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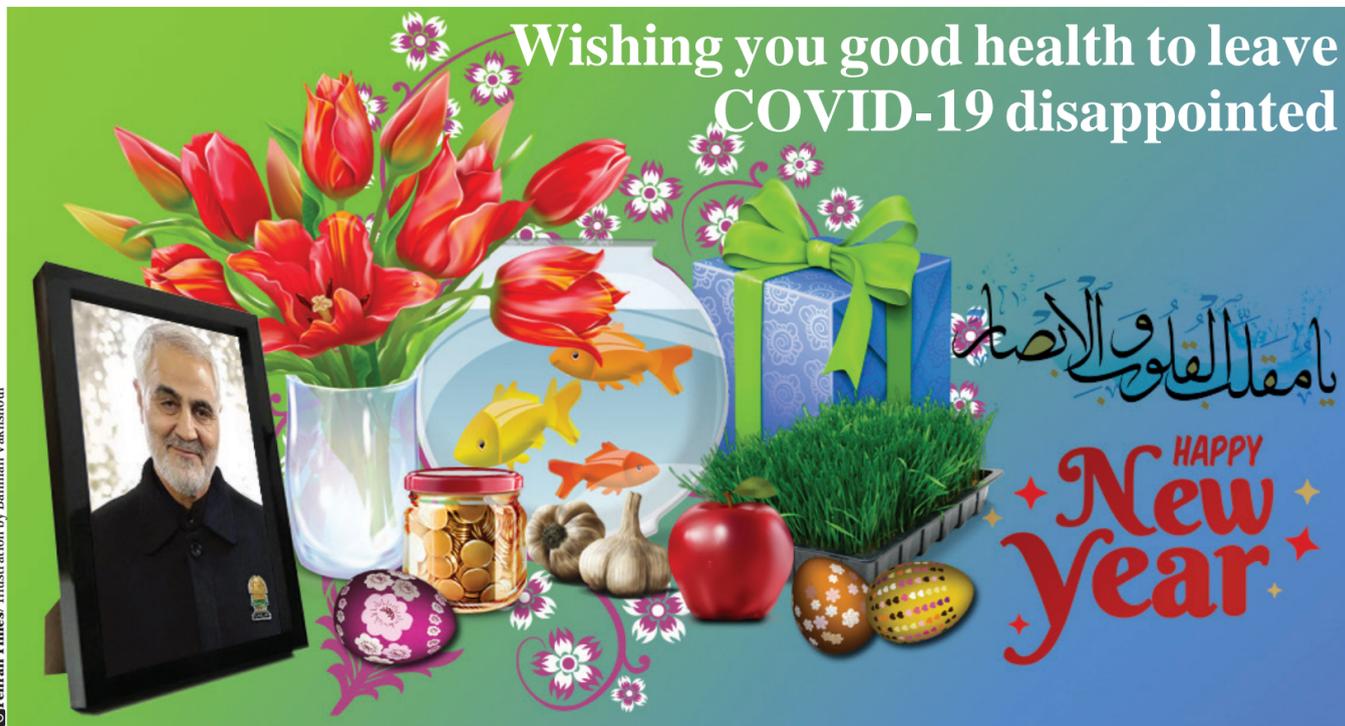
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© Tehran Times / Illustration by Bahman Vakhshtour

Knowledge-based firms indigenize 50 strategic products in water, electricity sector

TEHRAN — Iranian knowledge-based companies have indigenized the technology for manufacturing 50 strategic products applied in the water and electricity sector of the country in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 19), the managing director of Iranian Electrical Power Equipment Manufacturing and Provision Company (known by its Persian acronym SATKAB) told IRIB on Tuesday.

Mohammad-Vali Alaedini emphasized

that relying on domestic capabilities these companies managed to indigenize 50 strategic products in this year, which has been named as "Year of Pick-up in Production".

SATKAB is tasked with logistic operations and activities related to the pick-up in production, the official said, adding, "In the present year, we have invited knowledge-based companies to tackle the challenges that national water and electricity industries are facing in a move to support domestically-made products."

Iraqi president appoints Adnan al-Zurfi as new PM-designate

In his latest bid to end Iraq's months-long political stalemate, President Barham Salih has designated Adnan al-Zurfi as prime minister, tasking him with forming a government within a month, a decision which has been met with opposition from several factions.

State TV reported the appointment of Zurfi, head of the Nasr (Victory) parliamentary alliance, to the Iraqi premiership.

Zurfi, the ex-governor of the holy city of Najaf, is a former official of the U.S.-run authority that took over Iraq after the 2003 invasion. He lived in the United States as a refugee in the 1990s after fleeing the regime of ex-dictator Saddam Hussein. →10

Israeli spy sparks dispute between Lebanon, U.S.

A military tribunal in Beirut on Monday ordered the release of a Lebanese-American held in the country for nearly six months on charges of working for an Israeli-backed militia two decades ago, Lebanon's state-run news agency said.

Amer Fakhoury was ordered released because more than 10 years had passed since he allegedly tortured prisoners at a jail run by the so-called South Lebanon

Army, the National News Agency said.

Newly appointed U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Dorothy Shea has taken advantage of presenting her credentials to President Michael Aoun to raise the issue of the ongoing arrest of Amer Fakhoury, prominent Lebanese official sources have revealed.

