of just a few months.



The Süddeutsche Zeitung reported that state premier Söder said the contentious issues would be transferred to a working group of state premiers, members of the federal parliament and the government.

The head of Germany's renewable energy industry association BEE, Simone Peter, said a solution should be possible. "There have been enough working groups in which government attempts to find a common approach on distance rules for wind power have remained in vain," Peter said, adding that the question of the solar power support cap had been debated for more than 18 months now.

Henrik Maatsch of environmental organisation WWF said finding a solution for wind and solar power was a prerequisite for Germany to meet its 2030 climate targets. "Concrete solutions are on the table. It borders on political failure to not implement them."

(Source: cleanenergywire.org)

## U.S. looks at buying oil in bid to save American shale producers

The Trump administration intends to buy tens of millions of barrels of oil for storage in the caverns of the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve, using a safeguard against fuel shortfalls as a tool to assist American energy producers.

The move is a course reversal for the federal government that addresses the difficult position of the U.S. oil and gas sector. Their revenues will be pinched as the coronavirus pandemic curtails fuel demand and global supply surges following last week's collapse of production quotas maintained by Saudi Arabia, Russia and their allies. U.S. crude prices have fallen to \$33 a barrel.

Dan Brouillette, U.S. energy secretary, late on Friday directed his department to "immediately initiate the process of purchasing American-made crude oil for storage in the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve as expeditiously as possible".

His order came hours after President Donald Trump declared a national emergency over the coronavirus outbreak, which has stoked fear across the country and killed 41 people.

The government established the strategic reserve in the 1970s after an oil embargo damaged the U.S. economy. Releases from the reserve have been used to cover emergency fuel outages, such as when Hurricane Katrina devastated energy infrastructure in 2005.

As recently as 2011 the reserve's salt caverns along the Texas and Louisiana coasts were full with 727m barrels of crude. Emboldened by strong domestic shale oil production, Congress has since approved sales from the reserve to fund tax cuts, transport and other priorities, leaving 635m barrels in the stockpile.

Earlier this week the energy department ditched the latest planned sale of 12m barrels from the reserve, citing "recent fluctuations in global oil markets". On Friday Mr Trump said: "We're going to fill it right up to the top."

Purchases of that magnitude would total less than a day of global oil demand. Rystad Energy, a consultancy, estimated they would add no more than 200,000 barrels a day of crude oil demand over the next three months.

At the same time, quarantines and other public health restrictions could erase several million barrels a day from oil demand, the consultancy said.

"Because of the massive oversupply, [the purchases] will not be enough to balance the impact of the national emergency on fuel consumption," said Per Magnus Nysveen, Rystad's head of analysis.

The American Petroleum Institute, the largest U.S. oil trade group, offered a measured reaction to the purchase announcement.

"To be clear — we are not seeking policy relief in response to the current market disruption," said Frank Macchiarola, the API's senior vice-president for policy, economics and regulatory affairs. "However, Congress gave the president and the secretary broad authority to manage the SPR and it's the administration's responsibility to exercise that authority."

(Source: Financial Times)



## Second Announcement



## ONE TIER GENERAL INTERNATIONAL TENDER NOTICE

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

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

## Please note the following:

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

Suppliers, wishing to participate in the tender, could register in the Iranian Tobacco Company Identification System ([www.iirtobacco.com](http://www.iirtobacco.com)). The samples of each item and the related data sheet and safety data sheet should be dispatched in standard reinforced packing format as below to Security Office, located at Golchin Building, Iranian Tobacco Company, Qazvin Ave, Qazvin square, Tehran, Iran, P.O.Box: 1331838734 exact and complete information of vendor should be indicated on each sample.

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

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

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

Iranian Ideal Tobacco Company

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# Ex- Algerian FM Ramtane Lamamra eyed as next UN Libya Envoy, replacing Salame

By Hana Saada

**ALGERIA** — Consultations have been taking place between United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and U.N. Security Council members about appointing former Algerian Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra as the body's new Libya envoy, diplomats said on Wednesday.

Libya envoy Ghassan Salame quitted this month, citing health reasons. Meanwhile, US' Stephanie Turco Williams will, temporarily, replace him as acting envoy until the appointment of a successor," pointed out Guterres in a statement Wednesday evening.

Williams held several positions, including Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs at the UN Mission in Libya since 2018 and has gained more than 24 years' experience in government and international affairs.

For their parts and following Guterres informal consultations with some council members about appointing Lamamra, diplomats said most council members supported the appointment.

Lamamra, 67, served as Algeria's foreign minister from 2013 to 2017 and in that capacity played a prominent role in regional mediation efforts in different regions, Mali.

Previously, Mr. Lamamra was elected and served as the African Union's Commissioner for Peace and Security from 2008-2013. As Commissioner, he oversaw and led a period of increasing engagement by the African Union in mediation efforts. He has been a mediator in several African conflicts, notably in Liberia and helped forge a deepening partnership with the United Nations. Mr. Lamamra has, also, served as his country's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and Ambassador to the United States.

As a reaction, and according to the Algerian press service, the current Algerian Foreign Minister Sabri Boukhaboune has expressed



hope that the UN would appoint an envoy to Libya as soon as possible to replace the outgoing envoy Ghasan Salama, stressing that the new envoy should be agreed by all parties to the conflict, and not be biased to one parties at the expense of others.

"Algeria is continuing its efforts to resolve the Libyan crisis, saying positive developments will take place despite resignation of the UN Envoy," added the same official.

Besides, the Algerian Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerad reiterated, on Thursday in Oyo, the availability of Algeria to host the "inter-Libyan conference of reconciliation", scheduled for next July.

"I have the honor to announce the availability of Algeria to host the inter-Libyan reconciliation conference planned for next July under the auspices of the AU in collaboration with the United Nations," he declared at the opening of the 1st meeting of the AU contact group on Libya.

Mr. Djerad, who represents the President of the Republic, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, at

this meeting, affirmed that Algeria "undertakes to provide all the facilities and to meet all the conditions necessary for the success of this important event" aimed at putting an end to the crisis in this country.

He reiterated, on this occasion, Algeria's determination to continue its immutable, unwavering and unconditional efforts to contribute to the settlement of the crisis in Libya, while respecting the sovereignty and independence of this neighboring country, preserving its territorial integrity and allowing the Libyans to appropriate the political process.

The Prime Minister stressed, once again, the "pivotal role" that the neighboring countries of Libya must play in this process aimed at a political settlement of the crisis which is shaking that country, in accordance with the resolutions of the conference of ministers of the neighboring countries of Libya, organized on January 23 in Algiers.

Mr. Djerad expressed, in this context, Algeria's willingness to "accompany the

efforts of the United Nations and contribute effectively to the success of the Libyan dialogue process ".

"Algeria is ready to cooperate with the new UN special envoy for Libya," he added, expressing the wish to see the new UN envoy appointed soon so that he can maintain the dynamics of the process of settling the crisis in Libya and preserving the gains made so far.

He, also, called on the international community to "involve the AU in the UN-sponsored Joint Military Commission talks" between the parties to the conflict.

"Our organization has extensive experience in mediation and conflict resolution and can contribute to the success of these talks," he said.

Prime Minister has said, on that occasion, that Algeria "is following with great concern" the situation in Libya, marked by "repeated violations of the truce and the continued delivery of arms to the parties to the conflict", in "flagrant violation of the UN arms embargo on Libya".

He stressed, in this regard, that "Algeria insists on the responsibility of the UN Security Council to impose peace and security in Libya by putting an end to foreign interference and the delivery of weapons to the parties in conflict".

He considered, as such, that "the international community has the duty to create a favorable political climate capable of allowing the Libyan belligerent to come together in order to find national solutions to the crisis facing their country, so as to guarantee Libya's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and preserving the social fabric of the Libyan people."

For the Prime Minister, the 1st meeting of the AU contact group on Libya "confirms the determination of the AU to support the process of resolving the crisis in Libya and to fully assume its role in this matter which concerns a AU Member State". ➡10

## How many chromosomes should human beings have to be considered humans by UN!?

**1 ➡** Answering these questions is very essential because, based on the data obtained from these screening tests, an important part of the probable life of many fetuses with Down syndrome has been and is still being disenfranchised. Somehow, it can be stated that these screening tests are one of the most important causes of the dramatic decline in the number of people with Down syndrome worldwide.

Prenatal screening tests are originally designed to indicate fetuses' genetic status and this is their main use; however, nowadays, these screening tests deviate from their original task and have become death certificates for fetuses with Down syndrome.



According to world statistics, a vast majority of chain murders, robberies, and unethical behaviors have been committed by 46-chromosome people who do not have Down syndrome. These people are those fetuses who were considered healthy, taking the conventional meaning of health into account, and were permitted to be born.

Other questions are:

What is the priority? Does getting the right to life from all fetuses that do not have the appearance of a 46-chromosome human and are far from the well-known standards of human-chromosomal medicine have priority?

Another question is:

Do all of these abortions and costly prenatal screening tests aim at eradicating people with Down syndrome and consequently having a healthier society with a lower health burden and more efficient people? If the answer is yes, then why, despite the massive eradication of people with Down syndrome who to date have been considered as an additional cost, have most of the human equations and calculations still failed? Why don't you consider high crime rates and deliberate homicides and thefts committed by people who do not have Down syndrome as additional burdens on society? Why are our global communities still overloaded even with the deliberate plans and policies countries adopted to eradicate people with Down syndrome?

Is our decision to abort fetuses with 47 chromosomes right? They are still human beings and we, by applying these health policies, have eradicated them. Are such policies right? Have considering people with Down syndrome as a burden on the shoulders of society and eliminating them made the world a better place?

Another question is:

Will the world miss out on something without people with Down syndrome? If you say No, it will not, I will ask you how do you know? Using what kind of sources did you answer to this question?

How much have we given people with Down syndrome throughout history, where, how, and to what extent have we allowed ourselves to evaluate the world with and without them?

Today, if a fetus is diagnosed with Down syndrome during screening tests, there will be a 98%, 77%, and 92% chance to get aborted in Denmark, France, and the UK, respectively. In the US, this chance is nearly 70%.

The question that matters the most is:

How can a country, a state, a government legalize the abortion of fetuses with Down syndrome every single minute before birth? Especially when we know that a fetus has pain receptors in the twentieth week of its life; therefore, after the twentieth week, the fetus that is aborted grasps all the pain.

Is permitting people to abort a fetus with Down syndrome until birth a philanthropic decision?

