



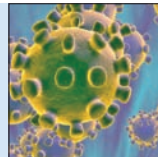
'It is immoral to let a bully kill innocents' **3**



Iran's 9-month non-oil GDP growth at 1.3%: CBI **4**



Iranian boxer Shahbakhsh dreams of winning Olympics medal **11**



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Army stages drills to counter coronavirus



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Agricultural exports exceed \$5b in 11 months

TEHRAN — Iran exported 6.348 million tons of agricultural products worth \$5.204 billion in the first 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019- February 19, 2020), IRNA reported, quoting the director-general of Agriculture Ministry's Export Promotion Bureau.

Over 22.659 million tons of such products worth \$11.648 billion were also imported into the country during the said period, Shahrokh Shajari said.

Watermelon, apple, tomato, potato, onion, and shallot were the top five exported products in terms of weights, according to the official.

In terms of value, fresh or dried pistachios with \$628 million, fresh apples with \$309 million, tomatoes with \$223 million, fresh or dried pistachio nuts with \$194 million and watermelons with \$172 million worth of exports were the top five export products in the mentioned 11 months. **→4**

Guardian Council urges India to revoke discriminatory law against Muslims

TEHRAN — Hadi Tahan Nazif, a member of Iran's Guardian Council, has urged the Indian government to annul a discriminatory law against the Muslims.

In a letter to India's Supreme Court, he said, "The respected colleagues in India's Supreme Court are expected to pave the way for ending discriminatory law against the Muslims."

Anti-Muslim violence started in India amid widespread protests over the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government introduced in December, offering a path to Indian citizenship for six religious groups from neighboring countries, specifically excluding Muslims. **→2**

Iraq military calls for immediate withdrawal of U.S.-led forces

The Iraqi military has called for an immediate withdrawal of all American and foreign troops from the country in accordance with a parliamentary resolution passed earlier this year, and in light of a string of airstrikes carried out by the United States against multiple locations of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), better known by the Arabic name Hashd al-Sha'abi.

On Saturday, the military asked all

U.S.-led forces to act within the resolution and pull out of Iraq.

Iraqi lawmakers unanimously approved a bill on January 5, demanding the withdrawal of all foreign military forces led by the United States from the country following the assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps. **→10**



ARTICLE

Masoud Hossein
Head of the Sport Desk of the TehranTimes

Football to be missed by fans

Football leagues are being cancelled one after another due to Covid-19 outbreak and it's not easy to believe for a football fan who enthusiastically waits for weekend to watch his favorite team's match. It's chaotic.

Domestic football leagues will not be completed because of the coronavirus pandemic, as most of them have been suspended and there is not enough time to reschedule them.

Most of the players and coaches have supported the move to suspend football, insisting that sport shouldn't be at the forefront of anyone's mind as the deadly virus continues to spread.

It can be even tougher for the football-mad Iranian people since watching their team's match is a must on the weekend.

When it comes to the coronavirus, nobody really knows anything right now but it seems the leagues will not be completed.

The Tokyo 2020 Games could be postponed from the summer until later in the year amid fears over the coronavirus and the life would be pretty boring without sports competitions, especially football.

On Friday, the Bahrain and Vietnam Grands Prix were postponed due to the continued global spread of coronavirus.

The death toll from coronavirus infections in Iran has risen to 611, with 12,729 confirmed cases in the country. The all sporting events in the country, which had been already called off until April 2, had been postponed until April 20.

FOOTBALL has always had a unique place among the Iranian people and the postponement of the sport can be really painful for them. The leagues have been shut down since last month and nobody knows whether the Iran professional League (IPL) season will be completed.

Imagine a world without the novel coronavirus, where the fans are excited with approaching the weekend, but they are forced to stay at home instead of going stadiums.

What the world needs is unity, cooperation and common purpose to eradicate global infectious diseases.

The fans have to wait for months to get involved in the game once again. The world will miss football.

Decoding U.S. new behavior in Iraq

By Mohammad Ghaderi

TEHRAN — American terrorists have launched a new round of hostile moves in the Iraqi territory. American troops have attacked Iraq's forces, public places and military bases in a move, which is an obvious violation of Iraqi national sovereignty.

The attacks have clearly carried out against the official Iraqi Armed Forces, which have a determining role in the fight against terrorism, and of course triggered numerous reactions within the country.

In this regard, Iraqi Joint Operation Command issued a statement condemning and denouncing

recent U.S. attacks on the positions of Iraqi forces and resistance groups.

By its movement in Iraq, the U.S. is clearly pursuing a major goal, which is raising the cost of implementing the resolution on expelling U.S. troops. In other words, the White House is trying to improve the situation of its troops to survive in Iraq and eventually in the region, if possible, by flaunting military power. If The U.S. cannot carry out this plan if will a burden cost on Iraq.

The point is that, although the PMF has refused to claim the responsibility for the attacks on American base Camp Taji, U.S. has used these

attacks as a pretext to destroy the Iraqi bases and forces, who are combating terrorism, as Washington considers them as a serious obstacle for carrying out its hostile plans in Iraq.

In addition to the concerns over its future presence in the region, the U.S. is dealing with numerous issues such as "the coronavirus crisis inside the country", "being accused of biological warfare among the world's public opinion" and "eroded insecure presence in the Iraqi territory". Therefore, Washington has put a great deal of effort in its agenda to cover up them and divert public opinion in the country and region. **→7**

COVID-19 less deadly than SARS, spreading faster

By Salman Parviz

TEHRAN — Questions about coronavirus (COVID-19) — how it behaves, who it strikes, and how bad it can get — are spreading almost as fast as the virus itself. The quest to get some answers will take some time before we can come up with reliable statistics.

In six month during 2003, SARS infected a

total of about 8,000 people and killed about 770 in just a few locations: China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Toronto and Singapore, with a handful of cases in a few other cities before it was contained and ran out of steam.

The first positive case for COVID-19 was detected December 1. Just three-and-a-half months later WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic.

What is alarming about this disease is the speed at which it is spreading worldwide. According to WHO website dated March 11, in the past two weeks, the number of cases of COVID-19 outside China has increased 13-fold and the number of affected countries has tripled. WHO reports more than 118,000 cases in 114 countries, and 4,291 people have lost their lives. **→7**

Bin Salman fears oppositions from royal family: Zonis

By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN (MNA) — Professor international political economy believes Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman's fear of the senior royal family is the reason behind the recent detention of senior royals and top officials earlier this month.

Saudi Arabia's reported detention of senior royals and top officials earlier this month has raised a series of questions on what prompted the crackdown.

To many observers, the detentions appeared to be Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's (MBS) latest effort to consolidate power by targeting two of the royal family's most influential members, Prince Ahmed bin Abdul Aziz, the youngest brother of King Salman, and Mohammed bin Nayef, the former crown prince and interior minister.

To shed more light on the issue we interview Marvin Zonis, Professor of international political economy and leadership at the University of Chicago.

■ What are the reasons behind the recent detention of some Saudi princes by crown prince Bin Salaman?

A: Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman clearly anticipates a transition in power from his father to himself. He fears opposition from senior figures in the royal family. How much of that fear is rational and how much reflects an impulsive and paranoid mindset is currently unknowable. **→7**



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NAJA launches face mask, antiseptic production line

The Law Enforcement Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran, abbreviated in Persian as NAJA, has launched a production line for manufacturing face masks and antiseptics in large scale to help the society combat the novel coronavirus outbreak.

The production line's output is around 2,000 face masks and 2,000 bottles of disinfectant liquid.

The number of people diagnosed with the novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19, in Iran hit 13,938 on Sunday, of whom 724 died and 4,790 recovered.



ARTICLE

Afshin Majlesi
Tehran Times journalist

New year travels plunge amid virus outbreak

For many Iranians, the new year's eve conjures up memories of holidays and traveling along dreamy beaches, silky warm seas, lush sceneries, and endless sunshine.

Unlike any previous year, this year its travel market, both domestic and inbound, is taking a big hit over the peak season as coronavirus fears prompt people to stay home.

Moreover, local and government authorities have issued severe warnings recently, urging to limit travel between major cities in order to contain the virus. They also warned that may use "force" to limit travel throughout the country if needed.

Air, rail and road travel markets have been grounded drastically to a screeching halt in the country, at a time when its already battered tourism industry had fallen into tatters largely due to tensions with the United States, its economic sanctions, and propaganda war spearheaded by some Western media.

The last month of the year, which ends on March 19 this year, is the most bustling and booming period for tourism sector because it culminates in Noruz, the Iranian new year. It corresponds with national holidays when the entire country takes on a festive mood, marked by an elaborate set of rituals, family gatherings and travel.

Prior to the virus fears, the sector, however, had managed to stay afloat, if not thrived, before the spread of the disease in this land with endless wonders.

In the face of outbreak, Iranian tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan asked people to postpone or reschedule tours so as to help the tourism industry deal with the coronavirus outbreak.

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

He went on to say that Noruz celebrations will be cancelled in all 31 provinces across the country, including all museums (and historical sites that are affiliated with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts) should be closed during the holidays. **→8**

Jahangiri tests negative for coronavirus

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri has tested negative for coronavirus, according to his office.

In a statement on Sunday, Jahangiri's office thanked the people for their concerns about the health status of the vice president, saying he has recovered from a disease.



"With God's grace and after two weeks, he tested negative for coronavirus and since he has fully recovered, he returned to his office and resumed his job," the statement read, IRNA reported.

As of Sunday, 13,938 Iranians were confirmed to have been infected with the virus. Of this number, 724 have lost their lives.

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.

Ilhan Omar calls for lifting sanctions on Iran amid outbreak

'Sanctions are economic warfare,' congresswoman says

Congresswoman Ilhan Omar has renewed calls for the U.S. to lift sanctions against Iran, as the country's crippled healthcare system struggles to deal with the rapid spread of the coronavirus, the Middle East Eye reported on Friday.

"We need to suspend these sanctions before more lives are lost," Omar said via Twitter on Friday, retweeting an earlier post made by well-known Iranian-American activist Hoda Katebi.

According to Iranian authorities, there have been more about 14,000 cases of the coronavirus - officially known as Covid-19 - and at least 724 deaths, making the Islamic Republic one of the countries worst hit by the virus.

Katebi said her aunt, who is a doctor in Iran, had reported "massive" shortages of medical supplies, including face masks, as the country struggles to deal with the spread of the disease.

"She keeps giving her face mask to other docs bc there aren't enough for everyone. For the love of GOD we need to end sanctions on Iran NOW," Katebi said on Twitter.

The situation in Iran is expected to worsen as Sunday saw the biggest single-day jump in cases since the virus was detected there.

The outbreak has prompted authorities to temporarily release about 70,000 prisoners to contain the spread of the illness, which has now reached all of Iran's cities.

On Friday, Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif has sent a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, asking the international community to "disregard inhuman U.S. sanctions".



"As the #COVID19 ravages Iran, we should recognize that viruses don't discriminate. To fight them, neither should humans," Zarif said, sharing the letter on Twitter.

Seyyed Abbas Mousavi, a spokesman from the Foreign Ministry, later said that some nations had responded positively to the letter, but did not give specific details as to which countries had agreed to provide support.

"After the Twitter posts from Dr. Zarif, a number of countries and organizations expressed their readiness to send medical aid or to provide and sell them to Iran," Mousavi said.

Tara Sepehri Far, a researcher at Human Rights Watch, told Middle East Eye that confusion around U.S. sanction regulations have been a major obstacle in getting humanitarian aid into Iran.

"Even though humanitarian trade is exempted from sanctions, many companies and banks have been worried about engaging with Iran, fearing U.S. secondary sanctions," Far told MEE.

"Given the burden sanctions have already caused on Iranians access to healthcare, we think the U.S. and international community should proactively ensure Iran is receiving the medical supply and relief material they need to combat this very serious health crisis," she said.

Olivier Vandecasteele, Relief International's (RI) country director for Iran, said that the impact of Covid-19 on Iran has been "enormous".

"The streets in Tehran are almost deserted," Vandecasteele said in an RI report on Wednesday.

RI has been working on the ground, partnering with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to help track distributed goods and increase the public's understanding about strategies for preventing the spread of the virus, but U.S. sanctions have created extra obstacles, Vandecasteele said.

"One of the problems for international aid has been to clarify the legal issues related to sanctions to ensure that medical supplies and medicines can be brought into Iran," he explained.

■ 'Sanctions are economic warfare'

Congresswoman Omar had been calling for an end to sanctions against Iran before the start of the outbreak.

"This makes no sense. Sanctions are economic warfare," Omar tweeted in January. "They have already caused medical shortages and countless deaths in Iran.

"You cannot claim to want de-escalation and then announce new sanctions with no clear goal. This is not a measured response!"

Army stages screening drills to counter coronavirus outbreak

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — On Sunday morning, the Iran Army launched a series of preventing-screening exercises to prepare its forces to counter the COVID-19 outbreak across the country.

The drills started in the Shahid Zarharan center upon order by Army Commander Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi to Ground Force Commander Brigadier General Kiomars Heidari.

"The drills are aimed at containing coronavirus outbreak in the country via resorting to combat spirit," Heidari said.

"The drills will currently cover the coronavirus-hit provinces of Qom and Gilan; however, they will finally be staged nationwide," Heidari stated.

"We are to set up screening checkpoints in the mentioned provinces' entrances to test the incoming people," the commander went on to say.

Heidari said sanitizing public places, setting up more rescue and diagnostic centers and field hospitals are also among our missions in the drills.

On Friday, top commanders of the IRGC, Army and police gathered together on how to contain the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, called Covid-19.

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

The commanders reviewed establishment of the base in detail and exchanged views



over its structure in order to activate the headquarters as soon as possible.

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

He said the screening 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 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 coopera-

Human rights necessitates lifting of illegitimate sanctions on Iran: advisor

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — A top advisor to Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said from human rights perspective that removal of "unilateral" and "illegitimate" sanctions on Iran is essential as country is the battling to contain the deadly coronavirus.

"In a situation in which the coronavirus has become pandemic in the world, the human rights necessitates removal of unilateral and illegitimate sanctions against Iran," Mehdi Sanaei tweeted on Saturday.

He added that other countries have responsibility towards the Iranians and must not follow the U.S. sanctions.

Iran is currently battling the world's deadliest outbreak of the coronavirus in the Middle East, where it originated. Iran has denounced the United States for impeding effective fight against the coronavirus through its sanctions, especially medical sanctions.

In a reference to Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran, Zarif has said, "It is immoral to let a bully kill innocents."

On Sunday, the death toll from coronavirus in Iran reached 724. Also, the number of those who are confirmed to have contracted the virus has hit 13,938.

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."

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 the two-page letter as attached photos.

Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani has urged the international community to help lift the "inhuman" sanctions against Tehran by the United States as Iran is in the midst of the campaign to contain the deadly coronavirus outbreak.

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

He urged the international community to adopt "principled" stance for immediate removal of sanctions against Iran, especially ban on medicine medical supplies.

Alaeddin Boroujerdi, a member of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, has said that the countries must not give in to the U.S. pressure and sanctions against Iran.

"The United States has sanctioned Iran, but we are not under sanctions of the [UN] Security Council. So, the countries are not obliged to follow the United States' sanctions," he told ISNA in an interview published on Wednesday.



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

In an article published by Common Dreams on Friday, it is said that the U.S. must lift sanctions on Iran to help stem the coronavirus.

"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," it is said in the article.

"On February 19, Iran announced two cases of the coronavirus, reporting within hours that both patients had 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," the article said.

It added, "If Iran is not able to stem the crisis, the virus will continue to spread throughout the Middle East and beyond."

Iran calls Halabja chemical attack a 'big anti-human tragedy'

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iran's Consul General in Sulaymaniyah Mehdi Shoushtari has said that the Iraqi Baath regime's chemical attack on the Kurdish city of Halabja in northern Iraq was a "big anti-human tragedy".

On March 16, 1988, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein ordered air force to attack Halabja in northern Iraq with chemical bombs, using nerve agents such as VX and mustard gas.

The attack killed between 3,200 and 5,000 people and injured 7,000 to 10,000 more, most of them civilians.

"Undoubtedly, this criminal incident against the innocent people of Halabja by a criminal regime through using chemical weapons manufactured by certain Western countries, which make claims about defending human rights, was one of the biggest anti-human tragedies," he said in

a message to Halabja Governor Azad Tofigh.

Shoushtari also said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran fulfilled its Islamic and humanitarian duty in this respect and supported the people of Halabja. These supports continued in different periods of time during history such as fighting terrorism and extremism."

Preliminary results from surveys of the affected region showed an increased rate

of cancer incidence and birth defects in the years after the attack.

The Halabja attack was part of the Al-Anfal Campaign in northern Iraq. The attack has been recognized as a distinct event of genocide conducted against the Kurdish people by the Saddam regime. The Iraqi High Criminal Court recognized the Halabja massacre as an act of genocide on March 1, 2010.

Guardian Council urges India to revoke discriminatory law against Muslims

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

Tahan Nazif said in his letter that India's Supreme Court must use legal methods to end the discriminatory law against the Muslims. Following is full text of the letter:

In the Name of God
Hon'ble Mr. Justice Sharad Arvind Bobde
The Chief Justice of India,
Greetings and regards,

As your Excellency well know, supporting basic rights and freedoms and safeguarding their human and citizenship rights are among the principal aims and objectives of judicial and constitutional review bodies that supervise laws and regulations approved by parliaments and other bodies. As we and you, at two judicial and constitutional review bodies that supervise parliamentary laws, feel it incumbent upon ourselves to prevent the establishment of norms that



can contribute to the deterioration of people's rights.

Sadly, however, today's images and news coming out of India show the scale of violence used against oppressed Muslims and denial of their very basic rights, including their right to life. This is while India has always been a key supporter of peace in the world and promoted peaceful coexistence of followers of different faiths and ideologies.

Moreover, India is best known for exercise of tolerance and invitation to peace and friendship among Hindus and members of other religious minorities, particularly

Muslims, issues stressed by the country's independence icon Mahatma Gandhi in the diverse and multi-cultural India.

Undoubtedly, the Indian government will take the necessary measures to prevent a religious conflict from escalating. But what our colleagues in India as a friendly and brotherly country can do to end the ongoing protests as well as brutality against Muslims is to reconsider a controversial citizenship law that was ratified by the Parliament of India in December 2019.

It seems that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) is discriminatory as it excludes Muslims from the fabric of Indian society by eliminating their rights to equality and citizenship, which runs contrary to basic human rights principles.

According to articles 1 and 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on December 10, 1948, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. Everyone is entitled to all the rights

and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status". ...

Again, according to article 15 of the same document, "Everyone has the right to a nationality and no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality".

Articles 2 and 26 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the Government of India is a party, also emphasize that "all persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law".

Article 14 of the Indian Constitution attaches importance to equality before law and equal protection of laws as well while Article 15 prohibits discrimination against citizens on the basis of religion and race.

Our respected colleagues in the Supreme Court of India are expected to use the legal methods and procedures enshrined in the Indian Constitution and pave the way for repeal of this discriminatory law against Muslims.

‘It is immoral to let a bully kill innocents,’ Zarif says of Trump’s sanctions on Iran

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Saturday that President Hassan Rouhani’s letter to his counterparts was a warning that the U.S. sanctions is not only putting Iranians’ life in danger but also will pave the ground for a faster spread of COVID-19 to other countries.

“In letter to counterparts Hassan Rouhani informs how efforts to fight COVID19 pandemic in Iran have been severely hampered by U.S. sanctions, urging them to cease observing them: It is IMMORAL to let a bully kill innocents. Viruses recognize no politics or geography. Nor should we,” Zarif wrote on his Twitter account, implying that no government should keep mum on such brutal sanctions on Iran.

In a letter to a number of world leaders on Saturday, President Rouhani said countering the coronavirus outbreak entailed “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 that it was necessary to

counter the U.S. economic terrorism against Iran which was showing its “ugly and anti-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.

A couple of days ago, Zarif 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.”

Runoff parliamentary polls to be held on September 11

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — The runoff parliamentary elections in 11 constituencies will be held on September 11, the deputy interior minister in charge of elections announced on Sunday.

Jamal Orf said the Guardian Council, a body responsible for supervising the elections, has agreed to postpone the elections, Mehr reported.

He said the elections, which were scheduled to be held next month, were postponed due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The first round of the parliamentary elections was held on February 21, when the principlist camp managed to capture a great majority of the seats in the 290-seat parliament.

The independents and reformists came second and third respectively.

A total of 7,148 candidates, including dozens of religious minorities, ran for the parliament.

In capital Tehran, 1,453 candidates competed for 30 seats, all of which were captured by the principlists.



Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli announced days after the parliamentary polls that 42% of people had voted in the elections.

“This was while we had the problem of coronavirus as well as political circumstances and issues such as the downing of the plane, the Aban (November) and Dey (January) incidents,” the minister said.

Meanwhile, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has thanked the Iranian nation for responding positively to the call for participation in the elections.

Addressing a session of advanced Islamic Jurisprudence (kharej-e Fiqh) on February 23, Ayatollah Khamenei expressed gratitude to the Iranians for their turnout in the elections, describing it as another great victory for the nation and another failure for the enemies.

Referring to the widespread negative propaganda by the enemies that aimed at disappointing people from taking part in the elections, the Leader said such propaganda had started a few months ago, and foreign media increased their negative propaganda in the past days under the pretext of the outbreak of a new virus.

U.S. to keep two aircraft carriers to ‘deter Iran,’ says Gen. McKenzie

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — The top U.S. military commander in the Middle East General Frank McKenzie says the U.S. military plans to keep two aircraft carriers in the Persian Gulf in order to deter Iran from taking retaliatory action for an earlier attack against Iraqi forces.

“We’re going to keep them for a while. And I’m not going to comment on exactly how long that will be, because we typically try to avoid talking about tactical operations,” said McKenzie at a Friday news conference in the U.S. defense department, referring to USS Eisenhower and USS Truman warships.

“In response to this attack on an Iraqi base that hosts coalition forces supporting the Iraqi fight against ISIS, we carried out precision defensive strikes to degrade and destroy advanced conventional weapons that have been provided to Kata’ib Hizbollah by their Iranian backers,” he said.

McKenzie further claimed that the attacks were defensive, saying, “I also want to reiterate that these strikes -- these defensive strikes were designed to destroy Iranian-supplied advanced conventional weapons, and that the United States acted in self-defense in response to a direct and

deliberate attack -- a direct and deliberate attack on an Iraqi base that hosts coalition service members.”

Asked whether he was stretching the definition of “defensive,” he admitted that “clearly, dropping a bomb is, in and of itself, an offensive tactical action,” but continued to claim that “in a broader context, these are designed to be defensive strikes.”

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.”

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.

Afterwards, Iran’s Foreign Ministry summoned the ambassador of Switzerland, whose country represents the United States’ interests in Iran, to protest Trump’s unfounded claim that Iran was behind the 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 late on Friday.

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.

On Saturday, however, a fresh spate of rockets targeted an Iraqi base north of Baghdad where foreign troops are deployed, Iraqi and U.S. security sources told AFP, in a rare daytime attack.

According to Al Jazeera, it was the 23rd such attack since late October on installations across Iraq where U.S. troops and diplomats are based, with the latest rounds growing deadlier.

None of the attacks have ever been claimed but the U.S. has blamed the Hashed al-Shaabi, a network of armed groups incorporated into the Iraqi state.

At least 33 rockets hit Iraqi air defense units at the Taji air base on Saturday, the country’s military said, in one of the largest such volleys yet.

COVID-19 likely a biological warfare: Iranian MP

TEHRAN (MNA) — An Iranian lawmaker says the Parliament Security Commission and the Foreign Ministry will address the possibility of a biological warfare behind the outbreak of the new coronavirus in Iran.

In an interview with Mehr News Agency, Mahmoud Navabain, who was elected to the parliament in the Feb. 21 elections, said, “It is highly probable that the coronavirus outbreak is a biological warfare by the U.S.”

He said “should the necessary documents

are attained, we must file a complaint against the United States.”

“We need to reach a powerful stance in the biological field, as we have in the defense and missile sectors, so that the enemy does not dare hurt the Iranian people by biological aggression,” Nabavian stressed.

Earlier this week, Head of Iran’s Passive Defense Organization Brigadier General Gholamreza Jalali said the new virus, also known as COVID-19, in the world can be a

form of biological warfare, though further studies are needed.

“Of course one cannot say for sure that is a biological war but in fact, it has many features of a biological war,” he added.

COVID-19 has so far infected over 156,700 individuals in more than 140 countries worldwide, causing 5,800 deaths and inflicting huge economic losses.

Iran is one of the hard-hit countries with 13,938 infections and 724 deaths.

Rouhani outlined the government’s plans to help people and businesses overcome difficulties in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

These measures include giving cash hand-outs to those with low wages and offering tax and utility breaks of up to three months.

The new coronavirus, called COVID-19, initially emerged in China late last year and is now spreading in Europe and across the Middle East.

724 Iranians killed; 13,938 infected Kianoush Jahanpour, the head of the public relations and information center of the Iranian Ministry of Health, said Sunday the virus had claimed 113 lives in the past 24



hours, bringing the overall death toll to 724.

Jahanpour said that 1,209 fresh cases were added to the number of confirmed infections during the period, bringing the total to 13,938.

“The good news is that more than 4,590 of the overall confirmed cases have recovered” and the patients have been discharged from hospitals, he added.

The official said people should cancel all travel and stay at home so that the situation would improve in the coming days.

Jahanpour called on Iranians to “take the coronavirus seriously” and especially be mindful of elderly relatives who are most vulnerable to the infection.

UAE sympathizes with Iran over coronavirus tragedy

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — The UAE foreign minister has voiced his country’s solidarity with the government and people of Iran in the campaign against the coronavirus outbreak.

Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan made the remarks in a phone conversation with his Iranian counterpart, Mohammad Javad Zarif on Sunday.

Zarif for his part, thanked the UAE for its solidarity and help, saying the coronavirus outbreak is a global issue which needs all countries’ cooperation.

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 deadliest outbreak of the coronavirus in the West Asia region. So far, 724 Iranian citizens have lost their lives and 13,938 persons confirmed infected with the virus.

Zarif and his Azeri counterpart Elmar Mammadyarov also held phone talks on Sunday afternoon over the spread of coronavirus in the region and the wider world. They insisted on the need for collective cooperation by all states to contain the virus.

Zarif, while thanking the Republic of Azerbaijan and its people for sending medical aid to Iran to counter the virus, said the “oppressive and unilateral sanctions” of the United States against Iran are a “great hurdle” in Tehran’s efforts to contain the deadly virus.

Over 1.2 tons of drugs seized in Sistan-Balouchestan

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Iran’s border police have seized 257 kilograms of narcotics from a depot at a border village in Sistan-Balouchestan, a province located in Iran’s southeast.



The commander of Sistan-Balouchestan’s border police has said his forces at the Jakigour border regiment gathered intelligence on a depot of illicit drugs at a border village and discovered that the smugglers had plans to transfer the narcotics into the country, according to Tasnim.

The border police forces raided the depot near the border village of Dazang, said Mohammad Mollashahi.

Mollashahi said a watchman was arrested in the operation and more than 1,257 kilograms of narcotics, including opium and hashish, were confiscated.

The smugglers had camouflaged the depot with plants, the general said. Police and security forces have been quite successful in ensuring security in the province despite its long borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan, harsh weather and vast desert areas.

Iran, which has a 900-kilometer border with Afghanistan, has been used as the main conduit for smuggling Afghan drugs to narcotics kingpins in Europe.

Despite high economic and human costs, the Islamic Republic has been actively fighting drug-trafficking over the past decades.

The country has spent more than \$700 million on sealing its borders and preventing the transit of narcotics destined for European, Arab and Central Asian countries.

The war on drug trade originating from Afghanistan has claimed the lives of nearly 4,000 Iranian police officers over the past four decades.

In April 2019, Iranian Police Chief Hossein Ashtari described Iran as a pioneering state in the campaign against drug trafficking, and said, “We have declared our information and needs to the international organizations but I should say that we have not pinned hope on their aid.”

“We do not have hope that the international organizations can seriously confront” the cultivation and production of narcotics in Afghanistan, General Ashtari said.

British ambassador advises compatriots to avoid panic shopping, learn from Iranians

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — British Ambassador to Iran Rob Macaire released an image on his Twitter page of shelves of a shop in Tehran full of toilet papers in a bid to advise his compatriots to learn from Iranians and stop panic buying for the fear of the coronavirus epidemic.

“Shopping today in Tehran. In case you were worried,” Macaire wrote on Twitter by posting the image below, Fars reported on Sunday.

Food retailers have urged the British public to avoid panic buying, but many are ignoring their advice and have been clearing supermarket shelves of toilet paper, hand soap and tins of beans.

The number of Covid-19 cases in the UK surged to 1,140 on Saturday, with the death toll jumping from 11 to 21.

But the government’s chief scientific adviser has said up to 10,000 people may have been infected without being officially diagnosed.

Panic buying has been rife amid the global spread of the new coronavirus, with consumers around the world stockpiling goods like hand sanitizer, canned foods and toilet paper.

The trend has seen stores ration products, with UK retailers limiting sales of hand hygiene products while Australian shoppers have seen restrictions on the amount of toilet paper they can buy.

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

According to the latest reports, the novel coronavirus, officially known as COVID-19, has infected over 156,700 people in the world, claiming more than 5,800 lives.

The coronavirus death toll in Iran has reached 724. Also, so far 13, 938 persons have been confirmed with carrying the novel coronavirus.

Rouhani rejects rumors about lockdown in Tehran, other cities

TEHRAN (Press TV) — President Hassan Rouhani has dismissed rumors that Iran is planning to put Tehran and other cities under quarantine amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Rouhani also said after a meeting with members of the government economic bureau as well as representatives of the private sector that talks were underway with neighboring countries to facilitate cross-border trade.

“We have no such thing as quarantine at all. There have been rumors that certain jobs and stores in Tehran or some cities will be quarantined. They are not true,” he said.

“There will be no quarantine neither to

day nor during, before or after Nowruz,” he added, referring to the Persian New Year holiday which begins on March 20.

Rouhani also stressed that people are free to pursue their professions as they like, while the government continues to offer its services as usual.

“However, we are doing our best so that the government’s economic activities and services are offered in a way that will keep people at home longer and prevent them from mingling as much as possible,” he noted.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the president said Iran was holding talks with its neighbors to facilitate cross-border trade and transportation of goods.

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	494099.8
IFX	6511.95

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,675 rials
GBP	54,546 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

Agricultural exports exceed \$5b in 11 months

1 → Mentioning the exports of livestock and poultry products, the official noted that 530,000 tons of such products worth \$658 million were exported in the said time span. The fishery sector also exported 113,000 tons of products at the value of \$225 million.



According to Shajari, corn, barley, soybeans, and unrefined sugar and rice were the top imported agricultural products in the country in the mentioned 11 months.

Leading nations must go all out to shore up global economy

The world's worst health crisis in decades is now threatening the health of the global economy as well. The meltdown in virtually all the major equities markets is a sign that things are going from bad to worse. People had long tried to predict what might put an end to one of the greatest bull runs in stock market history; it turns out to be a virus that has jumped species.

Just as China – where the pandemic first started – seems to be recovering, other countries, including the United States, are experiencing a drastic jump in the number of cases. While each country seems to be tackling the health crisis in its own way, they all face an economic downturn that could turn into a worldwide recession. That may be enough to concentrate minds and encourage governments and financial authorities to coordinate their efforts. Though the nature of the current threat is very different, in economic terms, it could be a rerun of the last financial crisis 12 years ago.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, whose member states represent the wealthiest industrialised nations, has revised global growth this year to 2.4 percent from 2.9 percent, with the worst-case scenario being 1.5 percent.