Is permitting people to abort a fetus with Down syndrome until birth a moral decision?

Is being silent against such laws compatible with human standards?

A while ago, Eric Torell, a 20-year-old man with Down syndrome who lived in Sweden, was mistakenly killed by a Swedish police officer just because he was playing with a toy gun. A few years ago, Ethan Saylor, a 26-year-old man with Down syndrome who lived in the United States, decided to see a movie twice at the cinema and he did not have a ticket for the second time. He did not know that he had to buy another ticket. The deputies put Ethan on the floor, held him down, and handcuffed him, a witness said. He died later because of a fracture in his throat cartilage.

Here, I want to address all the 48 countries that voted in favor of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

You, the 48 countries that agreed to the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, have never passed a declaration or a statement for Eric or Ethan. There are many people like Eric and Ethan out there, I beg all of you, the 48 countries that voted in favor of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to choose one of the two proposed ways.

Either restore your votes or once again gather together at the UN General Assembly in 2020, look into each other's eyes, and ask yourselves what have you done for people with Down syndrome? How did you react to the law of aborting fetuses with Down syndrome at any time up until birth? Or in other words, have you ever reacted? Do you, the 48 countries, still want to be silent and let many fetuses with Down syndrome die?

And I have a question with a very clear and explicit answer from the UN:

I urge the United Nations to clearly state the number of chromosomes when referred to the term human, which is repeatedly used in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; in other words, it should be precisely mentioned that how many chromosomes a human must have to be considered human by the United Nations and to be able to defend his/her rights in the context of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Here I quote from about seventy years ago; from the original text of the preface of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted on the morning of December 10th in 1948:

"... WHEREAS the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person ..."

## Reducing oil price would benefit Russia to influence U.S. oil export: energy expert

**1 ➡** Saudi Arabia has increased its oil production despite the Coronavirus bad effect on oil prices. Can this act of Bin Salman affect his own political future and Saudi's economy?

A: Saudi oil resources and oil policies play a primary role in the kingdom's dealings with the outside world. Yet in light of recent international outrage over various Saudi abuses and atrocities, such as the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, the country is focusing more and more on plans for diversification under Vision 2030.

Oil prices will continue to play a significant role in Saudi Arabia's economy, but whether Saudi Arabia can maintain oil prices to provide a steady stream of income, is a matter that must be coordinated with the OPEC, of which it is a powerful member state. Success in this arena will require coordination among the ruling Saudi government, the US, and the other major oil powers.

According to reports, the US has announced that it will be able to supply 80 percent of the world's oil demand through its own shale oil supplies within the next three years. While this may be exaggerated, the US seems intent on keeping oil prices at a level of at least \$55 to \$60 per barrel over the next three years. At this price, Saudi Arabia can be confident over the next few years of a steady income stream from oil.

Oil prices will continue to fall if Saudi Arabia's decision to increase production in



April is implemented. Aramco does not appear to be willing to reduce its market share, and perhaps it will increase production for a certain period of time. The lack of economic production of shale oil will reduce oil production in the US. It may be able to import oil at a cheaper price, but its dependence on imported oil will increase. Even the Trump administration, which has made the slogan of energy independence a pivotal point in its national energy policy, will in effect fail.

Saudi Arabia will be a serious rival in attracting foreign investment to the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, including Iran, in line with the principles and plans

outlined in the 2030 vision plan, and this could spell added tensions in the region.

The principal benefits of the Saudi diversification program, if achieved, are that it would buoy the Saudi economy and decrease the vulnerability of the country to fluctuations in the global oil market. However, the implementation of this large program is dependent on oil revenues and the ability of the country to procure investment from abroad. Saudi Arabia's oil marketing strategy, on the other hand, continues to expand investment in the refineries of countries with demand growth potential, especially China.

The consequences of the sale of part of Aramco, one of the first steps in this process, will likely be daunting to policy-makers, and may intensify internal disputes; yet, the sale of stock could be the beginning of a wave that provides a model for other governments with similar challenges in the region.

Can Saudi's measure affect the country's relation with Russia?

A: Russia's disagreement with cuts in OPEC Plus production could be a good opportunity for Moscow to influence US oil exports. Reducing oil prices to the extent that stopping shale oil production would benefit Russia. An increase in shale oil production has led the US to cut Saudi oil imports as well. If shale oil production is not economical, it would mean lower US oil production - rising oil imports and unemployment in the oil industry. Given Trump's economic growth

during the Trump era, the decline in shale oil production and the closure of shale oil wells will not be good news for the Trump administration. Trump has no desire to reduce his vote in the presidential race. Any economic crisis coupled with the growing impact of the Coronavirus on the US economy is a serious threat to the Trump administration and the upcoming presidential election.

Iran's oil sanction has put Russia in a position to increase its share of the oil market. The Russians are a serious competitor in both the oil and natural gas markets, and the economic boycott is an opportunity for the Kremlin. Moscow is not ready to step back from the market at a time when the United States has become a black gold exporter by producing shale oil. Low oil prices have a direct impact on US shale oil production and supply; in other words, shale oil production is not profitable. Given this slump in price overnight over the past three decades, the Russians will not leave the scene as long as cheap oil does not affect natural gas prices. The Moscow-Riyadh dispute over the market and, ultimately, cheap oil, whatever its impact, will be the major losers in the US oil companies investing in shale oil production. In addition, stopping the downward trend in oil prices will require the end of the Riyadh-Moscow battle on the market, declining production in North America and the result of the global fight against the spread of the Coronavirus.

## 'Russia, Iran, Venezuela can team up to confront U.S., SA triggered oil price war'

**1 ➡** At a time when oil, coronavirus and other oncoming crises require global cooperation and joint action, we are in constant competition, hostility, and conflict in the international arena.

Oil importers should by definition benefit most from the falling prices if we do not count the depression effect of the international trade contraction. The transition from fossil fuels to renewables and greater energy efficiency should not be losing momentum in a low price environment. Our efforts to reinvent the current energy system to create mutual dependency, added value, prosperity, digital and green economy, and to renew the industrial infrastructure built on the back of fossil fuels should continue at full speed.

How did this last crisis break out?

A: OPEC's dominant power, Saudi Arabia, and its allies had decided to apply to the traditional method, namely to cut supply, in the face of the rapid decline of the demand for oil, because of the low economic activity in China and then eruption of the coronavirus.

They brought the cut-off to 1.5 million barrels higher than any previous production reduction to offset the situation with supply abundance and reduced demand. It was envisaged that 1 million barrels would be provided by 13 OPEC countries, with the remaining 500,000 barrels by Russia and its non-OPEC producers.

The rise of renewable energy, the reduction

of costs and the spread of electric vehicles had already begun to erode the future of oil.

When discussing with OPEC at the meeting in Vienna, Russian Energy Minister Novak received a special instruction from the Kremlin: "Do not accept the further cut, come back home". According to what we learned later, it was Igor Sechin, one of Putin's close confidants, and chairman of Russia's biggest oil company Rosneft, who called the shots in this regard in Moscow.

Sechin, who has been against the cooperation with OPEC from the outset, thinks that these cuts will benefit most American shale oil producers and could be instrumental in reducing Russia's market share.

After this discord becoming clear and Russians showing no sign of conciliation, the Saudis sent a message via Aramco to all customers offering a serious discount on prices. They also decided to increase the production level even more.

The result was that the price of oil, which was around \$73 in early January, fell below \$30 during the Black Monday. We witnessed the fastest fall in the history of oil prices.

Is this a deliberate effort to weaken Russia?

A: On that Monday, the stock market wiped out a fortune of \$3.5 trillion - almost four times that of Turkey's GDP. There has been a loss of at least \$130 billion in the value of large international petroleum companies,

such as Shell and BP. We also know that the world's largest oil producer, the USA, has begun using its "energy weapon" with a view to capturing a market share from Russia and Saudi Arabia.

American shale oil producers were already in trouble because of the low prices, their debts grew for a long time, and some of them were on the brink of bankruptcy. After this dramatic decline, there is news now that Trump is considering a package of aid to these companies in difficulty.

Saudi Arabia's current account deficit is getting worse; it urgently needs the injection of fresh money through higher prices. The public offering of Aramco did not go as well as desired, its share value is decreasing. The oil production and processing facilities hit by unmanned aerial vehicles from Yemeni militants also shattered the assertion that this country is risk-free in uninterrupted production.

It is almost impossible for Saudi Arabia to endure low prices for a long time. Maybe a month or two, that's all. At least \$85 a barrel price is required to meet the 2020 budget, which has a deficit of over 50 billion dollars, according to IMF. The Saudi royal family is in turmoil. The King is said to have died or is on his deathbed.

Russia has been under American sanctions for years but continues to resist external pressures despite all its negative economic



impact in the country. I think Russians are better positioned and prepared in this war compared to the USA and Saudi Arabia, and can settle for the \$42 a barrel price level to balance its budget.

My guess is that while the USA, Saudi Arabia, and the Persian Gulf countries can work together in the coming period to influence the markets, Russia can team up with important OPEC producers such as Venezuela and Iran and assume the leadership of non-OPEC producers.

Mehmet Ugutcu is Chairman of London Energy Club, and CEO for Global Resources Partnership. He was a former Turkish diplomat, advisor to the Prime Minister, senior executive of International Energy Agency, OECD and British Gas.



## Coronavirus puts 50 million tourism jobs at risk, WTTC says

The coronavirus epidemic is putting up to 50 million jobs in the global travel and tourism sector at risk, with travel likely to slump by a quarter this year, Asia being the most affected continent, the World Travel and Tourism Council said on Friday.

This impact would depend on how long the epidemic lasts and could still be exacerbated by recent restrictive measures, such as those taken by the U.S. administration on travel to Europe, WTTC's managing director Virginia Messina told Reuters.



File photo depicts foreign travelers posing for a photo opposite the Gate of All Nations in the UNESCO-registered Persepolis, southern Iran.

"Certain measures are not helping and they can prompt the economic impact to be way more significant," Messina said referring to the U.S. decision.

She argued that such policies are too generic and not proven to be effective to contain the virus. She also said that such restrictions could complicate travel by medical experts and delivery of medical supplies.

Around 850,000 people travel each month from Europe to the United States, equivalent to a \$3.4 billion monthly contribution to the U.S. economy, Messina said.

Of the 50 million jobs that could be lost, around 30 million would be in Asia, seven million in Europe, five million in the Americas and the rest in other continents, she projected.