Supply chains have been disrupted worldwide, and consumer demands are being stifled as more countries have put swathes of their populations in lockdown or quarantine. Some central banks have started lowering rates. The US Federal Reserve is expected to funnel trillions of dollars into short-term funding markets after reports of disruptions and malfunctions to the US government bond trading operations because of escalating market volatility.

Though the European Central Bank has not joined the US Fed and the Bank of England in cutting rates, it has announced a package of economic support measures. However, central banks have limited room in exercising monetary policy and cannot be expected to do all the heavy lifting. Major economies including China and the US are considering subsidies and tax cuts. These are in the right direction. Worst-hit sectors such as airlines may need bailouts.

But, just as during the global financial crisis when the US was the first Western country to recover, having triggered it with its subprime mortgage market collapse, China is now seeing fewer cases and slowly trying to restart its industrial capacities. The health crisis may even have strengthened China's hand. Of course, one sure way to end the pandemic is to contain the virus, but its spread may be just starting in some countries. There needs to be coordinated planning to contain the economic fallout. It's time for leading governments and central banks to step up and restore confidence by declaring that they will do whatever it takes to shore up the global economy. (Source: South China Morning Post)

Iran's 9-month non-oil GDP growth at 1.3%: CBI

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iran's gross domestic product, excluding the oil sector, has registered a positive growth rate of 1.3 percent in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21 -December 21, 2019), IRIB reported, quoting the governor of Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

"Total non-oil economic growth for the first nine months has reached 1.3 percent. We all hope that as soon as we overcome the coronavirus [outbreak], we will see continued production boom and positive economic growth," Abdolnasser Hemmati wrote in an Instagram post.

According to Hemmati, the country's

economic performance shows that despite maximum pressure imposed by the U.S. sanctions, Iran's economy has achieved good results in the framework of the production boom strategy outlined by the leader of the Islamic Revolution.

The CBI statistical reports indicate that in the third quarter of the year, non-oil economic growth stood at 3.3 percent and economic growth with oil was 1.2 percent.

The report put the growth for the country's agriculture, industries, construction, and services sectors at 7.8 percent, 7 percent, and 1.2 percent, respectively for the mentioned quarter.

In Early February, Majlis research center



said in a report that Iran's non-oil gross domestic product expected to register a positive growth rate of 1.8 percent in the current fiscal year (March 21, 2019-March 19, 2020).

"Although due to the significant negative growth rate of the oil sector, economic growth in the country will continue to be negative in 1398 [the current calendar year] but oil-free

economic growth is estimated at 1.8 percent for the year," the report said.

The report saw the growth for the country's agriculture, industries, energy, construction, and services sectors at 5.5 percent, 1.5 percent, and 10 percent, as well as 14.5 and 0.5 percent, respectively for the current Iranian calendar year.

Commodities worth \$547m traded at IME in a week



ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Some 417,013 tons of commodities valued at \$547 million were traded at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) during the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday).

As reported by the Public Relations and International Affairs Department of IME, last week, on the domestic and export metal and mineral trading floor of the IME, 142,013 tons of various products worth close to \$203 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 138,253 tons of steel, 760 tons of aluminum, 3,000 tons of coke as well as 3 kg of gold bullion were traded by customers.

The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of the IME, 272,525

tons of different commodities with the total value of \$354 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 105,210 tons of bitumen, 26,345 tons of VB feed stock, 69,518 tons of polymer products, 44,000 tons of lube cut oil, 20,202 tons of chemical products, 690 tons of base oil, 1,900 tons of slaps waxes, 910 tons of insulation, as well as 3,600 tons of sulfur were traded.

Moreover, 2,630 tons of various commodities were traded on the side market of the IME.

IME is one of the four major stock markets of Iran, the other three markets are Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known also as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), and Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX).

'We should mobilize all capacities to pass current condition'



ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Referring to the special condition created in the country because of the coronavirus outbreak, Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani said, "We should mobilize all existing capacities in the country to pass the current condition."

Making the remarks via video conference in a meeting of the ministry's council of deputies, the minister emphasized that his ministry will made all its endeavors to battle the virus, Shata news reported.

Rahmani has also announced that the production of antiseptic products in the country has doubled since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar month (February 20).

According to the official, the ministry has issued new licenses for the companies which have been able to produce such products.

Rahmani has noted that a coronavirus containment headquarter has been established in the Industry Ministry for taking necessary measures for production, distribution and monitoring the markets of health and hygiene products.

In late February, the minister had held a meeting with the producers of health and hygiene products to discuss the supply of such products amid at the coronavirus outbreak.

The meeting was attended by the representatives of the country's major health products manufacturers as well as senior officials including the government's spokesman Ali Rabiei.

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

Iranian banks to offer facilities to compensate coronavirus economic damages

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** – Governor of Central Bank of Iran (CBI) said the banking system is going to offer low-interest-rate facilities to more than four million people to compensate the financial damages resulted from the coronavirus outbreak, IRIB reported.

"Bank loans are set to be paid to four million people at a 12-percent interest rate, of which eight percent is paid by the government and only four percent is going to be paid by the borrower," Abdolnaser Hemmati said.

Speaking on the sidelines of a meeting with the representatives of various economic sectors on coronavirus outbreak, Hemmati noted that the installments of the mentioned loans will be reduced from their cash subsidies every month.



U.S.-China trade truce at risk as virus hits global economy

A hard-won trade war truce between the U.S. and China is at risk as the coronavirus pandemic rocks the global economy, making it tough for Beijing to fulfil its commitments.

The United States also faces huge disruptions from the deadly virus while a diplomatic spat between Beijing and Washington threatens to derail the phase-one deal that came after more than a year of escalating tensions between the world's two biggest economies.

In the pact signed in January, China agreed to buy \$200 billion more in U.S. goods over two years than it did in 2017 - before the trade war erupted and triggered tariffs on billions of dollars of two-way trade.

But concerns are mounting that the conditions of the deal cannot be met as the world economy is threatened by governments taking drastic measures to contain the outbreak, including quarantines, travel bans and closures of public spaces.

"(The coronavirus) is likely to be a huge distraction for both governments," said Steve Tsang, head of the China Institute at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

Global markets have plummeted, oil prices have slid, and the International Monetary Fund warned this week that 2020 growth will drop below last year's 2.9 percent under "any scenario".

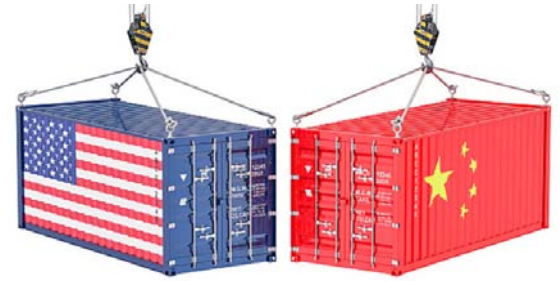
"I would be surprised if they can now fulfil the terms of the phase one deal," said Tsang.

■ Trade plunge

Huge waves of business closures have not only disrupted China's consumer spending and manufacturing but also the world's supply chains.

Companies told AFP the past year has brought disarray first from the trade war, then the virus outbreak.

Qingzhou Ruiyuan Trading Company restarted importing soybeans from the United States this month, but sales were down at least 20 percent from last year, said



the general manager surnamed Li.

He was uncertain how quickly they would be able to boost business once the health crisis is over.

"We're affected by the epidemic, and the impact is rather big," Li said, blaming a drop in domestic demand.

"We can't control the market."

China's exports plummeted in the first two months of this year on the back of the new coronavirus, falling 17.2 percent from a year ago, while imports slipped 4.0 percent.

The virus threatens "China's import commitments as mandated by the phase one trade deal," said Rory Green, economist at research firm TS Lombard.

China has agreed to buy more U.S. farm commodities and seafood, manufactured goods such as aircraft, machinery and steel, and energy products.

But there are provisions "to allow a delay in compliance, and both nations are likely to accept this, given the global nature of the coronavirus outbreak," Green added.

"There is now no chance of China fulfilling its import targets within the timeframe set by the text of the agreement."

■ Distrust

The U.S. economy is also taking a hit from the virus, with the government introducing sweeping restrictions

on arrivals from Europe and huge stock market falls.

Diplomatic tensions between the U.S. and China have also flared up during the outbreak.

Washington ordered Chinese state-run media to cut the number of Chinese nationals employed in the United States after Beijing expelled three Wall Street Journal reporters.

The two countries have also sparred over the pandemic, with a U.S. ban on arrivals from China angering Beijing.

More recently, Washington blamed Beijing for the disease and China - where the virus was first detected in December - promoted conspiracy theories that it started in the United States.

"I doubt that either has considered fully the implications (that) the measures taken to counter the spread of the virus have for their bilateral relations," said Tsang.

But he said that given the upcoming U.S. election, President Donald Trump was unlikely to highlight any failure by China to meet all the terms of the deal.

Instead, Trump will use the agreement to score political points.

But the trade war has fueled distrust among farmers in both countries that could undermine the deal's success.

In the Federal Reserve's latest "beige book" survey, some U.S. farmers said purchases of agricultural goods by China had "not yet materialized" and expressed worries that the virus "would be used as an excuse for missing future trade targets".

Liu Lingxue, general manager of agricultural trading firm Guangzhou Liangnian, said her profits have fallen by at least a third during the virus outbreak.

But she does not want to import sorghum and soybeans from the U.S.

"We would first consider other countries that have been friendlier to China," she said.

(Source: CNA)

Iranian fuel stations disinfected daily against covid-19

ENERGY TEHRAN — Iranian fuel stations, especially in high-risk areas of the country, are being disinfected on a daily basis to prevent the spread of coronavirus, Shana reported citing the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC).

NIORDC had earlier announced in a statement that in order to protect the public health, all fuel station operators are required to do the filling operation for drivers otherwise supply them with gloves and disinfectants to refuel their cars themselves.

Following the outbreak of covid-19 in Iran,

which spread rapidly among the residents of the capital, the Fire Department of Tehran made arrangements with the Municipality of Tehran to disinfect public and crowded places.

Firemen have been working tirelessly to sanitize subway stations, bus rapid transit (BRT) vehicles and stations, food and vegetable markets, holy shrines and religious sites, the central railroad station, Tehran's grand bazaar, hospitals, the Tabiat Bridge, and the Vali-e-Asr street which is 18 kilometers long.

The number of people tested positive for the coronavirus in Iran exceeded 13,938 on



Sunday after detection of 1,209 new cases.

The death toll from covid-19 outbreak in the country has also risen to 611. Meanwhile,

more than 4,590 coronavirus patients have recovered from the respiratory disease and discharged from hospitals so far.

Natural gas is now truly a global market

With all the drama around crude oil right now natural gas has moved outside the spotlight but there are some interesting developments there as well, and a lot more positive than what is happening in oil. The natural gas trade is beginning to shape a truly international market.

As LNG trade intensifies, traders are being offered a growing variety of derivative instruments to trade in, Bloomberg's Mathew Carr, Stephen Stapczynski and Anna Shiryayevskaya wrote this week.

Open interest in the Japan-Korea Marker, or JKM the benchmark for liquefied natural gas delivered in northern Asia, has increased threefold in the past 12 months, Bloomberg's authors noted, reflecting a boom in the LNG trade but also a flourishing spot market that is driving the internationalization of natural gas trade.

The spot market evolution was a result of the expansion in LNG suppliers. The United States and Australia are perhaps the most prominent but there are also emerging LNG producing and exporting nations in Africa, with Canada also staking a claim in the LNG market. At the same time, more receiving terminals are being built to take in the increased supply, further feeding the evolution of an international gas market.



Almost a third of all LNG trade last year took place on the spot market, Shell said in its latest LNG Outlook. This is encouraging for the internationalization of trade in the commodity, according to analysts who spoke to Bloomberg, and that's despite the price slump that's hurt gas producers' profits and cast a shadow over new liquefaction capacity investment decisions.

What's even better for the global natural gas trade is that it is separating itself from crude oil. Even though most of the natural gas trade is done under long-term contracts with prices linked to crude oil benchmarks,

the emergence of a vibrant spot market has driven a divergence between oil and gas. This was most recently demonstrated by the fact that the JKM remained largely unchanged this week while oil crashed with a bang, Bloomberg's authors pointed out.

All this doesn't mean that this nascent natural gas market is without its problems. The growth in paper trading that suggests a maturing commodity market is certainly a good sign. The price depression, however, is not such a good sign because it is also depressing trade.

Here, LNG had the same fate as oil: the coronavirus that effectively closed China for business, as one industry executive said, affected both the oil and gas trade severely.

"China is effectively closed for business as it relates to long-term contracts right now," says Omar Khayum, chief executive Annova LNG, a project yet to be completed in Texas.

But it is not just China. There is a global glut of natural gas and even though Shell expected the market to rebalance by next year, it couldn't anticipate the blow the industry will receive from the COVID-19 epidemic.

The JKM dipped in February amid the worst of the epidemic in China. It has since rebounded but, according to Platts Analytics,

the spread of the virus to South Korea and Japan, which together account for almost 33 percent of global LNG demand, puts future demand at risk, too.

This is where the relatively new nature of the gas market becomes evident despite all the progress made thus far. There is no gas OPEC to step in and curb production to prop up prices.

There is an organization of gas exporters. It's called the Gas Exporting Countries Forum and involves a dozen countries, led by Russia, Qatar, and Iran. The list of members also includes Nigeria—Africa's top LNG producer—Egypt, which has recently staked a claim in the international gas market with several discoveries, and Libya.

However, this organization has so far made no hint that it is interested in acting in concert to control gas prices. The reason: the international gas market is not as developed as the international oil market, according to analysts. Yet as we saw, thanks to LNG, it is developing and maturing. We might someday see the equivalent of OPEC in gas, and this will be perhaps the clearest indication the international gas market has caught up with the oil market and has become a truly mature global market.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Aramco's 2019 profit falls 21%, plans to adjust capital spending

Oil giant Saudi Aramco 2222.SE on Sunday posted a 21% decline in 2019 net profit due to a drop in oil prices and production, and said it plans to "rationalize" capital spending in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

This was Aramco's first earnings announcement after it listed in December in a record \$29.4 billion initial public offering (IPO) that valued the company at \$1.7 trillion.

Its shares fell below the IPO price last week for the first time, as oil prices crashed after the collapse of an output deal between OPEC and non-OPEC members which led to an oil price war between Riyadh and Moscow.

Aramco CEO Amin Nasser said in a statement the oil giant has taken steps to rationalize planned capital spending in 2020 following the coronavirus outbreak.

"The company expects capital spending for 2020 to be between \$25 billion and \$30 billion in light of current market conditions and recent commodity price volatility. Capital expenditure for 2021 and beyond is currently under review," Aramco said in a statement.

Brent crude futures last traded at \$33.85 per barrel on Friday, down from about \$64



when Aramco listed its shares.

Despite a drop in income, Aramco said it paid a dividend of \$73.2 billion in 2019 and intends to declare a cash dividend of \$75 billion in 2020, paid quarterly.

Aramco, which is 98 percent owned by the Persian Gulf kingdom, reported a net profit of \$88.2 billion in 2019, down from \$111.1 in 2018.

Analysts had expected Aramco to post a net profit of 346.6 billion riyals (\$92.6 billion) in 2019, according to an estimate of 15 analysts polled by Refinitiv.

(Source: Reuters)

Russia faces 2020 budget deficit of 0.9% of GDP at current oil prices

Russia's budget deficit could reach 0.9% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020 at current oil prices, Finance Minister, Anton Siluanov told the upper house of parliament on Saturday.

The country's economy has been hit by a slump in global oil prices and the spread of the coronavirus, with the minister saying the latter was having the bigger effect as it complicated transportation, tourism and trade.

Russia previously expected a 2020 budget surplus of 0.8 percent of GDP, but budget revenues from oil and gas at current prices are set to decline by about 2 trillion roubles (\$27.7 billion) compared with previous estimates, Siluanov said.

"With the current prices for energy resources, we will have a deficit of up to 1% of GDP. We estimate that it will be at 0.9% of GDP," the minister said, adding that all budget obligations would be met.

Russia has a rainy-day National Wealth Fund (NWF) made up of oil revenues accumulated in previous years. It is part of Russia's sovereign



reserves and held 8.2 trillion roubles (\$113.5 billion), or 7.3% of the country's GDP, as of March 1.

The country will spend 600 billion roubles from this fund in 2020, including on a previously disclosed state plan to purchase a 50% + 1 share in Sberbank, the country's largest lender, from the central bank.

Siluanov added that the finance ministry expects oil companies to add 500 billion roubles to the fund this year. (\$1 = 72.2650 roubles)

(Source: Reuters)

Could the oil price collapse drive more investment into renewables?

Low oil prices will test the resolve of the majors' energy transition plans, but analysts expect the companies' long-term commitments to decarbonization and renewable energy to remain intact.

A dispute between Russia and Saudi Arabia has sent a flood of cheap oil and gas into global markets just as the COVID-19 pandemic is stifling demand.

This market dislocation comes at a time when European oil majors including Shell, Total, Repsol and BP are embarking seriously down a path toward emission reductions and the diversification of their businesses into renewables, e-mobility and other energy services.

Oil companies have been notoriously slow in pivoting their businesses toward cleaner energy sources. Will the current market storm change that? Might it even accelerate the transition?

"The argument that has often been put forward is that they can't invest in renewables because renewable projects offer much lower returns than oil and gas projects. That argument no longer holds at \$35 per barrel," Valentina Kretzschmar, director of corporate research at Wood Mackenzie, told GTM.

"Average returns from oil and gas projects are now the same as renewables projects and, in fact, renewables projects are much lower risk. Already, we have seen companies like Occidental cutting dividends by 90 percent. It's a discretionary spend," she added.

By that same token, the current headwinds for oil companies could mean a negative impact on carbon-reduction measures that would also be considered by the



industry as discretionary spending.

The upside for renewables

The oil and gas sector currently accounts for just 2 percent of investment in renewables, according to Wood Mackenzie. So a slowdown in the near term would not derail the flow of finance to solar and wind projects.

This isn't the first time that oil prices have suffered a shock. During such "black swan" events, many types of diversification strategies are used to protect against commodity prices, said Luke Fletcher, senior analyst for investor research at the environmental reporting nonprofit Carbon Disclosure Project.

"Traditionally, the integrated companies had their 'downstream' to mitigate against low oil prices," said

Fletcher. Essentially, low oil prices mean the profit margin for converting that into motor oil or other products is higher.

"In the future, having exposure to other diversified energy assets, such as renewables, could provide a bit of a hedge against oil price volatility as well. They have fundamentally very different cash flow profiles and are obviously less reliant on oil and gas and other commodity prices," Fletcher said.

While some oil companies may choose to trim capex in the energy transition in the immediate term, others may choose to signal their longer-term strategy and double-down on diversification across the broader energy sector.

As oil companies are hit hard by the price collapse, cost-cutting will dominate, and companies with weaker balance sheets will be more concerned with survival, Kretzschmar said.

Yet longer-term strategies to expand revenue streams in the power sector are not likely to be shelved.

"One thing is clear: The energy transition is not going to go away," said Kretzschmar, pointing out that this week's UK budget announcement had climate change woven throughout. "It's still a key priority for the government."

With that in mind, Kretzschmar warned against business as usual for oil companies.

"The sector is already very much unloved by investors, and it's only going to get worse. I would like to see the oil and gas sectors starting to seize opportunities in the megatrend that is the energy transition. Because there are opportunities. It is a growing trend, and the pressures to transition and to tackle climate change are only going to increase."

(Source: greentechmedia.com)

India increases fuel taxes in a bid to shore up revenue

India has increased taxes on petrol and diesel in a desperate attempt to increase government revenue at a time when tax collections have fallen amid the weakest economic growth in over six years, with the coronavirus impact yet to come.

The excise duties on the fuels, which have been hiked by 3 rupees per liter, is expected to result in up to 400 billion Indian rupees (\$5.42 billion) increase in annual revenue, a senior government official told Reuters.

Taxes on petrol and diesel, which account for more than a third of retail fuel prices, are one of the biggest sources of income for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, which has more than tripled revenue from taxes on fuel since first coming to power in 2014.

The excise duties on petrol and diesel contributed nearly 1,420.3 billion rupees (\$19.24 billion), or nearly 11 percent of total tax revenue for the year ended March 2019.

The move comes at a time when India is staring at the highest ever tax collection shortfall, as corporate and income tax collection for this fiscal year is set to fall for the first time in at least two decades and the goods and services tax revenue could see a gaping shortfall.

Indian opposition parties have criticized the Modi government for their high fuel tax policy amid a decline in rural consumption, but economists have praised the move as fiscally prudent.

"This balance by the government is a good strategy. This also helps the state shore up some revenue for other useful expenditures," said N.R. Bhanumurthy, economist at the government-backed National Institute of Public Finance and Policy in New Delhi.



India stopped controlling petrol prices in 2010 and diesel prices in 2014, linking them to global crude markets in a bid to ease pressure on government finances and improve the earnings of oil refiners.

Global oil prices posted their biggest week of losses since the 2008 global financial crisis, rocked by the coronavirus outbreak and efforts by top exporter Saudi Arabia and its allies to flood the market with record levels of supply.

The national hike translates to a 4.8% increase in diesel prices, and a 4.3% hike in petrol prices in India's capital New Delhi, compared with Friday's prices. Petrol was sold at 70 rupees a liter, while diesel was sold at 62.74 a liter on March 13. (Source: India Times)

S.Korea's Feb U.S. crude imports down 2.4%; total crude imports down 11.6%

South Korea's U.S. crude oil imports in February fell 2.4 percent from a year earlier and its total February crude imports dropped 11.6 percent year-on-year as the spreading of the coronavirus in South Korea has dented fuel demand, customs data showed on Sunday.

U.S. crude imports were 1.59 million tons in February, or 402,434 barrels per day (bpd), compared with 1.63 million tons a year earlier, according to the customs data. The United States ranked as South Korea's No.3 crude supplier after Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.



South Korea's imports of U.S. crude have increased amid the end of U.S. sanction waivers in May 2019, which stopped South Korea purchasing Iranian crude oil, mainly condensate, or an ultra-light form of crude oil.

The country's Iranian oil shipments have remained zero for a tenth consecutive month.

In total, South Korea's February crude oil imports dropped 11.6% year-on-year to 11.61 million tons, or 2.94 million bpd, according to the data.

The drop in crude oil imports comes as South Korea is coping with the region's biggest coronavirus outbreak outside of China with more than 8,000 cases.

SK Energy, South Korea's top refiner, said in early March that it would lower its crude distillation units' (CDU) operations by 10-15 percent in March as exports and domestic demand have been hit by the coronavirus outbreak.

Crude oil shipments from Saudi Arabia, South Korea's top crude oil supplier, were 3.19 million tons in February, or 806,220 bpd, down 19.9 percent from 3.98 million tons a year earlier.

In the first two months of the year, the world's fifth-largest crude oil importer shipped in 24.03 million tons of crude oil, or 2.92 million bpd, down 6.2 percent from 25.60 million tons during the same period a year earlier.

The country's final crude oil imports data from state-run Korea National Oil Corp (KNOC) is due later this month.

(Source: Reuters)

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Oil min. holds phone talk with Russia's energy min. on reducing oil output

TEHRAN, Feb. 20 (MNA) -- Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh held a phone conversation with the Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak on Thu. with regards to the cooperation of the two countries within the framework of OPEC Plus.

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Selling Arms to Saudis is crime against Humanity

TEHRAN (FNA) — The United Nations should call on the US and its allies to stop selling weapons to Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners who have waged an unjustified war on Yemen. It is crime against humanity under international law and UN Charter.

The UN has a responsibility to call on the US and other Western governments to cease selling arms to the warmongers and urge the international community to do more to stop nations actively producing and selling weapons in the conflict zones of the Middle East. The Western governments have now issued many permits to arms manufacturers to export weapons or military technology to Saudi Arabia and its regional partners.

They have been in near-perpetual conflict for nearly ten years now, not just with Yemen but also Syria. The UN has already warned that these conflicts are causing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in the region, displacing millions of people and putting millions of civilians at risk.

The world body is currently monitoring the deteriorating human rights situation in Yemen and Syria that has been the product of the war launched by the Saudis or their proxy forces. The UN had warned the multiple failures of the states – in administration, justice and security – are facilitating mass violence with impunity in these war-torn countries. The time is now to tell them stop exporting arms to



their terror proxies as well.

The diffusion of arms in the region should be considered a crime against humanity, and the world community should urge the world, including the UN Security Council, to do more to pressure the Western nations transferring arms to the terrorist groups.

What solutions exist to stop the spread of weapons, end violence and its tragic consequences in Yemen and Syria, which actively poses a threat to regional peace and security, results in millions of deaths and refugees and precipitates humanitarian catastrophes?

The international community, notably the UN Security Council and the European Union, must hold Riyadh and its allies which are actively aiding and weaponizing terrorist groups accountable, and pressure them to cease these practices in the conflict zones, including Iraq. The diffusion and transfer of weapons by the US must also be considered to be a crime against humanity in Syria.

The US government claims its export licences are only issued after thorough assessments on whether arms will be used to breach human rights or any of US interna-

tional obligations. If there is an overriding risk that the weapons could be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of humanitarian law, the US says it will not issue an export permit.

The US has, however, refused to say what it is exporting, to whom, and for what purpose. Requests under freedom of information law for such details have always been refused. The US knows that it is violating human rights law.

Human Rights Watch, Oxfam and Save the Children have all called for greater transparency on US arms sales. They have also criticized the US and its allies for training and fuelling Saudi warplanes that bomb schools, markets and hospitals in Yemen.

The UN should put an end to this criminal practice, as well as arms exports to the Middle Eastern countries. In this volatile region, the intent behind the exports of US and Western weapons and the practice of violence by terror proxies has never been democratic in nature, much less for freedom and establishment of peace.

Today, millions of US weapons circulate in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, including heavy machine guns, rocket propelled grenades, and surface to air missiles. We all know that they are being used exclusively against civilians and those who are fighting the Saudi-Israeli-American terror proxy groups. The time has finally arrived for the UN to put a cap on this criminal practice and to save lives.

Iraqi parties, politicians condemn U.S. airstrikes against multiple PMU positions

By Zahra Mirzafarjouyan

TEHRAN (MNA) – The recent US airstrikes against multiple locations across the country have caused a lot of reaction among Iraqi politicians and parties and have faced a wave of condemnation.

The United States has carried out a series of airstrikes against multiple locations of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), also known as Hashd al-Sha'abi, only a day after more than a dozen of the Iraqi fighters were killed by airstrikes targeting an area in Syria's eastern province of Deir al-Zour.

The early Friday US airstrikes were carried out about 24 hours after at least 18 PMU fighters were killed in air raids targeting an area southeast of the city of al-Bukamal in eastern Syria and near the border with Iraq.

That deadly attack was conducted hours after the US-led military coalition announced that three of its personnel - two Americans and one Briton - had been killed in a rocket attack on Iraq's Taji military camp, located some 30 kilometers (18.6 miles) north of Baghdad.

Following the recent US airstrike against multiple locations across the country, Iraqi President, Foreign Ministry, and some other groups and parties reacted, condemning the aggression of US forces.

In this regard, Iraqi President Barham

Salih condemned the airstrikes, stressing that such attacks are a violation of national sovereignty and a systematic weakening of the country's capabilities.

According to the statement released on Friday, the Iraqi President called on the international community to respect Iraq's national sovereignty and its decisions.

Iraq's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also summoned the US and British ambassadors to Baghdad in response to Washington's recent aggression against the headquarters of Hashd al-Sha'abi.

Fatah Alliance, a political coalition in Iraq also reacted to the US aggression, stressing that there is no solution except the withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq.

It also emphasized that Washington's intention is to destroy Iraq's infrastructure, saying that the recent US attacks represent an egregious, overt and repeated aggression on the Iraqi people and armed forces.

Condemning the US attacks on Iraqi military and civilian positions, the leader of the Sadr movement Muqtada al-Sadr called for restraint and for the spread of peace in all areas of Iraq and the abandonment of violence.

The spokesman of Kata'ib Hezbollah called the US attack on the headquarters of Hashd al-Sha'abi in line with its efforts to undermine the legitimate resistance of the Iraqi people to the American occupiers, stressing that the United States is seeking



to bolster its presence in Iraq by all means.

Al-Nujaba Islamic Resistance also reacted to US aggression by issuing a strong statement, saying, "The United States continues to commit crimes and attacks on the headquarters of Hashd al-Sha'abi, the Iraqi army and Karbala civilian airport by its illegal occupier forces in Iraq."

"Continuation of American stupidity and arrogance will lead to a conflict in the region where the rules of conflict will

change," it added.

In reaction to Friday airstrike, Leader of the National Wisdom Movement of Iraq Seyyed Ammar al-Hakim also called on the government to defend its sovereignty in the face of US aggression.

He also condemned the US airstrike against multiple locations across Iraq, warning that Iraq will become a place for political and military conflict during these invasions.

COVID-19 less deadly than SARS, spreading faster

1 → From the time of this report WHO has made the assessment that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic. However, "90 percent of the cases are in just four countries, and two of those – China and S. Korea – have significantly declining epidemics," the report added.

According to TIME magazine's March 14 report Italy is second on the list, with 21,157 cases, 1,441 deaths and 1,966 recoveries. Iran is third on the list with 12,729 cases, 611 deaths and 2,959 recoveries.

During a Wednesday news conference in Berlin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the "consensus among experts is that 60 to 70 percent of the population will be infected" since there is no immunity for the virus. About 1,300 people have been infected with novel coronavirus in Germany as of Wednesday, but only three deaths have been reported.

We simply do not know if it will slow during the summer months, as some respiratory viral infections do.

If it does, "be ready for at least a second wave in the fall, following the path of the 1918 influenza and the 2009 influenza", says Timothy Sly a Canadian epidemiologist while talking to Macleans magazine.

The worst-case scenario, writes Sly, is to allow the virus to enter a population and circulate, some people will die, while the majority will acquire immunity, finally bringing the pandemic to a halt.

■ Important factors

Seriousness, in the context of an infectious illness, is assessed by a combination of factors. The "case-fatality rate" (CFR) is the risk of dying if you have the condition or mortality rate. For example, dandruff has a CFR of zero, Ebola ranges from 25 percent to 90 percent, and rabies is essentially 100 percent fatal. Seasonal influenza comes in around 0.1 to 0.2 percent, or one to two deaths expected per thousand cases. According to the recent data, confirmed by WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus CFR for COVID-19 is 3.4 percent, more than the previous estimates of 1.4 and 2 percent.

Fatality rates also vary based on age. No deaths



The World Health Organization called the COVID-19 viral disease a pandemic Wednesday. Here, workers in Spain place a medical mask on a figure that was to be part of the Fallas festival in Valencia. The festival has been cancelled over the coronavirus outbreak. (Photo: Alberto Saiz/AP)

occurred in nine or younger, but cases for those aged 70-79 carried eight percent fatality, and those aged 80 and older with a fatality rate of 14.8 percent. The rate was 49 percent among critical cases, and among those with pre-existing conditions to between 5.6-10.3 percent depending on condition.

A second key factor is the rate at which an infection spread to others. That's the "basic reproductive number" (BRN), an estimate of how many secondary infections

can be expected from an average primary case. A BRN greater than one predicts continuing growth, less than one predicts the outbreak will die out, while a BRN equal to one suggests continuous low-level disease – an endemic. A BRN for SARS for instance was between two to five, diphtheria, four to five, and measles nine to 18. More than 10 estimates for the COVID-19 have been calculated ranging from 1.7 and 3.3.

A third key factor is incubation period (IP). In a research published in the journal Eurosurveillance, one of the most detailed estimate of the IP of COVID-19, the researchers studied 88 people who had been confirmed positive for COVID-19 virus, and found the average incubation period was 6.4 days, with the range from 2 to 11 days.

Before jumping into conclusions there are doubts about the number of cases reported worldwide are accurate. Exact numbers of "confirmed" cases is not possible to find out at any given time but the numbers will be more refined with time.