The equivalent to a loss of three months of global travel in 2020 could lead to a corresponding reduction in jobs of between 12% and 14%, the WTTC said, also calling on governments to remove or simplify visas wherever possible, cut travel taxes and introduce incentives once the epidemic is under control.

She also encouraged flexibility in the sector, so that travelers can postpone and not cancel their plans.

The tourism industry accounts for 10% of the world's GDP and jobs.

The WTTC official defended the confinement of certain towns – as is currently happening in Italy and Spain – if health officials recommend it to contain the outbreak, but only in specifically targeted areas or for certain age groups.

Messina estimated that, once the outbreak is under control, it would take up to 10 months for the tourism sector to return to its normal levels.

(Source: Skift)



## ROUND THE GLOBE

### Archaeological Area and the Patriarchal Basilica of Aquileia

Located at the northern end of the Adriatic Sea on the Natissa (Natiso) River, the Archaeological Area and the Patriarchal Basilica of Aquileia are altogether inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

The Roman city dates to 181 BC and became one of the largest and wealthiest cities in the early Roman Empire until it was sacked and destroyed in 452 by the Huns led by Attila.

The city was a major trading center connecting the Mediterranean to Central Europe. Aquileia's wealth and status within the empire was reflected in its magnificent public buildings and private residences many of which survive as archaeological remains.



A view of the Basilica of Aquileia in Italy

The archaeological area, covering 155 hectares, includes part of the forum and its Roman basilica (courthouse), the late antique horrea, one of the sets of baths, and two luxurious residential complexes.

Outside the late Roman city walls, the entire course of which has been located and part of which stills survives, excavations have also revealed a cemetery with some impressive funerary monuments. Below ground archaeological remains of the amphitheater and the circus have also been preserved.

The most striking remains of the Roman city are those of the port installations, a long row of warehouses and quays that stretch along the bank of the river. These were incorporated into the 4th century defenses, substantial traces of which can be seen today.

The dominant feature of Aquileia is the Basilica, erected, primarily, in the early-Christian period. Most of Aquileia remains unexcavated beneath fields and, as a result, constitutes a unique archaeological reserve.

(Source: UNESCO)

# On the track of Iran's 'Assassins' in once impenetrable mountainous castle

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – Nested on top of a hill in **d e s k** a relatively remote village amidst the northern Iran's Alborz Mountains, a well-fortified castle was sheltering the followers of Hasan-e Sabbah (1070–1124), spiritual leader of Islam's heretical Ismaili sect, known as 'Assassins'.

In popular myth, Sabbah led a bizarre, much-feared mercenary organization whose members were dispatched to murder or kidnap leading political and religious figures of the day.

In early 1930s, British-Italian explorer and travel writer Freya Stark described her exploration of the place in her book "The Valleys of the Assassins".

Nowadays, the ruined castle, which is also known as Alamut Castle, is a top travel destination in northeastern side of Gazor Khan Village in the environs of Mo'alem Kalayeh, from the environs of Roudbar of Alamut, Qazvin province.

While approaching the village, you should pass for nearly half along a narrow road surrounded by cherry and pomegranate orchards, until a mass of gray-brown rock looms from distance with fortifications perched atop a summit.

Alamut, which means "eagle's nest", is a geographic region in the western edge of the Alborz range, between the dry and barren plain of Qazvin in the south and the densely forested slopes of the Mazandaran province in the north.

Narratives say that the name Alamut derives from a regional eighth-century king who spied an eagle landing amid its rugged lofty crags and was inspired to build an impregnable fortress.

Sabbah's rule from Alamut (which he renamed City of Good Fortune) is shrouded in mystery and enigma. This is partly because most Ismaili records of the era were destroyed by the Mongols while the writings of their detractors survived.

It is said that Assassins believed that their actions would transport them to paradise. Supposedly Sabbah cunningly cultivated such beliefs by getting his followers stoned on hashish (unbeknown to them) and then showing them beautiful secret gardens.

This gave the sect its popular name 'Hashish-iyun', root of the modern English term 'assassin'. Or so the story goes. Peter Willey's book, Eagle's Nest, gives an altogether more sympathetic version, portraying Sabbah as a champion of the free-thinking, pro-science Islamic tradition and suggesting that the hashish tales were exaggerations designed to denigrate Ismaili Islam.

Whatever the truth, most of the impregnable Ismaili castles were captured by Mongol ruler Hulagu Khan in 1256 using diplomatic trickery, having earlier forced the surrender of the Ismailis' spiritual leader (Sabbah's successor).

The crushing of Alamut Castle was effectively the end of the Ismailis for generations, though believers resurfaced centuries later and now Ismaili Islam is the predominant faith in parts of Tajikistan and northern Pakistan (though not at all in Iran).

The castle was almost forgotten and only returned to public consciousness with the publication of Stark's 1930s travel diary Valleys of the Assassins. A copy of that recently reprinted volume makes a great companion for the trip.

Most visitors -- virtually all Iranian -- regard the gorgeous mountain-rimmed valley as an idyllic weekend retreat. Villages and hamlets dot its floor and sides; corn fields and rice paddies occupy parcels of land between ravines, and irregular terraced plateaus ruffle the valley's picturesque undulating terrain.

In Gazorkhan, snack and tea vendors do a brisk trade beneath the castle's entrance kiosk. A steep trail winds up the hillside past an unfinished hoist to a narrow saddle overlooked by a weirdly eroded slanting crown of rock and cliffs.

Here is a select of comments that visitors to the historical



An aerial view of the ruined Alamut Castle, which stands perched on Alborz Mountains, northern Iran.

fortress have posted to TripAdvisor, one of the most popular travel websites in the world:

#### ■ "Magical place"

The Alamut Castle offers some great views across the Alamut Valley, they are renovating parts of the castle, but already a very worthwhile place to visit. (Bastiaan v. from Utrecht, the Netherlands; Date of experience: September 2018)

#### ■ "Worth taking time to step up the stairs to the summit"

Yes it worth going there but should not be the only visit in Alamut! I met many tourists who just came there to visit the castle only, but it is a big mistake! Before the castle I visited several places which worth more!

I had a tour guide friend who gave me good tips and also he drove me the places! His name is Farzad who has a page as Alamut eagle over here on trip advisor! (Fabian h. from Aachen, Germany; Date of experience: May 2019)

#### ■ "Alamut fortress and its amazing view on the summit"

It took one hour and half from Qazvin to Alamut. The road itself is beautiful with mountain sceneries. It takes 20 minutes to step up the stairs and you are supposed to buy



The Alamut Castle is, according to many of its visitors, worth climbing up some 500 steps.

ticket. The view of Ghazor khan village and horizon from the summit is perfect.

You must know that it is not the only point in Alamut if you have the plan to go there. My guide took me to some amazing lesser known places in Alamut. Not bad to contact him if you are going to have a trip to Alamut. He is helpful to travelers and speaks fluent English. (robinbackpacker from Paris, France; Date of experience: May 2019)

#### ■ "Fantastic view"

It is definitely worth climbing up the 500 steps to this castle for the views. The walk was relatively easy though you can hire a donkey or a horse.

The castle itself is in ruins but the unfortunate feature is the scaffolding that has been put up to give access. There are also rusty tin roofs covering much of the structure making photography almost impossible. (Sus1952 from Palmerston North, New Zealand; Date of experience: May 2019)

#### ■ "Long wonderful daytrip from Qazvin"

Landscape is like no else (don't miss tre 3 canyons!); castles are intriguing; food great; my guide Sohrab the best of my whole travel, kind, knowledgeable and relaxed. (SteveVax from Turin, Piemonte, Italy; Date of experience: April 2019)

#### ■ "Great Tour with Vahid"

I did a day trip to Alamut valley including Alamut castle with Vahid [a local guide] and had a blast! The nature in the valley, the canyons and the views from the castle are absolutely stunning!

Vahid showed me all the good places, stopped whenever I wanted to take some photos and we I was also served very delicious home cooked lunch at a family that runs a guesthouse and restaurant next to the castle.

Vahid also explained a lot about the history of the castle and the region as I didn't have much time to do any research in advance. He's a really funny and knowledgeable guide and he even helped me out to plan my onward journey the next day and helped me catch the right bus from the highway to Tabriz, I highly recommend him!! (enamena from Stuttgart, Germany; Date of experience: April 2019)

## Bagh-e Narenjestan: One of the smallest yet most visited gardens of Shiraz



**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** - Named after the bitter oranges that line the central courtyard, Bagh-e Narenjestan is one of the brilliantly manicured gardens of Shiraz. Bitter oranges are "Narenj" in Persian.

Though it's one of the smallest in the southern Iranian city, the garden is a top tourism destination both for domestic and international sightseers.

The garden is home to an opulently decorated pavilion which is called Naranjestan-e Ghavam; a complex owned by one of Shiraz's wealthiest Qajar-era families.

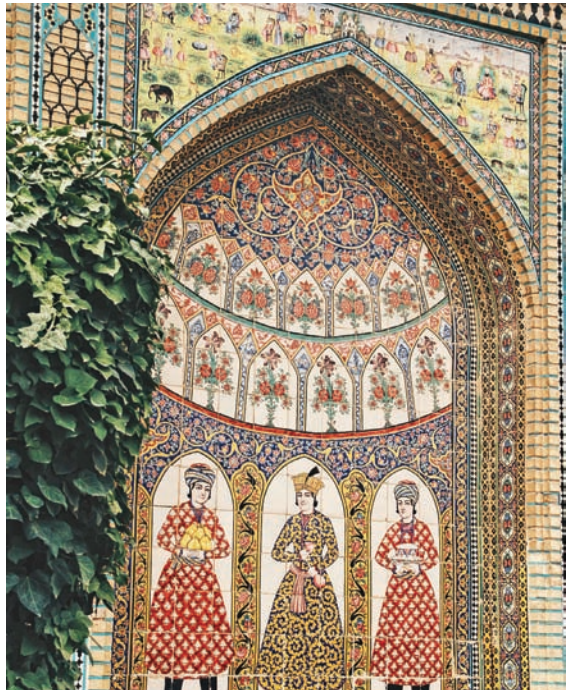
The pavilion's mirrored entrance hall opens onto rooms covered in a myriad of intricate tiles, inlaid wooden panels and stained-glass windows.

Particularly noteworthy are the ceilings of the upstairs rooms, painted with European-style motifs, including Alpine churches and busy German frauleins, according to Lonely Planet.