■ COVID-19 vs other epidemics

How the coronavirus compares to SARS, swine flu, Zika and other epidemics. While some of those examples were deadlier, they were far more limited in scope.

COVID-19 is not as deadly as SARS epidemic of 2003, which killed about ten percent of the 8,098 confirmed cases of the respiratory illness.

It is also far less deadly than the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, or MERS, which killed 34 percent of 2,500 since it was first reported in 2012 in Saudi Arabia.

With a mortality rate (CFR) of 3.4 percent, COVID-19 is more severe than 2009 outbreak of H1N1, or Swineflu which infected between 700 million to 1.4 billion people with mortality rate of 0.02 percent.

In 2015-16 more than 500,000 cases of Zika virus were reported with 18 deaths. Zika has been linked to a spike in birth defect microcephaly. It is transmitted through mosquitoes while COVID-19 is spread through respiratory fluids such as saliva or mucus. That is why it is so important to cover your mouth when coughing and cover your face when sneezing.

Decoding U.S. new behavior in Iraq

1 → Bombarding the PMF positions, targeting civilian airports and repeatedly violating Iraqi sovereignty and territorial integrity are among the measures Americans are taking to create insecurity and obstruct the establishment of a steady government in Iraq.

However, in the eyes of national and international public opinion, the Donald Trump administration is regarded as a "secretive" system, which has not presented any transparent and accurate information over past few months about of the issues raised.



Lying about the assassination of the commanders of the resistance movement, secrecy over the casualties of the Iranian missile attack on Ein al-Assad airbase and the facts about U.S. spy plane crash in Afghanistan's Ghazni city, and more recently releasing inaccurate information about the coronavirus outbreak in the U.S. are all the reasons that has caused the Trump administration be challenged by public opinion.

Accordingly, given the fact that no group has so far claimed responsibility for the attack on Camp Taji, the new round of U.S. military actions seems to be a pre-designed plan to the White House escape the deadlock it has stuck in because of its blunders.

Bin Salman fears oppositions from royal family: Zonis

1 → But given his policy making — his insistence on continuing the Saudi war in Yemen causing such catastrophe there and the murder of Jamal Khashoggi — I suspect this is a product of his brutality and impulsiveness.

■ Can such a measure pave way for him to grab the power in the country as king?

A: I would not call it "grab power" since he is the accepted Crown Prince. But it looks as if he has succeeded in taking all the various security services under his control and should easily become King upon his father's death.

■ What is the US and generally speaking the west's approach toward this issue?

A: President Trump has a special alliance across the Middle East with three leaders: President Erdogan, Prime Minister Netanyahu, and the Crown Prince. He is willing to excuse almost any of their behaviors — certainly their policies within their own countries. So, not surprisingly, no criticism from him on the Crown Prince's strike against others in the Royal family.

Mahir Abuaskar: Israel imposing harsh conditions on Palestinian patients

TEHRAN (FNA) — Mahir Abuaskar, Palestinian activist, says Israeli hospitals impose "harsh conditions" on Palestinian patients, and at the same time, overcharge the Palestinian Authority for their inadequate medical services.

In an exclusive interview with FNA, Mahir Abuaskar said, "By its two-tier system of laws, rules, and services that Israel adopts for the two populations in areas in the West Bank [...] it actually provides preferential services, development, and benefits for Jewish settlers. [...] Israel is promoting life in the settlements while in many instances stifling growth in Palestinian communities and even forcibly displacing Palestinian residents."

He further added the cut in the US and international aids to Palestine has made major financial crisis, which has significantly affected Palestine's health sector, namely PA's inability to maintain hospitals and save the facilities.

Mahir Abuaskar is a Palestinian activist and economic expert based in Finland. He has managed many projects in the health sector in Jordan, Kuwait and Finland. He is also a fundraiser for Palestine's only cancer treatment hospital.

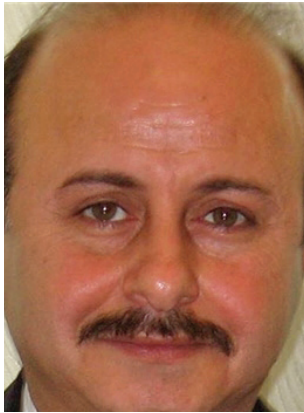
Below is the full text of the interview:

■ The United States has cut its aid to Palestine. How has this affected Palestine's health sector?

A: The US's decision to cut funding to hospitals serving the Palestinians has major adverse effects. It would cause the "collapse" of Augusta Victoria and St. John's Eye Hospitals, two of the medical centers in the East Jerusalem network. The Palestinian government is trying hard to save the facilities, but it is facing a severe financial crisis after deep cuts in international aids, mainly from and the United States. This has degraded health sector services in Palestine to a significant extent; for instance, Palestine has witnessed a noticeable increase in cancer cases, from 1073 cases in 2000 to 2536 in 2016 in the West Bank alone, and 59.1% of these cases appeared among the youth age group between 15 and 64 years.

■ Israel claims it serves Palestinian patients at its hospitals. How do you find these medical services?

A: Israel provides different treatment of Jewish settlements to Palestinian communities throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. By its two-tier system of laws, rules, and services that Israel adopts for the two populations in areas in the West Bank under its exclusive control, it actually provides preferential services, development, and benefits for Jewish settlers while imposes harsh conditions on Palestinians. Israel is promoting life in the settlements while in many instances stifling growth in Palestinian communities and even forcibly displacing Palestinian residents. On the other hand, Palestine's Ministry of Health now requires patients not to be referred to Israeli hospitals. The decision followed Israel's withholding of \$138 million in tax revenue owed to the Palestinian Authority.



Coronavirus: airlines face meltdown as global travel bans multiply

The international travel industry faces a widespread shutdown over coronavirus fears after airlines announced new flight reductions and more countries introduced travel bans and isolation requirements.

Travel businesses were hit with multiple doses of bad news on Saturday and Sunday, with the U.S. expanding its Europe travel ban to include the UK and Ireland, a number of South American countries bringing in flight restrictions and Australia joining New Zealand in requiring all people entering the country to self-isolate for 14 days.

American Airlines, the second biggest in the world, said on Saturday that it would start implementing a phased suspension of nearly all long-haul international flights from Monday, amid reduced demand and travel restrictions due to the ongoing coronavirus outbreak.

The cruise industry also suffered another setback when two ships were placed in quarantine in Chile after an elderly British man aboard one of them tested positive for the coronavirus, the health ministry announced on Saturday.

The U.S. government said on Saturday that it would "immediately" begin working on ways to help the coronavirus-hit aviation and cruise industries as they scramble to stem losses and protect jobs.

The crisis facing the industry has been accelerated by the latest extension of the U.S. ban on incoming travel, with U.S. vice-president Mike Pence announcing at the White House on Saturday that British and Irish travellers would also be barred from entering the U.S. for 30 days.

At the same press conference, Donald Trump revealed that he had taken a test for the virus, with the White House later revealing that he had proved negative.

In Spain, the wife of prime minister Pedro Sanchez has tested positive as her husband formally declared a state of emergency over the coronavirus. Spain is now the fourth-worst affected country in the world after it recorded more deaths to take the total to 196. Sanchez said the country would be placed in lockdown for two weeks and ordered people to stay at home unless they had to buy food or medicine or go to work or hospital.

The outbreak also worsened in the UK on Saturday with the total of deaths nearly doubling from 11 to 21 amid continued controversy about whether the government's policy aimed at creating "herd immunity" from the disease would work or not.

Around the world, varying measures of control continued to be imposed on populations from the Philippines, where the capital Manila was in the process of being sealed off, to Argentina where flights from countries badly hit by the virus have been halted.

The prospect of a shattering blow for the airline industry was foreshadowed by the Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, as he announced that all international passenger arrivals from midnight Sunday would be legally required to self-isolate for 14 days.

The flights would dry up "very, very quickly", he said, and set up serious concerns for the country's \$3.5bn cruise industry by adding that passenger ships from foreign ports would be banned for an initial 30 days.

Even before the new curbs were announced, the chief executive of British Airways told staff that the airline was in a "fight for survival".

U.S. Treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin said the government would "immediately" start working with Congress to support the afflicted industries.

The U.S. restrictions on travel to the UK and Ireland will begin on Monday at midnight, Pence said. Most non-U.S. citizens who have been in those countries within the last 14 days will be barred from entering America. The restrictions do not bar flights to and from the U.S., and Americans and permanent residents can still travel.

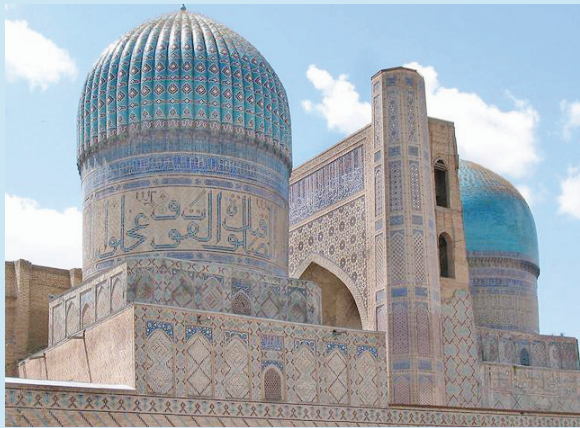
(Source: The Guardian)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Samarkand: Crossroads of cultures

The historic town of Samarkand, located in a large oasis in the valley of the Zerafshan River, in the north-eastern region of Uzbekistan, is considered the crossroads of world cultures with a history of over two and a half millennia. Evidence of settlements in the region goes back to 1500 BC, with Samarkand having its most significant development in the Timurid period, from the 14th to the 15th centuries, when it was capital of the powerful Timurid realm.



A view of the Bibi-Khanum mosque and mausoleum in Samarkand

The historical part of Samarkand consists of three main sections. In the north-east there is the site of the ancient city of Afrosiab, founded in the 7th century BC and destroyed by Genghis Khan in the 13th century, which is preserved as an archaeological reserve. Archaeological excavations have revealed the ancient citadel and fortifications, the palace of the ruler (built in the 7th century displays important wall paintings), and residential and craft quarters. There are also remains of a large ancient mosque built from the 8th to 12th centuries.

The major monuments include the Registan mosque and madrasahs, originally built in mud brick and covered with decorated ceramic tiles, the Bibi-Khanum mosque and mausoleum, the Shakh-i-Zinda compound, which contains a series of mosques, madrasahs and mausoleum, and the ensembles of Gur-Emir and Rukhabad, as well as the remains of Ulugh-Bek's Observatory.

(Source: UNESCO)

New year travels plunge amid virus outbreak

→ 1 Deputy tourism minister Vali Teymouri said earlier this month that more than 700 billion rials (over \$16 million) have so far been paid back to people who have cancelled their tours or hotel reservations over the coronavirus fears.

Teymouri also thanked "dear compatriots" and tourists for their cooperation with the "family of the tourism industry" in the country; those considering the special economic conditions of the tourism operators and hoteliers at this recessionary time, postponing the travel plans for a later time.

The coronavirus outbreak has pushed the country's death toll past 600 till Saturday and triggering new limits on people's movements. Some 13,000 people have so far confirmed infected by the COVID-19 – including several senior government officials testing positive.

Iran has also suspended schools and banned spectators from stadiums. The streets and markets are still crowded in the capital, Tehran, which has been the hardest hit by the virus.

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 is expected to be the most affected continent, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council.

Many travel officials, tour operators believe that Iran will make a quick rebound as soon as the virus is defeated. The impact would depend on how long the epidemic lasts by recent restrictive measures.

Because Iran has never ceased to attract tourists from around the world as it's home to hospitable people, and hundreds of historical sites such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasahs, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which



Firefighters prepare their fogging machines to disinfect a street against the new coronavirus as people watch, in western Tehran, March 13, 2020. (AP Photo/Vahid Salemi)

24 being World Heritage sites.

Last year, Iranians made 74 million overnight stays in their domestic trips during the Noruz holidays, which showed a 20 percent increase year on year. Some 132 million visits to tourist attractions were registered during the mentioned period, which shows a 34 percent growth year on year, according to data compiled by the

Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

The Islamic Republic was ranked the third fastest-growing tourism destination in the globe in 2019, with 27.9 percent growth year on year, according to the latest statistics released by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Some eight million foreign nationals visited

Iran since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019) despite U.S. sanctions and a sharp decline in flights by some foreign airlines.

The country expects to reap a bonanza from its numerous tourist spots. Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, it aims to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025.

‘Museums for Equality: Diversity and Inclusion’ chosen as 2020 Intl. Museum Day motto

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – “Museums for Equality: Diversity and Inclusion” was selected as the motto of the 2020 International Museum Day as organizers look to hammer home the message of joint understanding, cooperation and peace.

Each year since 1977, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) has organized International Museum Day on May 18 or around this date, to represent a unique moment for the international museum community.

The theme “Museums for Equality: Diversity and Inclusion”, according to organizers, aims at becoming a rallying point to both celebrate the diversity of perspectives that make up the communities and personnel of museums, and champion tools for identifying and overcoming bias in what they display and the stories they tell, the ICOM website reported.

By choosing this topic, ICOM stresses the potential of museums to create meaningful experiences for peoples of all

origins and backgrounds, which is central to their social value.

“As agents of change and trusted institutions, there is no time like the present for museums to demonstrate their relevance by engaging constructively in the political, social, and cultural realities of modern society. The challenges of inclusion and diversity and the difficulty of navigating complex social issues in increasingly polarized environments, while not unique to museums and cultural institutions, are important ones, due the high regard in which museums are held by society.”

The objective of International Museum Day is to raise awareness about the fact that, “Museums are an important means of cultural exchange, enrichment of cultures and development of mutual understanding, cooperation and peace among peoples.”

To mark the occasion in Iran, heritage museums and historical sites are traditionally offering free entry on the International Museum Day.

Arts of ancient Iran: Axe inscribed with the name of King Untash-Napirisha

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – The pictured Iranian hatchet inscribed with the name of Untash-Napirisha is dedicated to the goddesses Ishnikarab and Kiririsha.

The object was found in Tchoga Zanbil, in the temple of Ishnikarab near the great ziggurat consecrated by the king to Inshushinak and Napirisha.

It is currently kept at the Louvre museum in Paris.

This type of weapon, with the axe blade emerging from the mouth of an animal - usually a lion - is in keeping with the tradition in the early 2nd millennium BC. An electrum figurine of a wild boar decorates the side of the hatchet.

Famous for his victorious campaigns against Babylon, King Untash-Napirisha dedicated many weapons in stone and precious metals to Elamite divinities, the principal ones being Inshushinak, Napirisha, and Kiririsha, according to the Louvre's Department of Near Eastern Antiquities.

Ishnikarab is associated with these three divinities. Although the feminine character of Ishnikarab has been questioned, she would appear to have been the wife of Inshushinak.

In making his gift, the king placed himself under the protection of the two goddesses, Ishnikarab and Kiririsha. At the time, the unification of the upper and lower regions was uncertain, and the unity of the Elamite empire fragile. The inscription of the sovereign's name on this object in



Elamite was an assertion of the linguistic identity of the kingdom, which formed one of its underlying foundations. These offerings suggest the warrior nature of Kiririsha.

King Untash-Napirisha founded a new religious capital, Al-Untash Napirisha (present-day Tchoga Zanbil), on the road linking the two principal centers of the kingdom, Anshan and Susa. In the middle of this "holy city" was a small temple dedicated to the goddess Ishnikarab. Untash-Napirisha built a temple next to it dedicated to Kiririsha, as well as one to



A poster for the 2020 International Museum Day

Some Three million historical objects are currently being kept in Iranian museums which are affiliated with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

Cruises and the coronavirus: what travelers need to know

As the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the State Department continue to urge Americans to avoid cruise ships, and with a ban on much travel from Europe set to begin on Friday, the cruise industry reversed course this week and began suspending sailings.

On Wednesday, Viking said it was temporarily suspending operations of river and ocean cruises, for embarkations taking place between March 12 and April 30. On Thursday, Princess Cruises announced it was voluntarily suspending all 18 of its ships for two months; the company has canceled departures scheduled between March 12 and May 10.