Built for the wealthy and powerful Mohammad Ali Khan Qavam al-Molk between 1879 and 1886 as the buruni (public reception area) of his family home, the pavilion is connected to the Khan-e Zinat ol-Molk, which housed the family's andaruni (private quarters), by an underground passage (not open to the public).

The basement of the pavilion houses an archaeological collection put together by Arthur Upham Pope, an American scholar who taught at the Asia Institute in Shiraz between 1969 and 1979. There is also an excellent selection of handicrafts for sale in the basement, including miniatures painted on camel bone and tiles inspired by antique designs.

Those looking to take part in the current craze for dressing up in Qajar-era costume can do so at the booth in the corner of the courtyard. Receiving the last rays of the day's sun, the tea house here is a good spot to enjoy the light fading over the garden wall; it also sells delicate tinctures of rose- and pomegranate-flavored jellies.



Shiraz is home to dozens of magnificent buildings, historical sites and scenic landscapes. It was literally the capital of Persia during the Zand dynasty from 1751 to 1794.

## Pentagon halts domestic travel for military due to coronavirus

The Pentagon announced Friday that members of the armed services, Defense Department civilian employees and their family members who are living on or serving at military properties can no longer travel domestically starting Monday, to curtail the spread of the coronavirus.

"The continuing spread of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) necessitates

immediate implementation of travel restrictions for domestic Department of Defense (DoD) travel," according to a Defense Department memo signed by Deputy Defense Secretary David Norquist.

"These restrictions are necessary to preserve force readiness, limit the continuing spread of the virus, and preserve the health and welfare of Service members, DoD civilian

employees, their families, and the local communities in which we live," the memo continues.

The news comes after President Donald Trump said during a televised address Wednesday that travel from Europe to the U.S. would be suspended due to the worsening outbreak, later clarifying that the restriction would not apply to U.S. citizens. The military

has felt the effects of the pandemic, as some branches have begun screening new recruits for the virus and U.S. involvement in certain military exercises has been altered in response to the outbreak.

The travel restriction is slated to last until May 11. Service members may take only local leave during that time, according to the memo.

(Source: CNN)



# WHO says Iran's strategies to control COVID-19 'in the right direction'

**1 →** The government is leveraging the strong national health system and disaster management capacities to respond to the outbreak," says Dr Richard Brennan, WHO Regional Emergency Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Region and mission team lead. "But more needs to be done. We agreed on several priority areas for scale-up with the national health authorities, based on informed experiences in China and elsewhere. We held constructive discussions on ways to advance epidemiological data collection and analysis, which are key to getting a better understanding of the evolution of the outbreak and appropriate control measures.

We are all still students of this new virus, so we need to track its spread closely and

quickly apply proven public health measures, such as early detection, early isolation and treatment, contact tracing, and risk communications. More works also needs to be done to protect health workers," adds Brennan.

"The fight against coronavirus in the Islamic Republic of Iran is ongoing, and everybody in the country is engaged in this response. The right and timely public health measures implemented on adequate scale will make a difference."

Progress has been made in scaling up the number of laboratories that are now able to test for COVID-19 – over 30 laboratories across the country now have the capacity and at least 20 more will be added.

So far, WHO has provided lab testing



kits enough to test at least 110,000 people and seven tons of protective equipment and supplies. Contact tracing is expanding and new sanitarians have opened in Tehran and Qom to care for those who are recovering from coronavirus, so that overburdened hospitals can be decongested.

"Like every affected country worldwide, Iran's health system is being significantly challenged by the outbreak. During the team's mission in Iran, the Ministry of Health and

Medical Education (MOHME) launched a national campaign to control COVID-19. This will emphasize early case detection, contact tracing, isolation, treatment and community engagement.

WHO is working closely with the Islamic Republic of Iran in coordinating and providing critical international support to the country during this outbreak," says WHO Representative in Iran, Dr Christoph Hamelmann.

(Source: WHO)

## To help stem coronavirus, lift sanctions on Iran

By Medea Benjamin, Ariel Gold

The COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic is far from the first proof of how intertwined we are as a global community. The climate crisis and the refugee crisis have long been glaring examples that the wars or CO2 emissions on one continent risk the lives and well-being of people on another continent. What coronavirus is providing, however, is a unique opportunity to look specifically at how the intentional damage caused to one country's healthcare system can make it harder for the entire world to address a pandemic.

The coronavirus started in China in December 2019 and President Donald Trump immediately brushed it off as something limited to China. At the end of January 2020, he banned entry to the United States of people from China but still insisted that the Americans need not worry. It will have "a very good ending for us," he said, insisting that his administration had the situation "very well under control."

Despite Trump's insistence that the medical pandemics can be contained via travel bans and closed borders, the coronavirus knows no borders. By January 20, Japan, South Korea, and Thailand had all reported cases. On January 21, the U.S. confirmed the infection of a 30-year-old Washington State man who had just returned from Wuhan, China.

On February 19, Iran announced two cases of the coronavirus, reporting within hours that both patients had died. By March 13, at the time of this writing, the total number of coronavirus infections in Iran is at least 11,362 and at least 514 people in the country have died. Per capita, it is currently the most heavily infected country in the Middle East and third in the world, after Italy and South Korea.

In the Middle East, coronavirus cases have now been identified in Israel/Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, UAE, Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, and Egypt. If Iran is not able to stem the crisis, the virus will continue to spread throughout the Middle East and beyond.

By the time the coronavirus hit Iran on February 19, the country's economy, including its healthcare system, had already been devastated by U.S. sanctions. Under the Obama administration, the Iranian economy was given a boost when the Iran nuclear deal was signed in 2015 and the nuclear-related sanctions were lifted. By February 2016, Iran was shipping oil to Europe for the first time in three years. In 2017, foreign direct investment increased by nearly 50% and Iran's imports expanded by nearly 40% over 2015-2017.

The reimposition of sanctions after the Trump administration's withdrawal from the nuclear deal in 2018 has had a devastating impact on the economy and on the lives of ordinary Iranians. The Iranian currency, the rial, lost 80 percent of its value. Food prices doubled, rents soared, and so did unemployment. The decima-



CODEPINK protests outside the Treasury Department. (Photo: Medea Benjamin)

tion of Iran's economy, reducing the sale of oil from a high of 2.5 million barrels a day in early 2018 to about 250,000 barrels today, has left the government with scant resources to cover the enormous costs of dealing with direct medical treatment for patients suffering from the coronavirus, as well as supporting workers who are losing their jobs and helping businesses going bankrupt.

Humanitarian aid—food and medicine—was supposed to be exempt from sanctions. But that hasn't been the case. Shipping and insurance companies have been unwilling to risk doing business with Iran, and banks have not been able or willing to process payments. This is especially true after September 20, 2019, when the Trump administration sanctioned Iran's Central Bank, severely restricting the last remaining Iranian financial institution that could engage in foreign exchange transactions involving humanitarian imports.

Even before Iran was unable to procure enough testing kits, respiratory machines, antiviral medicines and other supplies to slow the spread of the coronavirus and save lives, Iranians were having a hard time getting access to life-saving medications. In October 2019, Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a report citing that "the overbroad and burdensome nature of the US sanctions [on Iran] has led banks and companies around the world to pull back from humanitarian trade with Iran, leaving Iranians who have rare or complicated diseases unable to get the medicine and treatment they require."

Among those in Iran who have been unable to get critical medications have been patients with leukemia, epidermolysis bullosa, epilepsy, and chronic eye injuries from exposure to chemical weapons during the Iran-Iraq war. Now coronavirus is added to that list.

On February 27, 2020, with over 100 people in Iran having been infected and with a reported 16% mortality rate, the Treasury Department announced that it would waive sanctions for certain humanitarian supplies to go through Iran's central bank. But it was far too little far too late, as the spread of coronavirus is yet to slow in Iran.

The Iranian government is not without blame. It grossly mishandled the beginning of the outbreak, downplaying the danger, putting out false information, and even arresting individuals who raised alarms. China had acted similarly at the start of the virus there. The same can be said for President Trump, as he initially blamed the virus on Democrats, told people not to practice social distancing, and refused to accept tests offered by the World Health Organization. Today, there are still nowhere near enough tests in the U.S., Trump is refusing to have himself tested despite having been in contact with infected individuals, and he continues to label this a "foreign virus." Neither China nor the U.S., however, have the compounding problems of sanctions that prevent them from obtaining the necessary medicines, equipment, and other resources to address the crisis.

It isn't just Iran that is sanctioned. The U.S. imposes some form of sanctions against 39 countries, affecting over one-third of the world's population. In addition to Iran, Venezuela is one of the countries most hard hit by U.S. sanctions, including new measures just imposed on March 12.

According to President Nicolas Maduro, Venezuela does not yet have any coronavirus cases. However, sanctions have contributed to making Venezuela one of the most vulnerable countries in the world. Its healthcare system is in such shambles that many public hospitals often do not have water, electricity, or basic medical supplies and many households have only limited access to basic cleaning supplies such as water and soap. "As of today, it has not reached Venezuela," President Maduro said on March 12. "But we have to get ready. This is a time for President Donald Trump to lift the sanctions so Venezuela can buy what it needs to face the virus."

Likewise, the Iranian government, which is now asking the International Monetary Fund for \$5 billion in emergency funding to fight the pandemic, has penned a letter to United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres calling for U.S. sanctions to be lifted.

There are sweeping changes President Trump needs to make to seriously address the coronavirus pandemic at home and abroad. He must stop minimizing the crisis and insisting that people do not need to exercise social distancing. He must stop falsely claiming that testing is available. He must stop catering to the greedy, profit-based healthcare industry. In addition, and no less important, the Trump administration must lift the sanctions on Iran, Venezuela and other countries where ordinary people are suffering. This is not a time to squeeze countries economically because we don't like their governments. It's a time to come together, as a global community, to share resources and best practices. If coronavirus is teaching us anything, it's that we will only defeat this terrible pandemic by working together.

(Source: Common Dreams)

## Qatar sends anti-corona consignment to Iran

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — The Government of Qatar has dispatched the first batch of sanitary and medical items to Iran to help the neighboring country fight the coronavirus.

The consignment, weighing more than 5.5 tons, was delivered at Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport on Friday night, IRNA reported.

President Hassan Rouhani, in a phone conversation with emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on February 29, called on the entire nations worldwide to enhance cooperation to overcome the coronavirus outbreak.

"Today, outbreak of the coronavirus has turned into a global problem, therefore, the entire nations and governments around the world should stay with each other to overcome the epidemic disease as soon as possible," Rouhani underscored in his phone call.