“It is our intention to reassure our loyal guests, team members and global stakeholders of our commitment to the health, safety and well-being of all who sail with us, as well as those who do business with us, and the countries and communities we visit around the world,” Jan Swartz, president of Princess Cruises, said in an emailed statement.

Two of the company's ships, the Diamond Princess and the Grand Princess, have been quarantined, with numerous passengers becoming infected.

Also on Thursday, Virgin Voyages, part of Richard Branson's Virgin Group, announced it would postpone the launch of Scarlet Lady, its first ship, to July 15 and reschedule the maiden voyage to August 7. The much-buzzed-about Miami launch had originally been scheduled for March.

“The current global health crisis is understandably making many people rethink upcoming travel plans. While there have been no health concerns on our ship Scarlet Lady, the Virgin Voyages team has engaged future sailors and travel partners as we all navigate this challenging moment together,” said Sir Richard Branson and Virgin Voyages Chief Executive Tom McAlpin in a joint emailed statement.

The cruise lines had continued to sail even after advisories from the C.D.C. and the State Department.

“Recent reports of Covid-19 on cruise ships highlight the risk of infection to cruise ship passengers and crew,” the C.D.C. said in its advisory. “Like many other viruses, Covid-19 appears to spread more easily between people in close quarters aboard ships.”

The State Department, in its advisory issued on Sunday,

said that American citizens, particularly those with underlying health conditions, “should not travel by cruise ship.”

The State Department also issued a Level 3 advisory, or Reconsider Travel, for global travel on Wednesday night.

The warnings came after the leaders of the top American cruise companies met with Vice President Mike Pence on Saturday and agreed to work with the Department of Homeland Security, the Coast Guard and the C.D.C. to come up with new policies to help contain the coronavirus in the coming days.

According to a spokesman for Carnival Corporation — Princess's parent company and the world's biggest cruise company — the two-month service suspension will only apply to Princess sailings. The company's other brands, which include Carnival Cruise Line, Holland America Line and Cunard, enhanced their health-screening protocols to include thermal scans and temperature checks before boarding and onboard, and were in conversation with the C.D.C., the World Health Organization and other health officials.

(Source: The New York Times)

Over 6,000 being tested for COVID-19 in Iran per day

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — More than 6,000 people are being tested for COVID-19 in Iran per day at about 50 state-run laboratories across the country, the Pasteur Institute of Iran's director Alireza Biglari has said.

"More than 220,000 test kits have so far been donated to Iran, of which around 80,000 have been used," IRNA quoted Biglari as saying on Saturday.

Some 70 specialized coronavirus labs have been authorized in the country, 50 of which are operating and the rest will come on stream over the next few days, he explained.

The World Health Organization has commended Iran for setting up the labs

over a short period of three weeks, he added.

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 com-



Pasteur Institute of Iran's director Alireza Biglari

munications. 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. 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.

"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 sanitariums have opened in Tehran and Qom to care for those who are recovering from coronavirus, so that overburdened hospitals can be decongested.

Australia's fire-ravaged forests are recovering. Ecologists hope it lasts

In the back corner of a burned lot in Australia's fire-ravaged South Coast stands a torched tree. It's uppermost branches reach into a cloudless sky, brittle and bare. Against its charred trunk rests half-burned rubble, remains from the gift shop it used to shade.

But that's not where local resident Claire Polach is pointing. She gestures to the middle part of the tree, where lime green leaves sprout from blackened bark, as if the tree is wearing a shaggy sweater.

To Polach, the burst of regrowth is a sign that despite a months' long assault of flame and smoke, the second-hottest summer on record and a multi-year drought, Australia's nature "is doing it's thing."

As for people like her, recovering from the same? "We'll follow the nature," she says.

This cycle of fire, rain and recovery has played out in Australia for millennia. The majority of the country's forests are uniquely adapted to fire. Some species need it. "Australia is, more than any other, a fire continent," writes ecologist and historian Stephen Pyne in his book "World Fire."

But scientists have long warned that a warming climate could mean more severe fires, more often. Now there are concerns that even a fire continent will struggle to recover from the scale and severity of recent events.

New research published in the journal Nature Climate Change found that a staggering 21 percent of Australia's forested area burned in the 2019-2020 fire season, a figure the authors say is "globally unprecedented" and may indicate "the more flammable future projected to eventuate under climate change has arrived earlier than anticipated."

The question now is whether Australia's nature can keep pace.



■ Recovering for now

His eyes on a narrow dirt road in front of him, Colin Brown gestures his head at the walls of burned trees passing on either side of his rumbling fire tanker.

"Good way to assess how bad the fire was is the scorch marks on the trees," he says. Two trucks ahead of him is a team of ecologists from the Australian National University, here in Tallaganda National Park to survey the damage caused by a recent fire.

Brown, a deputy captain with the Rural Fire Service in New South Wales, already has a pretty good idea of it. He, like tens of thousands of other volunteer firefighters, has spent the last few months chasing flames across eastern Australia's eucalypt-covered mountains, doing what he could to protect homes, ranches and other people tucked between.

"It's always difficult in Australia because the whole climate is drought and fire," Brown says, as the torch marks climb higher in the surrounding trees. "But what we're seeing is

more intense drought and more intense fires."

A recent study by a group of international scientists confirmed what Brown and many others suspected: human-caused climate change contributed to the conditions they saw over the last few months, making them 30 percent more likely. "The weather's just different," Brown says.

Outside, the scorch marks now reach the tops of the trees. The ground below is littered with fallen logs and dead leaves. Brown stops the engine and puts on a helmet, a caution against any weakened trees that have yet to fall.

The team of ecologists spreads out in the forest. Some gather around a firefighter who's showing videos of the blaze on his cellphone.

Michael Doherty, a plant ecologist, walks to the base of a charred tree about 50 yards off the road. It's a young brown barrel, he says, "a eucalypt and it's showing a flash of epicormic growth after the fires."

His fingers run through that epicormic growth — a cluster of olive green leaves that's sprouting from the tree's trunk at about chest height. It's a response to damage from the fire, Doherty says, and proof that the tree isn't actually dead.

It's canopy has been scorched, killing its leaves, but dormant buds were waiting beneath its bark. These epicormic shoots allow the tree to continue gathering sunlight and photosynthesize, keeping it alive while the canopy recovers.

The burst of regrowth isn't surprising to Doherty, whose research focuses on forests' ability to recover after bushfire. But he says he is encouraged.

"Notwithstanding climate change, we're still seeing the ecosystems recover as we might expect they would," he says. Whether they'll continue to recover, he says, is more uncertain.

(Source: NPR)

Polar ice caps and Greenland ice sheet melting six times faster than in 1990s

The polar ice caps and the Greenland ice sheet are melting six times faster than they were in the 1990s, according to the most complete picture of polar ice-sheet loss to date.

The high melt rate corresponds to the "worst case scenario" model for global warming set out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and means that without

sweeping curbs on greenhouse gas emissions, the planet will see a 17-centimetre rise in sea level in just 80 years, putting about 400 million people at risk of annual coastal flooding.

The research was carried out by a team of 89 polar scientists from 50 international organisations, and reveals that the combined rate of ice loss has risen from 81bn tonnes per year in the

1990s to 475bn tonnes per year in the 2010s.

This means that the polar ice sheets have already contributed a third of all sea-level rise.

The team behind the research — the Ice Sheet Mass Balance Inter-comparison Exercise (Imbie) — combined 26 separate surveys to compute changes in the mass of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets between 1992 and 2018.

Data from 11 different satellite missions was used, including measurements of the ice sheets' changing volume, flow and gravity.

The findings are shocking. Greenland and Antarctica lost 6.4 trillion tonnes of ice between 1992 and 2017, pushing global sea levels up by 17.8 millimetres.

(Source: The Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

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A ◀ ▶ ☰

3 million Iranians have organ donor cards

Some three million Iranians have organ donor cards and some 10 percent have signed online consent forms for organ donation, Farahnaz Sadeq-Beigi, head of organ procurement program in Masih Daneshvari Hospital, a national research institute for tuberculosis and lung diseases, has said.

Traffic accidents are the main reasons of brain deaths in Iran, she said, lamenting that out of 4,000 brain deaths reported by forensics only 1,000 donate their organs.

۳ میلیون نفر در کشور کارت اهدا عضو دریافت کردند

فرحناز صادق بیگی مسئول واحد فراهم آوری اعضا بیمارستان مسیح دانشوری اظهارداشت: تاکنون ۳ میلیون نفر از افراد کشور کارت اهدا عضو دریافت کرده اند و ۱۰ درصد از افراد کشور در سامانه های مختلفی که در جهت اعلام رضایت در زمینه اهدای عضو راه اندازی شده ثبت نام کرده اند.

وی تصادفات رانندگی را شایع ترین علت مرگ مغزی دانست و گفت: سالیانه ۴ هزار مورد مرگ مغزی در کشور ثبت می شود که سال گذشته تنها ۱۰۰۰ نفر از این افراد قابلیت اهدای عضو را داشته اند.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“cerebro-, cerebr-”

■ **Meaning:** brain

■ **For example:** Passive smoking is considered a major cause of **cerebrovascular** disease, which causes strokes.

PHRASAL VERB

Think something up

■ **Meaning:** to produce a new idea, name etc. by thinking

■ **For example:** She was trying to think up an excuse.

IDIOM

Give somebody a (good) run for their money

■ **Explanation:** to make your opponent in a competition use all their skill and effort to defeat you

■ **For example:** They've given some of the top teams a run for their money this season.

Child laborers to be provided with anti-corona aid

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The Social Security Organization plans to provide child laborers with packages of antiseptics and educational items in order to help them prevent the spread of coronavirus.



The plan will be implemented during the final week of the [current Iranian calendar] year (ending March 19), the organization's head Vahid Qobadi-Dana said, IRNA reported on Saturday.

Under the plan, social security experts will provide child laborers with necessary education about different aspects of the disease and ways to curb its spread.

The number of people diagnosed with the novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19, in Iran has increased to 13,938, of whom 724 have died and 4,790 recovered so far.

Over the past 24 hours, 1,209 new cases of people having the virus have been identified, Deputy Health Minister Kiyanoush Jahanpour said, ISNA reported.

The highest number of new cases were reported from the provinces of Tehran, Khorasan Razavi, and Isfahan with 251, 143, and 126 cases, respectively.

How to talk to kids about the novel coronavirus without scaring them

The fear and uncertainty around COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, is stressful for many adults and can be especially anxiety-provoking for children.

Before you talk to your kids about the realities of the novel coronavirus, it's important that you educate yourself first, said Cassie Brownell, an assistant professor at the University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Reading reliable sources of information, like government websites, is key to combating misinformation and correcting any misconceptions kids may have, Brownell said.

"Kids are seeing empty store shelves or people in masks... and they're worried about that or they're worried about their own family getting sick," she said.

"I think we need to create a really open space where we can talk about the facts, correct misinformation and be honest."

Brownell suggests opening the conversation around COVID-19 by asking your children what they know about the virus. That way, you can gauge their knowledge level and answer questions.

The amount of information you share with your children and the way you deliver it will depend on their age, said Steven Taylor, a clinical psychologist and professor in the psychiatry department at the University of British Columbia.

If a child is young and has a limited understanding of what's going on, you don't need to share detailed information with them. But if your child is in school and is hearing about the virus from friends and on the news, you should talk to them about it, he said.

"I would point out to them that we know, in most cases, it's usually mild," Taylor said.

"And [highlight] the best thing to do to keep yourself safe is to wash your hands, cover your coughs and try and keep your fingers away from your face, rather than getting caught up in probabilities of death and so on."

It is also vital that parents act rationally and do not panic, he said.

"If you're a young child and your parents are terrified, rushing out, stocking up... that's going to inflate the child's anxiety level."

(Source: globalnews.ca)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Breakthrough in Brain Cancer

(07 May 2003)

A team of American and Spanish scientists believe they have made an important discovery in the treatment of brain cancer. They have used a genetically engineered form of the common cold virus to destroy human brain tumour cells that had been injected into mice.

The **results** of this **research** on mice are so **remarkable** that the National Cancer Institute and the US Food and Drug Administration want to try it out on **brain cancer patients**.

One of the leaders of the study, Dr Frederic Lang of the University of Texas, said the mice had still be alive after one hundred and forty days with no **tumours** present when their brains were then **examined**. He said that previously mice injected with human brain **tumour** cells had died after only twenty. Dr Lang said these were exciting **results** but he was careful to say that success with humans wasn't guaranteed.

Even so, the National Cancer Institute is **intrigued** enough to be providing a million dollars of funding to produce enough of the **genetically engineered** cold **virus** and begin enrolling patients with brain tumours as early as the end of the next year.

■ **Words**

Results: conclusions

Research: study

Remarkable: impressive, unusual

Brain cancer patients: people who are ill with a growth, or tumour, on their brain

Tumours: growths, cancers

Examined: looked at very closely

Intrigued: very interested

Genetically engineered: produced through genetic engineering - the science of changing the cells that control physical characteristics in a living organisms in order to make it stronger or more suitable for a particular purpose

Virus: a germ that can cause an illness

Russia, Turkey begin joint patrols along Syria's M4 highway

Turkey and Russia have completed their first joint military patrol along a strategic highway in Syria's northwestern region, the Turkish defense ministry said.

"Within the framework of the Moscow agreement, the 1st joint Turkish-Russian land patrol on the M4 highway has been completed with the contribution of air and land assets," the ministry said in a statement on Sunday.

Earlier, Russian news agencies reported that Moscow had sent military police and armored vehicles to the patrol, which began from the settlement of Tronba in Idlib province, the last opposition-held stronghold in the country.

The patrols are part of a ceasefire deal reached earlier this month by Turkey, which backs certain opposition groups, and Syrian government ally Russia to halt an escalation of violence in Idlib that has displaced nearly a million people and brought the two countries close to direct confrontation.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said earlier this month that his country would not shy away from even stronger military action in Idlib if the ceasefire is broken.

Under the ceasefire deal, Turkey and Russia are meant to also establish a security corridor either side of the key M4 highway, which links Syria's east and west.

The corridor stretches 6km (3.7 miles) to the north and 6km to the south of the M4 - effectively advancing Russia's presence further north into Idlib.

The two countries are likely to face obstacles during their joint patrols, Al Jazeera's Sinem Koseoglu, reporting from Istanbul, said.

"Since yesterday, we have seen opposition activist groups holding sit-ins and demonstrations on the M4 highway to protest against the Russian presence in Idlib," she said.

Hay'et Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) - an armed group previously linked to al-Qaeda that is not backed by Turkey - also says it does not recognize this deal.

According to Koseoglu, the group says it does not want the Russians patrolling along the M4 highway. In the past, Russia has cited HTS's presence as the reason for attacking areas in Idlib.

■ Nine years of war

The Russia-backed government offensive on Idlib sparked what the United Nations said may be the worst humanitarian crisis yet in a war that has driven millions from their homes and killed hundreds of thousands.

At least 900,000 people were driven from their homes since last December, many of whom had amassed near the border with Turkey seeking relative safety.

Russia had repeatedly played down any talk of a refugee crisis and accused Turkey of violating international law by pouring troops and equipment into Idlib since early last month. About 60 Turkish troops have been killed in that time.

Sunday's patrols come as Syria's war enters its 10th year. What started as peaceful protests on March 15, 2011, to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's rule quickly turned into a bloody conflict that has seen the interventions of foreign powers.

Nine years on, al-Assad remains in power after gaining back large swaths of land from opposition factions in Syria. *(Source: al Jazeera)*

Israeli Shin Bet's involvement in coronavirus crisis raises questions

Israel has given its spy agency Shin Bet the green light to use "counter-terrorism" operations against those infected with a new coronavirus, treating the pandemic as a security menace.

Speaking at a news conference in Jerusalem al-Quds on Saturday, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the China-originated virus, also called COVID-19, as an "invisible enemy."

He announced that cyber tech monitoring would be deployed to locate people who have been in contact with those carrying the coronavirus.