He further pointed to traffic of passengers between the two countries and said, "A special health protocol should be drafted based on which we can normalize flights between the two countries."

The Qatari emir, for his part, said, "The Qatari government and people are with the Iranian nation and government. We do not withhold any cooperation and assistance in line with countering the coronavirus."

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.

The number of coronavirus cases in the country rose to 12,729 on Saturday, with 4,339 recovered and 611 dead.

## COVID-19 cases in Iran hit 12,729, death toll at 611

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — The number of people diagnosed with the novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19, in Iran has increased to 12,729, of whom 611 have died and 4,339 recovered so far.

Over the past 24 hours, 1,365 new cases of people having the virus have been identified, Deputy Health Minister Kiyannoush Jahanpour said, ISNA reported.

The highest number of new cases were reported from the provinces of Tehran, Isfahan, and Alborz with 347, 155, and 134 cases, respectively.

Richard Brennan, the Regional Emergency Director of the World Health Organization (WHO) Eastern Mediterranean Region, has said countries in the region and all over the world should use Iran's experience as a role model in fight against the novel coronavirus.

"Iran benefits from one of the strongest healthcare systems in the region. Iran has made notable achievements in the field of battling coronavirus," the WHO official said in a press conference in Tehran on Saturday, IRNA reported.

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

An immunomodulatory drug called "Actemra" in patients with coronavirus in a hospital in Isfahan city has led to a partial improvement of the patient's symptoms in scans, Jahanpour said on Wednesday. The first case undergone trial, and symptoms have declined within 48 hours after consumption, but it is still too early to judge, he added.

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

## WORDS IN THE NEWS

### Malaysian Prime Minister returns

(05 May 2003)

The Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad returns to work on Monday after a two month break before his planned retirement in October. It has given Malaysians a chance to assess his chosen successor Abdullah Badawi, who has been in charge in his absence. Malaysia's leader of twenty-two years, Dr Mahathir Mohamad went on holiday for two months, and behold, **the sky didn't fall on the country's collective head, but it had a good go.** The deputy prime minister, Abdullah Badawi had to **formulate** Malaysia's response to the US-led invasion of Iraq, deal with the outbreak of the SARS virus and keep watch while the courts heard an appeal by his jailed predecessor Anwar Ibrahim. After Dr Mahathir had **raised the diplomatic temperature** with a series of inflammatory attacks on Washington over Iraq, Abdullah **cooled things down** again. The Bush administration had reportedly been prepared to retaliate by telling US businesses to **pull out of** Malaysia. At the first hint of a cover-up over the spread of the SARS virus, Abdullah ordered **transparency** and helped prevent a loss of public confidence in the government's handling of the outbreak, but where Anwar was concerned, there was no sign that Abdullah would use his brief period in charge to forgive and forget. The court sent Anwar back to jail. The deputy prime minister's sprung no surprises. He seems to favour consolidation rather than the **breakneck** drive to development associated with Dr Mahathir. Above all, Abdullah hasn't got to **the brink** of claiming the top job by **upstaging** his boss. If he has anything more exciting planned, it won't be unveiled until after Dr Mahathir's planned retirement in October.

#### WORDS

**the sky didn't fall on the country's collective head:** nothing terrible happened to the country; there were no disasters  
**it had a good go:** it had a good try; tried hard to do so  
**formulate:** decide upon and express in words  
**raised the diplomatic temperature:** created diplomatic tension; caused tension to increase  
**cooled things down:** calmed the situation  
**to pull out of:** to leave; to stop doing business with  
**transparency:** a clear and full explanation of the facts  
**breakneck:** very fast  
**the brink:** the edge; if you are on the brink of something important you are just about to do it.  
**upstaging:** receiving more attention than; if you upstage someone, you draw attention away from them by being more attractive or interesting.

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

### Recent rainfalls not to fully address prolonged droughts: expert

Despite above normal rainfalls the country has received, it cannot be claimed that the long-term droughts are set right, director for flood control and aquifer at Forests, Range and Watershed Management Organization has said.

That's why water management policies must be still drawn up with regard to water scarcity, ISNA news agency quoted Abolqasem Hosseinpour as saying on Saturday.

### بارش های اخیر خشکسالی کشور را جبران نمی کند

مدیرکل دفتر کنترل سیلاب و آبخوانداری سازمان جنگل ها، مراتع و آبخیزداری گفت: پس از بارش های اخیر در کشور، نمی توان ادعا کرد که خشکسالی های بلند مدت ما جبران شده است. ابوالقاسم حسین پور در گفت و گو با ایسنا، اظهار کرد: سیاست های آبی ما همچنان باید منطبق بر کمبود منابع آبی باشد.

### PREFIX/SUFFIX

#### "dextro-, dextero-, dextr-"

■ **Meaning:** right

■ **For example:** A good handyman is skillful, **dexterous** and proficient in whatever it is he is doing.

### PHRASAL VERB

#### Nod off

■ **Meaning:** to begin to sleep, usually when you do not intend to and are sitting somewhere

■ **For example:** I missed the movie because I kept nodding off.

### IDIOM

#### Crest of a wave

■ **Explanation:** If you are on the crest of a wave, you are very successful in what you are doing

■ **For example:** Our company is going from success to success. We're on the crest of a wave right now.



## Iraqis condemn U.S. aggression, warn to expel American army by force

**TERHAN (FNA)** — Different Iraqi groups and figures deplored the recent US attacks against the security forces in Babel and Karbala provinces, warning that they will expel the American soldiers by force if faced by the government's procrastination.

Al-Nahj al-Watani fraction in the parliament condemned violation of Iraq's sovereignty and attacks against the security forces by Washington, warning of extensive consequences of the aggression for security of Iraq and the region.

Also, Na'eim al-Aboudi, a representative of As'aib Ahl al-Haq in the Iraqi parliament called on the government to accelerate measures for the withdrawal of foreign forces from the country.

Meantime, Seyed al-Shohada Brigades, affiliated to Hashd al-Shaabi (Iraqi popular forces), reminded the American army of its retaliatory acts in the past, warning of the group's outrage and wrath.

Also, Hassan al-Ka'abi, the Iraqi parliament's Vice-Speaker, described deployment of foreign forces in the country as illegal after the recent approval of the legislature, stressing the need for the government to end the presence of "occupiers".

The Iraqi military and the presidency condemned the US recent airstrikes against the security forces, 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.

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.

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

Iraqi resistance groups denied such allegations. 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.

## Afghanistan summons UN official over meeting with President's Rival

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — The Afghan Foreign Ministry summoned the United Nations (UN) special representative for Afghanistan to protest his meeting with Abdullah Abdullah, a former official and a rival to incumbent President Ashraf Ghani.

Abdullah has contested the official results of the recent presidential election in Afghanistan, which Ghani won. On Monday, Ghani and Abdullah both held inauguration ceremonies in the capital, Kabul, pressTV reported.

UN Special Representative for Afghanistan Tadamichi Yamamoto held a meeting with Abdullah earlier on Friday.

The ministry said in a tweet that Deputy and Acting Foreign Minister Mohammad Haroon Chakhansuri on Friday "reminded Mr. Yamamoto that the electoral process has reached its end and in accordance with the constitution" of Afghanistan.

According to the ministry, Yamamoto stressed during the meeting that the UN did not recognize or support any parallel government in Afghanistan.

In the election last year, Abdullah was seeking the presidency for the third time, after losing in 2009 and 2014.

Following the 2014 presidential election, Afghanistan was struck by a similar power crisis. Back then, Ghani and Abdullah fought a close and angry race that sparked widespread allegations of fraud and saw the United States step in to broker an awkward power-sharing agreement between the rivals under which Ghani became president and Abdullah became "chief executive".

On Wednesday, Afghanistan's former president Hamid Karzai blamed the US's policies for the current political crisis in the country.

## Ex- Algerian FM Ramtane Lamamra eyed as next UN Libya Envoy, replacing Salame

➔ 7 According to Mr. Djerad, this meeting "will bring a new and important stone to the building" and should also allow "the adoption of important decisions and an action plan for the organization of the inter-Libyan reconciliation conference which will bring together all the parties, all the factions and all the forces in Libya in order to contribute to the establishment of a government of national understanding capable of managing the transition period".

The Prime Minister, also, welcomed the decisions of the last AU summit which "placed the Libyan dossier at the top of the continent's priorities".

Algeria, under the leadership of President Tebboune, is continuing 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.

In addition, Algeria offered to host a reconciliation forum on Libya during a meeting of African leaders discussing ways to end the long drawn-out conflict, while slamming the "unscrupulous" foreign actors of continuing to meddle in Libya's conflict, in violation of commitments made at the international summit held in Berlin this month. Algeria is still attached to the stability of this country, refusing to be kept out of the settlement process, while showing maximum neutrality.

Libya has been riddled with political and military divisions since NATO-backed forces toppled the oil-rich country's former President Col Muammar Gaddafi in October 2011 amid uprisings shaking the Arab world.

The North African country is now beset by a total chaos with two warring powers failing to build a post-Gaddafi Libya stall; one in the east to which general Khalifa Haftar is affiliated, and the Tripoli-based government, which enjoys U.N. recognition and is known as the Government of National Accord (GNA). It is under the leadership of Fayez Sarraj.

The oil-rich country, which was during Gaddafi era a torch of hope with one of the highest standards of living in Africa and a free healthcare and free education, in addition to its strategic position as a key departure point for thousands of migrants travelling to Europe, has been a hotbed for conflicts with myriad armed militias holding sway.

# Nasrallah urges PG nations to help Iran in COVID-19 fight amid U.S. sanctions

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — The secretary-general of the Lebanese resistance movement of Hezbollah denounced Washington's attitude towards Iran amid the Islamic Republic's tough battle against the Coronavirus outbreak, calling on Persian Gulf nations to support Tehran in dealing with the deadly virus.

The Islamic Republic is currently in need of was not the US's help -- apparently referring to Washington's offers of assistance for Iran's preventative measures -- but the removal of the American sanctions, Seyed Hassan Nasrallah said during a televised speech on Friday.

The Hezbollah chief also hailed Iran's observance of the principle of transparency amid the outbreak.

He also criticized some Persian Gulf countries' media outlets for trying to direct attention towards some Iranian authorities' reported affliction with the virus. Nasrallah called such officials, who stand with their people and are infected with the virus amid their efforts to provide service for the nation, a source of pride, according to Press TV.

Nasrallah further criticized the US's avoiding transparency concerning the extent of the outbreak of the deadly new coronavirus.

"We are in the middle of a battle that resembles a world war," he said.

US President Donald Trump and his team have, however, been "the worst liars" when it comes to fighting the new virus, the Hezbollah chief added.



He cited Trump's effort to downplay the risk posed by the virus, and said the US and the UK have been concealing the real number of those infected with the virus.

The virus emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year. It has so far infected over 137,000 people and killed more than 5,000 others.

Nasrallah hailed the Lebanese Health Ministry's transparency in reporting the fig-

ures that concern the outbreak, and said the resistance movement's entire resources and potential were at the government's disposal to be used towards fighting the deadly virus.

Battling the virus now constituted the government's top priority, he said, and noted that confronting the issue was a national duty for all that had to be approached with absolute unity.

Nasrallah called on both his supporters

and opponents to look beyond political, sectarian, and religious differences to tackle the new virus. He warned that the battle against the deadly virus would not be successful and instead would lead to greater losses if the issue was to be instrumentalized for political gains.

Separately, the Hezbollah secretary-general pointed to Lebanon's financial crisis, saying he did not oppose foreign assistance, not even from the International Monetary Fund, as long as the conditions suited the Lebanese people and did not do them disservice.

"Reform, fighting corruption, transparency, and judicial independence are excellent conditions [for a rescue package] that we have asked for," The Daily Star cited him as saying.

Nasrallah also condemned a recent set of deadly American airstrikes against Iraq as violation of the Arab country's sovereignty.

Earlier, the air raids targeted several locations in Iraq, including a recently-opened airport in the holy city of Karbala, killing three soldiers, two police officers, and one civilian.

According to the Iraqi military, four more soldiers, two other officers, another civilian, and five individuals affiliated with Iraq's anti-terror Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) were also wounded in the attacks.

The Pentagon claimed the strikes had targeted five weapons stores used by Iraqi groups that "targeted US forces."

## Ansarullah: 50,000 children die every year in Yemen

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — Yemen's Houthi Ansaruallh movement said the years-long Saudi-led war and blockade on the impoverished Arab country has increased the infant mortality rate alarmingly.

The Ansarullah said Thursday the ongoing Saudi military aggression against Yemen has fueled famine, poverty and diseases, resulting in the deaths of 50,000 children annually, many of whom are under a month old.

Saudi Arabia and its allies launched a deadly military aggression against Yemen in an attempt to reinstall a Riyadh-backed former regime and eliminate the Houthi movement, which has been defending the country along with the armed forces, pressTV reported.

The Western-backed offensive, coupled with a naval blockade, has destroyed the country's infrastructure.

It has also led to the world's worst humanitarian crisis in Yemen, with many children suffering from cholera and severe malnutrition.

Children are among the most vulnerable victims of Saudi imposed war on Yemen. The issue has barely drawn any international response despite numerous reports about child deaths.

Back in February last year, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said tens of thousands of children under the age of five have died of starvation in Yemen ever since Saudi Arabia and a number of its allies launched an atrocious military aggression against the impoverished country.

Also in November, Yemeni Minister of Public Health and Population Taha al-Mutawakel, announced that every 10 minutes, a child under the age of five died from extreme hunger

in the war-ravaged country.

Separately on Thursday, the Spokesperson for the Ministry of Health in Sanaa, Saif al-Hadri, criticized the inaction of international community on Yemen's crisis, saying none of the leading global powers has taken any serious initiative to force Saudi Arabia to lift its economic siege and work towards bringing the war to its end.

He described the situation of Yemen's children as "disastrous in the shadow of war", pointing out that "approximately five and a half million children under the age of five are suffering from malnutrition".

He went on to say "one child dies every ten minutes in Yemen", adding that "80 percent of children in Yemen live in a state of stunting and anemia due to malnutrition".

"Two hundred thousand women of childbearing age or some of them are pregnant or have given birth to malnourished children, which threatens the lives of children," he added.

The Saudi aggression has displaced millions and left 24.1 million -- more than two-thirds of the Yemeni population -- in need of humanitarian assistance, including more than 12 million children.

The US-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization, estimates that the war has claimed more than 91,000 lives over the past four and a half years.

Meanwhile, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) says it is deeply concerned about the continued impact of fighting between Houthi fighters from Ansarullah movement and Saudi-led mercenaries in Northern Yemen.

## Rockets Hit Taji Camp in Baghdad Anew

**ALMANAR** - A fresh spate of rockets targeted an Iraqi base north of Baghdad on Saturday where US-led coalition forces are deployed.

Several rockets were fired at the Taji air base on Saturday, Iraqi and US military officials said.

"The initial toll is two wounded Iraqi Air Defence personnel who are in very critical condition," said Tahsin al-Khafaji, spokesman for Iraq's Joint Operations Command.

A military source said Iraqi security forces had found the launching pad for the rockets, but not the attackers themselves.

The US-led coalition's surveillance capabilities have been impaired by cloudy weather in recent days, which the US official said may have contributed to the attackers' readiness to launch the rockets during the day instead of under the cover of night.

It came three days after a similar attack



on the base killed two American military personnel and a British soldier — the deadliest such incident at an Iraqi base in years.

The US on Friday struck several posts across Iraq, claiming they were for Hashd Shaabi's Kataib Hezbollah. However the strikes killed 5 Iraqi servicemen and a civilian, Iraqi Army said in a statement. President Barham Saleh denounced the attack, with Iraqi foreign ministry summoned both US and UK ambassadors in the country.

## Coronavirus Cases in 'Israel' Climb to 164, Nearly 40,000 in Quarantine

**ALMANAR** — The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the Zionist entity climbed to 164 on Saturday, up 21 from Friday, with nearly 40,000 currently in home quarantines according to the Israeli Health Ministry.

Of those with the virus, two are still in serious condition, 10 are in moderate condition, and four have recovered, the Time Of Israel reported, noting that the Zionist entity has seen no deaths from the virus so far.

Of the 164 confirmed cases, 124 people have been hospitalized with 27 receiving medical care at home. Some 38,000 are in self-quarantine, including nearly 1,000 doctors, more than 600 nurses, 170 paramedics, and 80 pharmacists, according to Health Ministry figures.

Health officials have conducted over 6,800 coronavirus tests nationwide so far, the Israeli daily said citing the Israeli ministry.



Israeli authorities have increasingly imposed stricter measures to halt the pandemic, starting with travel restrictions in February.

Officials are set to announce later Saturday further widespread and stringent directives to try to contain the spread, including transitioning staff at workplaces deemed non-essential to work from home, and further limiting public gatherings and movement, the daily added.

## How media misinforms about Western Role in Middle East

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — Mainstream press and media in the West continue to portray the United States as a supporter of noble objectives such as human rights, freedom and democracy in the Middle East.

With regard to the US-backed and Saudi-led war on Yemen, for instance, the world public is being bombarded by views supporting the priorities of US policy-makers, which is ensuring the status quo in the region. There is only a very small space in some independent media outlets for critical, independent analysis and key facts about US foreign policy and involvement in the conflict. In this respect, there is also little divergence between the democratic and republican press and media.

The Saudi regime under Bin Salman has killed thousands of civilians and has become increasingly repressive at home, jailing tens of thousands of opponents as well as Shia citizens and journalists. During this period, the US government has deepened military, trade and investment with the regime, in effect acting as a sponsor for it.

The lack of reporting is especially striking given that the US government has itself been consistently announcing its support, especially in military relations, for the Saudi regime

in the war on Yemen.

The US has also deepened its military cooperation with Israel, a highly controversial policy while it continues serious human rights abuses and illegal settlement building in the occupied West Bank and Gaza. The US Navy conducts exercises with the Israeli navy and provides military training to Israeli officers.

Yet no media outlet in the West criticises these policies, despite being a threat to regional peace and stability.

When the Israeli warplanes bomb Syria killing and destroying civilian and military objects, which is widely condemned by the United Nations, there is no coverage and criticism in the Western press and media either. Neither is there widespread criticism in the press and media when Israeli warplanes bomb the besieged city of Gaza.

Many aspects of Western governments' relations with Saudi Arabia have also gone under-investigated by the media, despite the special relations between the countries. Saudi Arabia is by far the West's top military and arms purchaser, but various components of this barely exist in the mainstream media.

Inconvenient truths are regularly downplayed or buried

as well. For instance, they never bother to hold the Saudi regime to account for the brutal murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey. While the independent press frequently highlights UN reports about his torture and murder at the Saudi embassy in Istanbul, Western governments remain silent on UN concerns and reports about the criminal conduct.

Western governments' role in the devastating war on Yemen, which began in 2015, has also been notably under-reported. In the first two years of the conflict, few media outlets mentioned the Western role, despite much evidence on this in the public domain, notably from answers by ministers to parliamentary questions, with some noting Western training of Saudi pilots and Western officers' presence in Saudi war operations rooms.

The West's and in particular the US military role goes even deeper in Syria, with training and weaponising various terrorist groups. Their roles in the war on Syria have been distinctly under-reported and mis-reported and have overwhelmingly followed the priorities of Washington which is regime change. While the press and media have widely reported Western military operations against ISIL in Syria, their regime change campaign has received much less attention.



# Wheelchair basketball line-up for 2020 Paralympics finalized

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — International Wheelchair Basketball Federation (IWBF) has announced the name of 12 participating teams at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

Following the conclusion of the 2020 Afro Paralympic Qualifiers, the line-up for the men's and women's wheelchair basketball competition has been finalized.

Algeria men's and women's teams both won the 2020 Afro Paralympic Qualifiers in Johannesburg to complete the field.

In the men's competition, 12 teams will be drawn into two groups of six, playing in a round robin in the preliminary stage with the top four in each group making their way through to the quarter-finals, followed by the semi-finals and final.

First to qualify for the men's competition were the U.S., Canada, and Colombia from the Lima 2019 Parapan American Games. The European Zone were next with Great Britain, Spain, Turkey, and Germany securing their ticket. In the Asia Oceania Zone, Australia, Korea, and Iran are joined by hosts Japan, with Algeria taking the final spot, IWBF reported.

A total of 10 teams will compete in the women's competition, split across two groups of five. They will play a round-robin in the preliminary stage to decide the top four placings in each group followed by quarter-finals, semi-finals and final.