"We will very soon begin using technology ... digital means that we have been using in order to fight terrorism," he said.

"Up until today I avoided using these measures in the civilian population but there is no choice," Netanyahu added.

Netanyahu admitted that the new measures could infringe on patients' privacy, but claimed that by using them, "we will be able to see who they were with, what happened before and after and we will be able to isolate the coronavirus."

Shin Bet confirmed that it was examining the use of its technological capabilities to deal with the virus. The tools, it said, would not be used to enforce quarantines, but rather to help authorities track the paths of confirmed virus carriers.

■ Privacy scare

Former minister of military affairs Moshe Ya'alon, who is currently a lawmaker from the Blue and White political alliance, took to Twitter to denounce Netanyahu's new regulations as a "cynical exploitation of the coronavirus crisis for the personal interests of a defendant before trial."

The Israeli prime minister is facing trial on charges of bribery and fraud and breach of trust.

The head of the left-wing Meretz party also stressed that the new surveillance measures should not take place without parliamentary and judicial oversight.

"Monitoring citizens with the help of information databases and advanced technology is a harsh blow to privacy and basic liberty," Nitzan Horowitz said.

Former Israeli justice minister Ayelet Shaked, who is currently a lawmaker from Yamina political alliance, tweeted that "the technological surveillance after coronavirus patients is a radical move and a grave violation of privacy, but it can save lives and money."

Avner Pinchuk, a privacy expert with the association for civil rights in Israel, said the regulations could include real-time tracking of infected people's mobile phones to spot quarantine breaches and backtracking through meta-data to figure out where they had been and whom they had contacted.

"I am troubled by this announcement. I understand that we are in unique circumstances, but this seems potentially like over-reach. Much will depend on how intrusive the new measures are," said Pinchuk.

So far, a total of 195 Israelis have been diagnosed with the coronavirus. Almost 40,000 Israelis, including medical personnel, are in home quarantines for fear of exposure to the virus, according to the health ministry. *(Source: Press TV)*

Iraq military calls for immediate withdrawal of U.S.-led forces

➔ **1** along with the deputy head of the PMU, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, and their companions in U.S. airstrike authorized by President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport two days earlier.

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

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

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

■ Iraqi MP: We demand immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces

Meanwhile, an Iraqi lawmaker from the Fatah (Conquest) alliance has called for the "immediate" pullout of American-led forces from the country through diplomatic means.

"Our fellow countrymen and women have become fully convinced that whatever has happened or happens in our country over the past 16 years is due to foreign interference in general, and the American interventions in particular in Iraq's domestic affairs," Ahmed al-Kinani said in a press release.

He added, "I would like to refer to repeated attacks on the sovereignty of Iraq



by the occupying U.S. forces, including the bombing of the headquarters of our security forces, army and the PMU, which led to their martyrdom and injury besides destruction of civilian facilities."

"Such repeated attacks do not show that U.S. forces have good intentions, and that they must leave our land as demanded by the government, the parliamentary resolution and the Iraqi nation, who took part in a million-march demonstration and called for their immediate departure," Kinani pointed out.

■ 'Next Iraqi PM must be someone who can stop U.S. recklessness'

Another Iraqi legislator lambasted U.S. airstrikes as blatant violation of the Arab

country's sovereignty.

Nada Shaker Jawdat said that the country's next prime minister must be someone who can firmly act against the U.S. recklessness and its utter disdain for Iraq's national sovereignty.

■ Attack on Camp Taji cannot serve as pretext for foreign ops: Baghdad

The Iraqi military also cautioned the U.S. and other foreign forces on Saturday against taking any military action in Iraq without the government's approval, emphasizing that recent missile strikes against the Camp Taji can't serve as a pretext for unauthorized actions.

The military noted in a statement that 33 Katyusha rockets had been launched on the

Syria parliamentary elections adjourned to May 20 over coronavirus concerns

Syria has decided to delay parliamentary elections, initially scheduled for April 13, in a precautionary step against the new coronavirus as the contagion continues its rapid spread around the world.

Syria's official news agency, citing a decree issued by President Bashar al-Assad, announced on Saturday that the legislative polls will be held on May 20.

Moreover, Syrian Health Minister Nizar Yaziji said there is no confirmed coronavirus patient in the war-ravaged Arab country, but Damascus is taking preventative measures.

Speaking at a Saturday joint press conference with the Resident Representative of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Syria, Neama Saeed, Yaziji said that all samples

analyzed in public health laboratories for suspected cases of COVID-19 infections had been negative.

He added that the government's measures and raising the level of the health sector's readiness are preventive and precautionary measures to control the spread of the new coronavirus.

Yaziji highlighted that Syria has taken measures at its border crossings, sea ports as well as airports to ensure those entering the country are not infected, and has even set up quarantine centers to transfer suspected cases to them.

Sixteen Syrian nationals, who had recently visited Iraq, as well as the crew members of a flight have been moved to a quarantine center in al-Duwait area on the outskirts of

Afghan gov't delays Taliban prisoner release, endangering deal



The Afghan government has postponed its plan to release Taliban prisoners, a senior official said, a decision that could sabotage a deal signed last month between the armed group and the United States.

Javid Faisal, a spokesman for the National Security Council, said the releases were being delayed because more time was needed to review the list of Taliban prisoners.

"We are ready to start the process the way it is described in the presidential decree but we won't release anyone if there is no guarantee that they will not return to fighting," he said.

"The Taliban have to show flexibility."

Earlier this week, President Ashraf Ghani announced that 1,500 Taliban prisoners would be freed as a "gesture of goodwill" in an attempt to resolve one of the long-running disputes with the armed group that had stalled intra-Afghan peace talks.

Ghani's decree said the government would release 1,500 captives starting Saturday if the Taliban reduced violence, with plans to free another 3,500 prisoners after negotiations begin.

The Taliban rejected the offer and demanded the release of nearly 5,000 captives,

citing it as one of the conditions behind the U.S.-Taliban deal signed last month that excluded Kabul.

According to the U.S.-Taliban agreement signed on February 29, foreign forces will withdraw from the country within 14 months in exchange for Taliban security guarantees and a pledge to hold talks with Kabul.

There was no immediate reaction from the Taliban on the delay in the release, a move that is likely to further stall peace talks which were originally scheduled to begin on March 10.

On Wednesday, the Afghan government warned it would resume attacks against the fighters if violence continued, ending a unilateral partial truce put in place before the talks.

Political chaos in Kabul has complicated matters further, with Afghanistan's former Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah also claiming the presidency following last September's election, which was marred by delays and allegations of voter fraud.

On Monday, Abdullah swore himself in as president minutes after Ghani took the oath of office.

(Source: al Jazeera)

Turkey quarantines thousands of pilgrims returning from Saudi Arabia

Thousands of Muslims returning to Turkey from a pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia were being taken into quarantine on Sunday due to concerns about the spread of the coronavirus, Turkish officials said.

Television pictures showed buses transporting pilgrims along the highway from Ankara's airport to the city as part of an operation to place those returning into student dormitories.

Turkey, which has only diagnosed six cases of coronavirus, has ramped up measures to halt its spread in recent days, closing schools and universities, holding sports events without spectators and halting flights to many countries.

On Wednesday it became the last major economy to report an outbreak after taking what the World Health Organization (WHO) described as "vigilant" measures to delay it.

The latest move came after Health Minister Fahrettin Koca called overnight for those returning from the Umrah pilgrimage to quarantine themselves for a fortnight, saying a returnee in the last week had become the sixth person to test positive.

He then announced on Sunday that the state was actively quarantining the returnees.

"All passengers returning from the Umrah since last night are being put into quarantine in separate rooms in

student dormitories," he wrote on Twitter, adding that those suspected of being ill were being taken to hospital for tests.

Earlier in March, Saudi Arabia expanded a rare freeze on pilgrimages to the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina by foreigners to also include Saudi citizens and residents due to concerns about coronavirus.

Umrah refers to pilgrimage rites carried out in the holy cities throughout the year, and is separate from the annual week-long haj, which typically draws 2 million Muslims from around the world. Haj starts this year in late July. *(Source: Daily Star)*

Lockdowns and entry bans imposed around the world to fight coronavirus



France and Spain joined Italy in imposing lockdowns on tens of millions of people, Australia ordered self-isolation of arriving foreigners and other countries extended entry bans as the world sought to contain the spreading coronavirus.

Panic buying in Australia, the United States and Britain saw leaders appeal for calm over the virus that has infected over 156,000 people globally and killed more than 5,800.

Several countries imposed bans on mass gathering, shuttered sporting, cultural and religious events, while medical experts urged people to practice "social distancing" to curb the spread.

Austria's chancellor urged people to self-isolate and announced bans on gatherings of more than five people and further limits on who can enter the country.

All of Pope Francis' Easter services next month will be held without the faithful attending, the Vatican said on Sunday, in a step believed to be unprecedented in modern times.

The services, four days of major events from Holy Thursday to Easter Sunday, usually draw tens of thousands of people to sites in Rome and in the Vatican.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said from midnight Sunday international travelers arriving in the country would need to isolate themselves for 14 days, and foreign cruise ships would be banned for 30 days, given a rise in imported cases.

Australia's latest restrictions mirror those announced by neighboring New Zealand on Saturday.

-----Travel bans, airline cutbacks

Donald Trump tested negative for the coronavirus, his doctor said on Saturday, as the U.S. president extended his country's travel ban to Britain and Ireland.

Last week, Trump had met a Brazilian delegation in which at least one member has since been tested positive.

Travel restrictions and bans, and a plunge in global air travel, saw further airline cutbacks, with American Airlines Inc planning to cut 75% of international flights through May 6 and ground nearly all its widebody fleet.

China tightened checks on international travelers arriving at Beijing airport on Sunday, after the number of imported new coronavirus infections surpassed locally transmitted cases for a second day in a row. *(Source: Reuters)*

Iranian people very kind to me: Cheick Diabate

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Esteghlal football team Malian forward Cheick Diabate says that the Iranian people have been very kind to him.

Diabate joined the Iranian giants in July 2019 and scored eight goals in 13 matches for the Blues. He scored a hat-trick in a 4-2 away win over Tractor in Iran league and also scored three goals against Al Rayyan of Qatar and Kuwait SC of Kuwait, helping Esteghlal to book a place at the 2020 AFC Champions League group stage.

“All the people have respected me and I’m not feeling I am a black since I came to Iran. The African people should respect the Iranians because they are good people and have always been kind to me,” Diabate said.

Diabate has played in leagues of Italy, France, Turkey and the UAE but he believes that there is a big different between the Iranian fans and others.

“To be honest, I am very excited to see the Iranian fans’ excitement. They have always been supportive and encouraged me,” the 31-year-old striker stated.

Persepolis striker Ali Alipour mocked Diabate’s goal celebration pose after scoring in Tehran derby against Esteghlal but Diabate says that it’s normal in football.

“First, I want to say hello to Ali. I think he didn’t do that out of badness. When you score, you want to show your satisfaction and I think Alipour was thinking of me in that moment,” he smiled.



Diabate has played 39 matches for Mali national football team and scored

15 goals. Esteghlal’s training has been post-

poned until April 20 due to coronavirus concerns.

‘It’s a great feeling to score a hat-trick’, Sardar Azmoun



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Zenit Saint Petersburg striker Sardar Azmoun made the difference at Saint-Petersburg Stadium on Saturday, scoring a hat-trick in his team’s 7-1 win over Ural.

Speaking after the game, the Iranian international player expressed delight with the result and with his three goals that took his tally for the season to 10 in the Russian Premier League.

“Scoring seven goals in a game is not easy and thankfully we played really well. The most important thing is that we could

take all three points of the game. In football, nothing is easy to achieve and everything depends on the players’ performance. My teammates were highly focused in this game and because of that we could score early in the game and did not allow our opponents to work the ball around too much,” he added.

It was Sardar’s first hat-trick in Russian football and he feels happy about that.

“I’m so happy to be able to score my first hat-trick in Russian football. We played really well and of course, we were a bit lucky on some occasions. Overall, I feel great. The hat-trick is so enjoyable” he said.

Iranian boxer Shahbakhsh dreams of winning Olympics medal



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iranian boxer Danial Shahbakhsh is going to write his name into history book by winning a medal at the 2020 Olympic Games.

Shahbakhsh secured his place at the Olympics on Wednesday after defeating his rival from Hong Kong TSO Sing Yu in the 57kg weight class at the Asia-Oceania Olympic boxing qualifier in Amman.

Another Iranian boxer Shahin Mousavi also secured a place at the 2020 Tokyo in the Men’s 75kg weight class, beating Mongolian boxer Byamba Erdene Otgonbaatar.

“I’m very happy to book a place at the Olympics because the competition had brought the best boxers of the world together. I defeated TSO Sing Yu who had 22 wins in his resume,” he said.

“I’m going to make history in Olympics because Iran has not yet won a medal in boxing at the Olympics. I have to keep my motivation high to make it happen,” Shahbakhsh added.

“I think we had to win three places but the referee’s decision went against Omid Ahmadi Safa. He should have secured a place at the Olympics,” he concluded.

Tokyo 2020 torch handover to take place in empty Athens stadium

The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games flame handover in Athens next week will be done in an empty stadium amid the coronavirus outbreak, Greece’s Olympic Committee said on Sunday.

Greece on Friday cancelled the remainder of the domestic Olympic torch relay through the country to avoid attracting crowds a day after the Tokyo Games flame was lit in ancient Olympia.

“The Hellenic Olympic Committee has decided that the handover ceremony for the “Tokyo 2020” Olympic Games, on Thursday, March 19, will take place at the Panathenaic Stadium behind closed doors,” it said in a statement.

The central Athens stadium, site of the 1896 Games, usually attracts thousands of spectators to the handover ceremony to the next host city of winter and summer Games every two years.

Greece had three fatalities from the disease and 228 confirmed cases by late Saturday.



“Following the orders of the Greek State in order to contain the coronavirus pandemic and for the protection of public health no accreditation cards issued will be valid,”

the country’s Olympic Committee said.

Japan is still preparing to host the Olympics, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on Saturday, despite rising global concern about the viability of the summer Games due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Abe and his government as well as the International Olympic Committee have been adamant the July 24-Aug 9 Games will go ahead, even as other global sporting events have been put on hold.

Speculation about a delay from the July start date has grown since U.S. President Donald Trump said organizers should consider a one-year postponement.

The Olympic Torch relay, in which the Olympic flame typically starts a tour around the host nation, is due to start in the Japanese prefecture of Fukushima in less than two weeks. The tour of the torch through Greece has already been cut short.

(Source: Reuters)

Vertonghen’s family held at knifepoint during home invasion

Jan Vertonghen’s family were held at knife-point during a terrifying burglary while the Tottenham defender was away with his Premier League club.

British police said four men wearing balaclavas and armed with knives broke into Vertonghen’s house while the Belgian international’s wife and children were inside.

The 32-year-old was in Germany for Tottenham’s Champions League last 16 second leg defeat against Leipzig on Tuesday. Vertonghen was an unused substitute as Tottenham lost 3-0 to crash out of the competition.

“We have been supporting Jan and his family through this terribly traumatic time,” a Tottenham spokesperson said.

“We encourage anyone who has any

information to come forward to help the police with their investigation.”

A Police spokesman said: “Police were called to a residential address in NW3 at 7.49pm on 10 March to a report of a burglary.

“Officers attended. It was reported four men wearing balaclavas, armed with knives, had forced entry to the property and stolen a number of items before leaving.

“Nobody was injured. The suspects had left the scene before officers arrived. There have been no arrests and inquiries continue.”

The incident comes after Arsenal stars Mesut Ozil and Sead Kolasinac were targeted by armed moped riders while driving through north London earlier this season.

(Source: AFP)

Valencia confirm five positive tests for coronavirus

Valencia confirmed on Sunday five of the club’s players and staff have tested positive for coronavirus, including Argentinian defender Ezequiel Garay.

Valencia said all those affected were “now at home, in good health and obeying self-isolation measures.”

Garay, who was set to miss the rest of the season with a knee injury, became the first player in La Liga to confirm a positive test earlier on Sunday.