World Champions Netherlands were first to secure their place at the Paralympic Games at the Women's European Championships alongside Great Britain,



Germany, and Spain. Canada and the U.S. were next to confirm their spots coming first and second respectively at the Lima 2019 Parapan American Games. China and Australia topped the Asia Oceania Championships to join hosts Japan.

Finally, it was Algeria who claimed the

last spot from the Afro Paralympic Qualifiers.

The groups will be drawn on March 22 in Tokyo, Japan by representatives from the Japanese Wheelchair Basketball Federation and the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation.

Due to concerns surrounding the trans-

mission of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) attendance at the draw will be limited, and it will not be open to any external guests, team representatives or media, but the draw will be streamed online with live updates via IWBF's and JWBF's social media channels.

## Ronaldinho to get '16kg suckling pig' if he wins prison football tournament



Ronaldinho has had a colorful career to date - but his latest rumored escapade might just be the wackiest of the lot.

The 39-year-old is currently being detained in a Paraguay prison after being arrested for allegedly trying to enter the country with a fake passport.

And according to ABC TV Paraguay, the curly-haired Brazilian could be about to take part in a behind-bars football tournament... with an unusual prize on the line.

It is claimed that the various teams of detainees will be slugging it out for the chance to win a 16kg suckling pig.

The farmyard treat is a far cry from the World Cup, Champions League and LaLiga crowns that he played such a big part in hoisting during his illustrious career.

But despite the huge prize on the line, other reports claim that team captains have spoken to the Selecao legend - insisting that he mustn't be allowed to score if he takes part.

Ronaldinho was branded as "stupid" by his lawyer after being banged up.

His legal rep, Adolfo Marin, insisted that Barcelona's iconic former No10 had no idea that he was doing anything wrong.

He told Brazilian newspaper Folha de Sao Paulo: "The courts have not taken into account the fact that Ronaldinho didn't know he was committing a crime, because he didn't understand he had been given false documents. He is stupid."

And it is even rumored that Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro will get involved to try and free his "friend" Ronaldinho and return him to his home country.

Police were called to the 2002 World Cup winner's luxury hotel last Wednesday after a tip-off he had entered the country hours earlier to attend a charity launch and present his new book with a Paraguayan passport which stated he was a naturalized citizen.

Prosecutors said the passport was requested by a woman before its contents were doctored to include Ronaldinho's photo and full name - Ronaldo de Assis Moreira. His brother had a similar passport.

(Source: The Sun)

## Boston Marathon moved to September from April due to coronavirus



The Boston Marathon, originally scheduled to be held on April 20, has been postponed until mid-September because of the coronavirus outbreak, the city's mayor said on Friday.

The world's most prestigious marathon, which is now due to take place on Sept. 14, generally draws more than 30,000 runners from all over the world ranging from decorated professionals and Olympians to amateur runners.

"Our expectation — and it's an expectation and a hope right now — is that this date will get us to a safer place in relation to the spread of the coronavirus," Marty Walsh said during a news conference.

"Our priority right now is making sure the health and safety of the runners, of the fans, of the medical personnel, first responders, residents of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (and) visitors from around the world."

The Rome, Paris, Barcelona and Rotterdam marathons have all been postponed or canceled, as have the World Half Marathon

Championships in Gdynia, Poland.

The Tokyo Marathon went ahead on March 1 with elite runners only. The London Marathon is currently still on for April 26.

The decision to postpone the Boston Marathon comes three days after Governor Charlie Baker declared a state of emergency in Massachusetts.

The Boston Athletic Association, which manages the Boston Marathon, said it has been meeting regularly with city and state officials to discuss all updates related to the coronavirus.

"On matters of public health and safety we take our guidance from the officials entrusted with protecting the public in this area," BAA chief executive Tom Grilk said in statement.

"We understand our role, along with our partners, in ensuring a safe environment for all participants, volunteers, spectators, and supporters that meets the standards set by those officials."

(Source: Reuters)

## Chelsea's Callum Hudson-Odoi tests positive for coronavirus



Chelsea player Callum Hudson-Odoi has tested positive for coronavirus, the club announced early Friday morning.

The 19-year-old England youngster is the latest football figure to test positive for the virus that has caused sporting event cancellations and suspensions across the globe.

In a statement, the club said: "Chelsea personnel who had recent close contact with the player in the men's team building will now self-isolate in line with Government health guidelines. These will include initially the full men's team squad, coaching staff and a number of backroom staff."

"It is expected that those who did not have close contact with Callum will return to work in the coming days. In the meantime, the men's team building, one of several separate buildings at our training ground, will remain closed. The rest of our training facility, Stamford Bridge and our other facilities are operating as normal."

"Callum displayed symptoms similar to a mild cold on Monday morning and has not been at the training ground since then as a precaution. However, his test came in positive this evening and he will undergo a period of self-isolation. Despite testing positive for the virus, Callum is doing well and looking forward to returning to the training ground as soon as it is possible."

The Premier League will hold an emergency meeting on Friday morning to discuss future fixtures after Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta was also diagnosed with the coronavirus.

"In light of Arsenal's announcement tonight confirming that their first-team coach Mikel Arteta has tested positive

for COVID-19, the Premier League will convene an emergency club meeting tomorrow morning regarding future fixtures," the league said in a statement on Thursday night.

Arsenal's match against Brighton and Hove Albion on Saturday was postponed following the revelation on Arteta.

The Premier League match between Manchester City and Arsenal, scheduled for March 11, was the first Premier

League game to be postponed. Meanwhile, three unnamed Leicester City players are in self-isolation after showing symptoms for the coronavirus, as well as Manchester City defender Benjamin Mendy, according to ESPN sources.

Along with Hudson-Odoi and Arteta, Juventus defender Daniele Rugani and Hannover's Timo Hubers have tested positive.

La Liga, Ligue 1 and Serie A, among others, have announced interruptions in play this week. While in other sports, the NBA and NHL have suspended their seasons while the wildly popular NCAA men's and women's basketball tournaments have been cancelled for the first time in their history.

COVID-19 is a new strain of the coronavirus that has surged around the world in recent months.

The coronaviruses are a family of viruses that cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to more serious respiratory diseases. Flu is caused by a different virus. There is no vaccine for coronavirus, though researchers are working on one and hope to begin testing soon.

Older people, especially those with chronic illnesses such as heart or lung disease, are most at risk. The coronavirus spreads mainly through coughs and sneezes, though it also can be transferred from surfaces.

The best way to prevent infection is by frequent hand-washing, cleaning surfaces with regular household sprays and wipes, and avoiding close contact with people who are sick.

(Source: ESPN)

## Iran's Nazemasharieh nominated for Best National Team Coach in the World

Iran futsal team head coach Mohammad Nazemasharieh has been nominated for the Best National Team Coach in the World.

He will vie with nine other coaches to win the award.

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

### ■ Nominees

(In strict alphabetical order!)

● Albert Canillas Alavés (ESP)  
SPAIN UNDER 19

● Clàudia Pons Xandri (ESP)  
SPAIN WOMEN

● Federico Vidal Montaldo (ESP)  
SPAIN

● Jorge Gomes Braz (POR)  
PORTUGAL

● Marcos "Marquinhos" Xavier Andrade (BRA)  
BRAZIL

● Mohammad Nazemasharieh (IRN)  
IRAN N.T.

● José María Pazos Méndez "Pulpis" (ESP)  
THAILAND

● Wilson Nóbrega Sabóia (BRA)  
BRAZIL WOMEN

● Sergey Skorovich (RUS)  
RUSSIA N.T.

● vRyuji Suzuki (JPN)  
JAPAN UNDER 20

(Source: Futsal Planet)

## Finals cancelled at FIG Apparatus World Cup because of coronavirus

Finals at the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) Apparatus World Cup in Baku have been cancelled because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Two days of finals had been scheduled for this weekend at the National Gymnastics Arena following two days of qualification.

The decision to cancel the finals, set for Saturday and Sunday (March 15), was made after the conclusion of the second day of qualifying.

The FIG has not yet confirmed the move but National Federations in France and Canada revealed the decision on social media. It is not yet clear whether the FIG will use qualification standings as the basis for results from the event, part of the qualification process for this year's Olympic Games in Tokyo.

The cancellation comes after the Azerbaijan Government imposed restrictions on events involving a certain number of participants, which are due to come into effect.

The World Cup in the Azerbaijan capital is the latest to be affected by the outbreak of COVID-19, which has so far killed 5,375 people and infected more than 142,000 worldwide.

Azerbaijan has reported 15 cases of the virus, which has spread to more than 130 countries, and one death.

(Source: Insidethegames)

## Czech Olympic javelin champion Zatopkova dies aged 97

PRAGUE (Reuters) - Czech javelin champion Dana Zatopkova, who won an Olympic gold medal on the same day her husband did in 1952, died on Friday, the Czech Olympic Committee said. She was 97.

Zatopkova won her competition at the 1952 games in Helsinki with a throw beyond 50 meters as her husband, Emil Zatopek, triumphed in the 5,000 meters race - one of the three gold medals that he brought home from the Finnish capital. He also won the 10,000 meters and the marathon races.

Born on the same date and year, Emil and Dana married in October 1948 and remained together until Emil's death in 2000.

"The Czech sport lost one of its greatest personalities," the Czech Olympic Committee said on its website.

Zatopkova added another Olympic medal, a silver, in Rome in 1960. She also won the European championships twice.

## FIFA postpone all World Cup qualifiers for March and April

FIFA have requested that all international matches due to take place in March and April are postponed in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

World football's governing body have reversed the rule that has always forced clubs to release their players for international duty on certain dates.

FIFA have suspended all 2022 World Cup qualifiers due to be held in the next two months themselves.

The measures have been put in place to protect the health of players, coaches, officials and fans across the globe.

FIFA will study the possibilities of rescheduling the qualifiers and trust that, with good will and flexibility, that football will find solutions to the current problems it is facing.

(Source: Marca)

## Japan continues to prepare for Olympics, PM Abe says

TOKYO (Reuters)— Japan continues to prepare to host the Olympic Games in Tokyo this summer, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on Saturday, despite widening concern about the viability of the Games given the global coronavirus outbreak.

Abe also told a news conference that he had not discussed a possible delay or cancellation of the Games, which are due to start in July, in a recent telephone call with U.S. President Donald Trump.



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GUIDE TO  
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Greed is a deadly watering-place and a perfidious bondsman.

Imam Ali (AS)

## Doctors monitoring “Salman Farsi” crew for possible coronavirus exposure: Sima Films

**A R T** TEHRAN — All crew members of the TV series “Salman Farsi” are being checked by a medical team for the new coronavirus and the accessories are being disinfected every day, Sima Films said on Saturday.

The film production studio affiliated with the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) made the remarks in a press release in response to some Persian articles reporting on what it is producing that the crew members of the international project are under the threat of the new virus infection.



A scene from director Davud Mirbaqeri's TV series “Salman Farsi”.

The Iranian House of Cinema and the Cinema Organization of Iran have ordered all cineastes to stop their projects in the line with the government's policies to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Iran's Screen Directors Guild has recently sent a letter to IRIB Managing Director Ali Aliasgari, criticizing the organization for ignoring the measures in the country to slow the virus.

“Undoubtedly, if IRIB will not stop its film projects, you and other IIRB senior managers will be responsible for coronavirus infection or death among the members of the series' crews,” the association noted.

Iran has also canceled all theatrical and musical performances and shut down movie theaters due to coronavirus. The country has also postponed the 33rd Tehran International Book Fair and the 38th Fajr International Film Festival.

Meanwhile, director Davud Mirbaqeri is still continuing the filming of “Salman Farsi”, which is about the life story of the Iranian companion of the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (S), Salman Farsi, on location on Qeshm Island in the Persian Gulf.

The crew is scheduled to leave Iran for Turkey to take scenes of the series in the country. They will then return to Iran to resume shooting on location in the Iran Television and Cinema Town, formerly named Ghazali Cinema Town and Varamin, located 43 kilometers south of Tehran.

## “Khorasaniyat”, new year gift from two legends

**1 →** Although poems have been sung in the Khorasani dialect, the musical setting has been precisely based on the Iranian dastgahs. The second part, especially last composition of the album, is so close to the Khorasan maqami music, which illustrates some parts of Khorasan for listeners.

Listening to “Khorasaniyat”, apart from enjoying the unique voice of master Shajarian, takes you back to the heyday of Aref Ensemble, which is regarded as the watershed of Iran's music. Some unrepeatable works such as “Dastan” and “Nava” were made and released in those years.

This is the second time that after three decades, an album by these two great artists has been released. Earlier, “Tariqe Eshgh” was performed in Paris in 1989 and then released in Iran in September, 2016. It was an amazing collection from Shajarian, Meshkatiyan in Aref Ensemble.

## NEWS IN BRIEF



**Dramatic Arts Center director Shahram Karami steps down**

**A R T** TEHRAN — The director of Iran's Dramatic Arts Center, Shahram Karami, has resigned from his position, Persian media announced on Saturday.

In his Instagram post published on Saturday, Karami said that he quit his job due to some financial and management restrictions on the center.

Karami, who is an award-winning playwright and stage director, was appointed to the post in 2018.

# Comedy film “Motreb” leads Iran’s box office hits of the year

**A R T** TEHRAN — Iranian director Mostafa Kiai's latest comedy film “Motreb” has become Iran's box office hit of the year by grossing 380 billion rials (about \$9 million).

Starring Parviz Parastui, Elnaz Shakerdust and Mohsen Kiai, the film tells the story of a low class singer who is forced to leave his job after Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979.

The movie is followed by Saeid Rustai's acclaimed drama “Just 6.5” with 270 billion rials (about \$6 million).

The comedy films “Texas 2” by Masud Atiabi and “Rahman 1400” by Manuchehr Hadi come next with 250 billion rials (\$5.9 million) and 220 billion rials (\$5.2 million) respectively.

Acclaimed dramas “When the Moon Was Full” by Narges Abyar and “The Warden” by Nima Javidi took the fifth and sixth places.

“Closed Eyes and Ears” by Farzad Motamen, “Four Fingers” by Hamed Mohammadi, “We Are All Together” by Kamal Tabrizi and “Under the Supervision” by Majid Salehi are also among Iran's 10 box office hits of the year.



A scene from “Motreb” by Mostafa Kiai.

## Norwegian author Jostein Gaarder’s “Just Right” published in Persian

**C U L T U R E** TEHRAN — “Just Right, a Brief Story of Almost Everything” by prominent Norwegian author Jostein Gaarder has recently been published in Persian by Tandis Publications in Tehran.

Translated by Mahvash Khoramipour, the 2018 novel is about Albert, who meets Eirin on his first day at the University in Oslo. While the two have never met before, they are both awestruck by their initial gaze at each other.

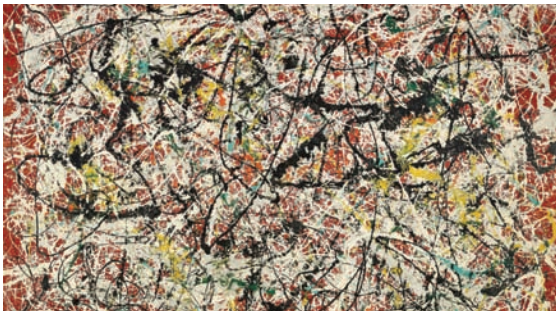
Thirty-seven years later, when Eirin is in Melbourne at a conference and Albert is alone, he grants himself a 24-hour deadline to write down the history of their life together because there are things he must try and understand.

Like his other novels, Gaarder tries to explore philosophical concepts and ideas through the story of the book.

His international bestseller, “Sophie's World”, has also been published in Persian by several publishers.



Front cover of the Persian version of Norwegian author Jostein Gaarder's book “Just Right, a Brief Story of Almost Everything”.



Jackson Pollock's “Mural on Indian Ground” (1950) is preserved at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art.

## TMCA to put treasure trove online

**A R T** TEHRAN — The Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMCA), home to works by many august artists of the West, including Claude Monet, Francis Bacon, Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol, announced plans on Saturday to put images of a selection of its artworks online as part of Iran's bid to entertain people who must stay at home due to the outbreak of the new coronavirus.

“The visitors will be asked to select one item every day from a list provided by the museum on its Instagram page in a poll for the showcase every day for 41 days,” TMCA director Ehsan Aqai said in a press release

published on Saturday.

“At the end, the visitors will have a virtual exhibit whose items have been selected by themselves,” he added.

Moreover, the Visual Arts Office of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance has prepared a podcast in which the history of the art of Iran has been reviewed.

The 20-episode podcast, which is available on the website of the office, reviews several topics such as the history of photography, cartoon and modern art in Iran over the past century.

## European Independent Film Festival picks “Funfair”, “Greyish” from Iran

**A R T** TEHRAN — The 15th edition of the European Independent Film Festival (ECU) has picked “Funfair” and “Greyish” from Iran, the organizers have announced.

The movies will be competing in the Non-European Dramatic Short section of the festival, which will take place in Paris, France from April 24 to 26.

“Funfair” is a short film by Kaveh Mazaheri about

Majid, a young financially struggling man who comes up with a ploy in order to better the life of his wife Sarah.

Directed by Egbal Shirzaei, the animated movie “Greyish” portrays the life stages of an old man as a metaphor for our lives.

A lineup of 90 films from 30 countries will go on screen in different sections of the festival.



A scene from “Funfair” by Kaveh Mazaheri.

## From Eiffel Tower to Moulin Rouge, Paris landmarks close in virus clampdown

**PARIS (Reuters)** — Paris' famed Moulin Rouge cabaret, the Louvre museum and the Eiffel Tower were among top tourism landmarks that closed their doors on Friday after the government banned gatherings of more than 100 people to curb the spread of coronavirus.

The cabaret, known for its high-kicking dancers, and many other venues including cinemas were caught on the hop by the televised lunchtime announcement by Prime Minister Edouard Philippe in response to the coronavirus outbreak.

The Louvre museum, home to Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa and the Venus de Milo sculpture and one of France's biggest tourist attractions, said it would close its doors from 1800 (1700 GMT) until further notice.

The Eiffel Tower will close from 2100 (2000 GMT). Its management said the tower would reopen as soon as health conditions allowed.

But some venues were still unsure on Friday afternoon whether or not they would be taking in spectators, including one cinema in central Paris which said it

was keeping its doors open for now as it expected fewer than 100 people.

Before the prime minister's announcement, gatherings of anywhere below 1,000 people were permitted. But France is stepping up its effort to contain the virus. It is also shutting schools from Monday.

The 130-year-old Moulin Rouge confirmed it would be closed to the public until further notice.

It was offering refunds, or the option of rebooking tickets for another date, a spokeswoman said.

In the meantime, however, the venue in Paris's Pigalle neighborhood, surmounted by a giant red wind mill which has become an attraction in itself, will remain lit up, the spokeswoman added.

“We don't want the Moulin Rouge to lose all positivity and optimism, we want people to still be able to take photos,” she said.

Some of the Moulin Rouge's 450 employees will keep working, repairing costumes, for instance, to be ready to reopen, the spokeswoman said.

## Coronavirus to test U.S. movie theater box office

**LOS ANGELES (Reuters)** — U.S. theater operators moved to prevent the spread of coronavirus and reassure audiences ahead of a weekend with options ranging from satirical thriller “The Hunt” to Pixar animated adventure “Onward” and faith-based film “I Still Believe.”

Ticket sales over the next few days will provide insight into the movie business' resilience during the outbreak, box office analysts said.

The United States and Canada, which comprise the world's largest movie market, had been barely affected while theaters were closed in China, Italy and a few other countries. But concerns about the global virus outbreak hit shares of theater chains this week, with AMC Theatre's down nearly 20%.

The two largest U.S. theater chains, AMC and Cineworld Group Plc's Regal Cinemas, said they had halved their seating capacity to allow more space between moviegoers to prevent virus transmission.

The chains also limited seating in a single theater.

No auditorium will allow more than 250

people, AMC said on Friday, adding that it had ordered additional cleaning of kiosks, restrooms, handrails and other areas and urged anyone feeling sick to stay home.

In the United States, theaters have remained open in times of national crisis including after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks and during World War II.

“AMC remains firmly committed to offering a clean, healthy, entertaining environment every time,” the company said in a statement.

While choices are varied this weekend, new movies will be limited in the next few weeks. Hollywood studios have postponed several upcoming blockbuster action films including James Bond thriller “No Time to Die,” Walt Disney Co's epic “Mulan” and the ninth “Fast and Furious” movie from Comcast Corp's Universal Pictures.

“What's going to happen the next weekend when no big films are on the release schedule, and what happens the weekend after that?” said Jeff Bock, senior media analyst at Exhibitor Relations Co. “I don't know if (theaters) will be able to stay open just because there is no product.”