“Clearly I’ve got off on the wrong foot in 2020,” Garay wrote on social media. “I’ve tested positive for the coronavirus, I’m fine and now just listening to the health authorities, at the moment in isolation.”

Valencia confirmed more cases shortly after Garay’s announcement. “Valencia CF

confirm five positive cases of the COVID-19 coronavirus have been detected amongst first team staff and players.

“All of these persons are now at home, in good health and obeying self-isolation measures.”

Valencia played behind closed doors on Tuesday in the Champions League against Atalanta, the Serie A team based in Lombardy, one of Italy’s worst-hit regions by the virus.

The club announced on February 28 they would be suspending all non-sporting activity with the first-team after a journalist attending the opening game against Atalanta was confirmed to have tested positive.

(Source: France 24)

Iran football star Karimi contributes to anti-corona campaign

IRNA— Iran’s former football player Ali Karimi dubbed ‘The Magician’ on Sunday contributed to the nation-wide campaign to fight further spread of the killer coronavirus by donating items to the citizens of Gilan province.

The medical and health equipment donated by the well-known footballer were dispatched to the hospitals of the Province.

Head of Iran’s Health Ministry Public Relations Office Ki-anoush Jahanpour said on Sunday that 4,790 people out of a total of 13,938 infected by the coronavirus have survived the deadly disease while 724 have succumbed to death.

Aghapour nominated for Best Young Player in the World

Salar Aghapour from Iran has been nominated for the Best Young Player in the World.

Iran will vie with nine other players to win the one of the most traditional prizes of futsal.

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

Nominees
(In strict alphabetical order!)
*Salar Aghapour (IRN)
Mes Sungun Varzaghan FSC (IRN) - IRAN A & U20 N.T.
*Antonio Pérez Ortega (ESP)
Jaén Paraíso Interior FS (ESP) - SPAIN U19 & U21 N.T.
*Hugo Miguel Neves Silva (POR)
Sporting Clube de Portugal (POR) - Quinta dos Lombos (POR) - PORTUGAL U19 & U21 N.T.
*Josip Jurlina (CRO)
MNK Split (CRO) - MNK Olisum (CRO) - CROATIA A & U19 N.T.
*Leonardo Caetano Silva “Leozinho” (BRA)
Magnus Futsal (BRA) - BRAZIL N.T.
*Matheus Rodrigues César da Silva (BRA)
Sport Club Corinthians Paulista (BRA) - BRAZIL N.T.
*Artem Niyazov (RUS)
MFK KPRF Moscow (RUS) - RUSSIA N.T.
*Muhammad Osamamusa (THA)
Bangkok BTS Futsal Club (THA) - Port Futsal Club (THA) - THAILAND N.T.
*Adrián Rodríguez Mosteirín “Pirata” (ESP)
Santiago Futsal (ESP) - SPAIN U19 & U21 N.T.
*Kazuya Shimizu (JPN)
ElPozo Ciudad de Murcia (ESP) - ElPozo Murcia (ESP) - Thai Son Nam FC (VIE) - JAPAN N.T.

(Source: Futsal Planet)

Javid candidate for Best Player in the World

Mahdi Javid from Iran is a candidate for the Best Player in the World, futsalplanet.com reported.

He will compete with nine other players to win the award.

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

Nominees
(In strict alphabetical order!)
*Adolfo Fernández Díaz (previously also known as “Adolfito”) (ESP)
Barça (ESP) - SPAIN N.T.
*Artem Antoshkin (RUS)
MFK Tyumen (RUS) - RUSSIA N.T.
*Henrique da Cunha Elgart “Di Maria” (BRA)
Pato Futsal (BRA)
*Carlos Wagner Gualarte Filho “Ferrão” (BRA)
Barça (ESP) - BRAZIL N.T.
*Mahdi Javid (IRN)
Giti Pasand Isfahan FSC (IRN) - Mes Sungun Varzaghan FSC (IRN) - IRAN N.T.
*Leandro Lino Dos Santos (BRA)
Magnus Futsal (BRA) - BRAZIL N.T.
*Alex Rodrigo da Silva Merlim “Babalu” (BRA/ITA)
Sporting Clube de Portugal (POR) - ITALY N.T.
*Damián Stazzone Alvarez (ARG)
Club Atlético San Lorenzo de Almagro (ARG) - ARGENTINA N.T.
*Taynan da Silva Rego (BRA/KAZ)

(Source: Futsal Planet)

Maâloul: I want to lead Syria to the FIFA World Cup

Newly appointed national team head coach Nabil Maâloul said he is determined to steer Syria to the FIFA World Cup Finals for the first time ever.

The former Tunisia national team head coach, who has signed two-year contract, said it will be a big challenge but one that he is relishing as Syria look to better their 2018 FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign where they advanced to the play-off against Australia.

“My first task is to bring joy to the Syrian people by steering the national team to the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022,” said Maâloul, who coached Tunisia in Russia 2018.

“I know very well what to expect and I will give it my all, especially as I know the capabilities of the Syrian players.”

Maâloul said he plans to make full use of the players available to him.

“I know several players who play in Egypt, Turkey, Kuwait and Netherlands and they all have good capabilities,” he said. “We will try our best to introduce young players from the U23 team who are the future of Syria national team.”

“My mission will not be easy but I will give all I can to replicate the good results that I had with the Tunisia national team,” he said. “I want to lead Syria to the FIFA World Cup Finals for the first time ever.”

(Source: the-afc)

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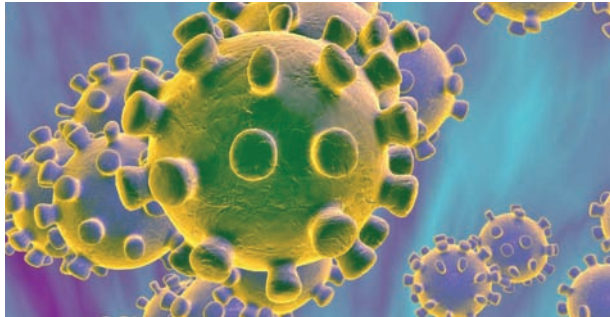


GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

He who engages in various tasks, cannot do any of them properly, and brings himself into troubles.
Imam Ali (AS)

IIDCYA launches intl. painting contest on new virus

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Khorasan Razavi branch of the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) has launched an international painting contest to promote personal and group health to fight against the new virus, the institute announced on Sunday.



An graphic image of coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

Amid the outbreak of the new coronavirus in Iran and the world, the topic of personal health has received much attention as one of the main factors in transmitting the new virus. The main topics of the contest are "Health of My Hands" (clothes, toys, food, family, friends, home and city), and "The Hands That Take Care of Me" (father, mother, doctors and health care staff). Children aged 4 to 18 are asked to upload their paintings on the IIDCYA portal available at paintfest.kpf.ir. The deadline for the national section is May 20 and the international section is July 15. Submissions will be judged by a group of painters and book illustrators and winners will be announced on August 5.

Persian version Japanese author Osamu Dazai's "Shayo" republished

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** — The fourth Persian edition of Japanese author Osamu Dazai's novel "Shayo" has recently been released by Fanus Publications in Tehran. The book has been translated into Persian by Morteza Sanne. The author is considered one of the foremost fiction writers of the 20th-century in Japan, whose novel "Shayo" ("The Setting Sun"), published in 1947, turned him into a popular novelist. Set in the early postwar years, it probes the destructive effects of war and the transition from a feudal Japan to an industrial society. Dazai died in 1948. But the influence of his book has made "people of the setting sun" a permanent part of the Japanese language, and his heroine, Kazuko, a young aristocrat who deliberately abandons her class, a symbol of the anomie, which pervades so much of the modern world.

Persian readers experience Norwegian writer Hanne Orstavik's "Love" again

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** — The second edition of a Persian version of Norwegian writer Hanne Orstavik's novella "Love" has recently been released by Gooya Publications. Translated by Ali Salami, the first edition of the Persian translation was published in 2019.



The 1997 book tells the story of Vibeke and Jon, a mother and son who have just moved to a small town in northern Norway. It's the day before Jon's birthday, and a traveling carnival has come to the village. Jon goes out to sell lottery tickets for his sports club, and Vibeke is going to the library. Jon is sure that his mother has a surprise for his birthday, while Vibeke is occupied with concerns of her own and forgets the occasion. The English translation of "Love" by Martin Aitken won the 2019 PEN America Translation Prize. It was also a finalist for Britain's Republic of Consciousness Prize as well as the U.S.'s 2018 National Book Award for Translated Literature.

Cartoonist Jamal Rahmati uses Shahnameh characters to make animations on coronavirus

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian cartoonist Jamal Rahmati has used characters from Persian poet Ferdowsi's magnum opus, the Shahnameh, to make an animation series named "The Seven Adventures of Coronavirus".

"Rustam and Zakariya against Corona", the first part of the seven-episode comedy series, was released on Saturday. In this episode, Rustam, the most celebrated legendary hero in the Shahnameh, and his horse Rakhsh ally with Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariya Razi (Rhazes), the great physician of the Islamic world during the ninth century CE, to fight coronavirus. The animation aims at entertaining children, who have been kept in quarantine at their homes over the past three weeks due to the coronavirus epidemic in the country, while teaching them how to protect themselves against the new virus. "The Seven Adventures of Corona" refers to "The Seven Adventures of Rustam", one of the compelling stories from the Shahnameh.



A scene from "Rustam and Zakariya against Coronavirus", the first episode of Iranian animator Jamal Rahmati's series "The Seven Adventures of Coronavirus".

Director Majidi praises Mostazafan Foundation's support for child laborers

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Majid Majidi, the director of "The Sun", a drama about child labor in Tehran, has praised Iran's Mostazafan Foundation for supporting child laborers in the country. In a statement published on Sunday, Majidi thanked the director of the foundation, Parviz Fattah, over allocating a budget to support child laborers in Iran, and expressed his hope that these types of programs and movements will continue in the country. "I hope we will see these children sitting behind school desks instead of working," he said. The Mostazafan Foundation has allocated 50 billion rials

(about \$1.2 million) to child laborers, who have a higher risk of contracting coronavirus disease. This sum will be spent on preserving the health of the children and providing health and care packages under the supervision of Iran's State Welfare Organization. Majidi, in a statement published last week, had warned officials and asked them to support these children and keep them safe until this new virus abates. Majidi hired a group of child laborers to play roles in his latest drama "The Sun", which won the Crystal Simorgh for best film at the 38th Fajr Film Festival in February.



Majid Majidi in an undated photo.

Animator Mahin Javaherian shifts to movie on children

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Mahin Javaherian, the veteran Iranian animator whose works mostly are for children, has shifted to a plot about children in her new movie entitled "The Ghost". "I hope I will be successful in this project, because I have always worked to make children happy, and I want this different project to be fruitful as well," Javaherian told the Persian service of Honaronline on Sunday. She is currently working on the screenplay for the movie. The director of the acclaimed movies "What With", "Once Upon a Time" and "Golden Topknot" also announced another plan of hers to make an animation about child labor in Iran, the rate of which has risen over the past decade. Her short musical animations "Zarzari, Kakol Zari" and

"Yes" have been produced at the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults. "Zarzari, Kakol Zari" won the award for second best animation at the 49th Roshd International Film Festival in Tehran in last November. A France-based Iranian woman has acquired the right to screen both of the animations in movie theaters across the country, Javaherian said. "It seems that Canada also uses this method of screening animations from across the world to familiarize schoolchildren with various cultures," she added. She is also currently working on a musical about Noruz, the Iranian New Year celebration. Javaherian called making a musical a difficult task and



Iranian animator Mahin Javaherian in an undated photo. (Honaronline/Gatha Ziatabari)

Musicians give free online concerts to beat coronavirus

BERLIN (Reuters) — Bans on mass gatherings introduced to slow the spread of the coronavirus pandemic might have been expected to deal a death blow to musical life, but have instead prompted a boom in free online concerts. One musician to step up to the plate is Russian-German pianist Igor Levit, who took to Twitter on Thursday evening to stream an impromptu rendition of Beethoven's Waldstein Sonata Op. 53 from his Berlin flat to entertain audiences penned at home by the virus. Across Europe and the world, authorities are shuttering schools, museums, bars and

concert halls in an effort to prevent the kind of close physical contact that fosters the transmission of a virus that has killed more than 4,000 people worldwide. Germany has so far reported 2,369 confirmed coronavirus cases and five deaths. Berlin, among other German cities and regions, has announced plans to gradually close schools and reduce public transport over the coming week. "It's a sad time, it's a weird time, but acting is better than doing nothing," Levit told viewers of his stream, before sitting down at his Steinway to trill the piece's swooping opening bars.

"Let's bring the house concert into the 21st century!" Across Germany, opera houses and concert halls had the same idea. Berlin's Staatsoper, rather than calling off a performance of George Bizet's Carmen, opted to stream the story of the bewitching gypsy girl online for audiences worldwide. Moments after that ended, the baton passed across town to conductor Simon Rattle who led the Berlin Philharmonic in a performance of Luciano Berio's Sinfonia and Bela Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra. "The Philharmonie Berlin will be closed until 19 April — as a measure to counteract

the spread of the coronavirus," the orchestra said on its streaming platform, adding that it had decided to give the concert anyway, "without an audience". Nor was the generosity confined to the high-brow: earlier this week English crooner James Blunt's concert in Hamburg's empty Elbphilharmonie also took place before an invisible audience of millions. After Levit's 25-minute concert was retweeted 1,500 times and garnered almost 6,000 likes, the pianist seemed to have acquired a taste for the new genre. "Overwhelmed. Thank you. See you tomorrow, same time. 7pm CET," Levit tweeted.



PHOTO: Josh Gad, Idina Menzel, Jonathan Groff, Jennifer Lee, Chris Buck and Peter Del Veche attend the European premiere of Frozen 2 in London, Britain, November 17, 2019. (Reuters/Henry Nicholls)

Disney to release "Frozen 2" on streaming platform three months early

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Walt Disney Co said on Friday it would make the sequel to hit animated movie "Frozen" available on its streaming platform Disney+ three months ahead of schedule in the United States, as media companies respond to the coronavirus outbreak. The company said "Frozen 2" would be available in the country starting Sunday, "surprising families

with some fun and joy during this challenging period." Cinemas have closed in some countries to try to prevent the spread of the virus, while the two largest U.S. theater chains have halved their seating capacity. "Frozen 2" will be available on Disney+ in Canada, the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand on March 17.

'A Quiet Place 2' release joins list of Hollywood coronavirus delays

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - The release of Paramount thriller "A Quiet Place Part II" is being delayed indefinitely because of the coronavirus outbreak, director and producer John Krasinski said on Thursday. The film, starring Emily Blunt, which was due to start its international rollout

in movie theaters on March 18, was the latest Hollywood movie to be pushed back because of the virus that has closed movie theaters in China, Italy and many other nations. "Due to the ever-changing circumstances of what's going on in the world around

us, now is clearly not the right time to do that," Krasinski said in a posting on his Instagram account. He did not say when the film would be released. "As insanely excited as we are for all of you to see this movie... I'm gonna wait

to release the film till we CAN all see it together!," Krasinski added. The decision followed the postponement last week of the James Bond movie "No Time to Die" to November from April, and a move for "Peter Rabbit 2" to August from March.

Spielberg-produced Amazon mini-series in Mexico put on hold over coronavirus: letter

MEXICO CITY (Reuters) — The filming in Mexico of a big budget Steven Spielberg-produced Amazon mini-series, starring Spanish actor Javier Bardem, has been suspended due to concerns about the coronavirus, according to a letter sent to cast and crew on Friday and seen by Reuters. The production entitled Mexico, which centers on the

Spanish conquest of the Aztecs, began filming two weeks ago on location in Mexico City. Mexico has so far confirmed 26 cases of coronavirus. Only a skeletal wrap crew will continue working through next week, and cast and crew were informed that production might resume in December depending on how the public

health crisis develops. The project's budget is believed to be tens of millions of dollars, and dozens of local contractors will be affected by the suspension. Amazon did not immediately respond to a request for comment.