Fakhoury is a Lebanese-American who confessed he'd worked for Israel during its occupation of Lebanon. →10

10th anniversary of war against Syria; challenges, achievements

By Mehdi Azizi

TEHRAN (MNA) — As it enters the tenth years of war against terrorism and foreign conspiracies, Syria has been facing challenges and achievements.

It has passed 9 years of crisis and war in Syria since March 2011. At first, the crisis seemed to be a political demand under the influence of the Arab revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa. Therefore, some opposition political sides joined the protests.

The crisis in Syria began in March with demonstrations in some parts of the country. Domestic currents and some that sought a political change to complete the Arab revolutions' chain in Syria, but these protests and political opposition to the Bashar al-Assad government soon ended in military conflict.

Subsequent events in Syria proved that not only what happened in the country did not have

any traits of the Arab revolutions, but all in line with the simulation of revolutions in North African. In fact, it was the American, Israeli, and Saudi joint think-tanks' political exploitation of events that they were trying to describe as the Arab Revolutions or the Arab Spring.

The Arab revolutions were a good opportunity to harm one of the pillars of the Resistance in the region and to create tribal conflicts in order to reduce Iran's power and provide security for the region surrounding the Zionist regime. US assessments and Western intelligence agencies also suggested that the Syrian issue would be over in the early months.

It was the same instruction that was previously intended to target the Islamic Resistance forces in the region to pave the way for Iran's defeat. With the exception of political actors such as Turkey and some Arab countries such as Qatar, which

sought to seize the opportunity to play an active role in the region and subsequently gain political privilege, Saudi Arabia with its financial and military support played an active role in soaring the tensions in Syria. In particular, the Saudis felt that they were not capable of influencing to change the rules of the game, and on the other hand, they needed to influence the developments to change Syria's ruling structure.

Turkey, meanwhile, did not pull back and tried to gain political advantage from these conditions. It should be noted, however, that Turkey does not follow a firm strategic policy under Erdogan and changes its behaviors based on his party's political interests. The changes in Erdogan's Political approach in Syria's developments and many other developments in the West Asian region could be attributed to these instances of volatile and unstable behaviors. →7

Hans Christian Andersen Award nomination stirs writer Hassanzadeh's patriotic passion

By Samaneh Aboutalebi

TEHRAN — Eminent Iranian children's writer Farhad Hassanzadeh has said that his earning the 2020 Hans Christian Andersen Award nomination has made him happy as it made the headlines with the name of Iran.

"I feel good about it as it shows that I am heard in the world, my stories are read and my message is understood," Hassanzadeh told the Tehran Times.

"It also can make my people happy. After all the tragic events they have dealt with in the recent months, having Iran's name for a cultural reason in the news is enjoyable and it makes me proud that I am the cause

of this happiness," he added.

In January, the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) announced that Hassanzadeh has received a nomination for the 2020 Hans Christian Andersen Award.

He is competing for the world's most prestigious award for the creators of children's and young adult's literature with Maria Cristina Ramos from Argentina, Bart Moeyaert from Belgium, Marie-Aude Murail from France, Peter Svetina from Slovenia and Jacqueline Woodson from the U.S. The winner will be announced during a press conference at the Bologna International Children's Book Fair on March 30.

PERSPECTIVE

M.A.Saki
Deputy editor-in-chief

Norouz can serve as 14-day quarantine time to contain coronavirus

Norouz holidays in Iran begins on March 20. Holidays last for two weeks, exactly equal to the time that a person is quarantined to determine whether he is healthy or not. It is an opportunity to contain the outbreak of coronavirus.

If the officials get this opportunity to contain the virus they will save more lives and prevent more economic losses, otherwise they should brace for more consequences.

While physicians are warning that people to take the virus seriously and stay at home, avoid inter-city travels, family visits, and traffic in the streets, President Rouhani just softly advises people to stay at home.

Populism has always proven costly but in this case may prove too costly. Unfortunately, Rouhani, in another way, is proving another populist like his predecessor Ahmadinejad, who emptied the country of hundreds of billions of dollars gained from oil revenues through his populist economic policies.

At the beginning officials refused to lock down the cities or provinces in which coronavirus first emerged. The Health Ministry even argued that quarantining cities is outdated, saying it dates back to the early 20th century in Europe.

Now that coronavirus cases are found in every corner of Iran, it is extremely necessary to enforce a strict rule to contain the deadly virus. →2

EDITORIAL

Mohammad Ghaderi
Tehran Times editor-in-chief
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Iranians to Western nations: We will never do what you did to us in hard days!

This is my last article for the Tehran Times before the new Persian year arrives. As always, I deeply trust the almighty God's grace and the pleasing morning of reappearance of Imam Mahdi (MGHHR) to save human being.

The reappearance of Imam Mahdi is a belief of Shia Muslims, especially of the Twelvers, that the twelfth Imam will return at an unspecified time and establish an Islamic state of peace and justice.

It is approximately a month that our dear country, similar to over 160 other nations, has been badly hit by the coronavirus outbreak. The entire capacity of the country has been used over the recent weeks to counter the pandemic disease.

Naturally, the virus-hit countries started utilizing their facilities, capacities and energy to counter the disease. However, Iran's story is different from others.

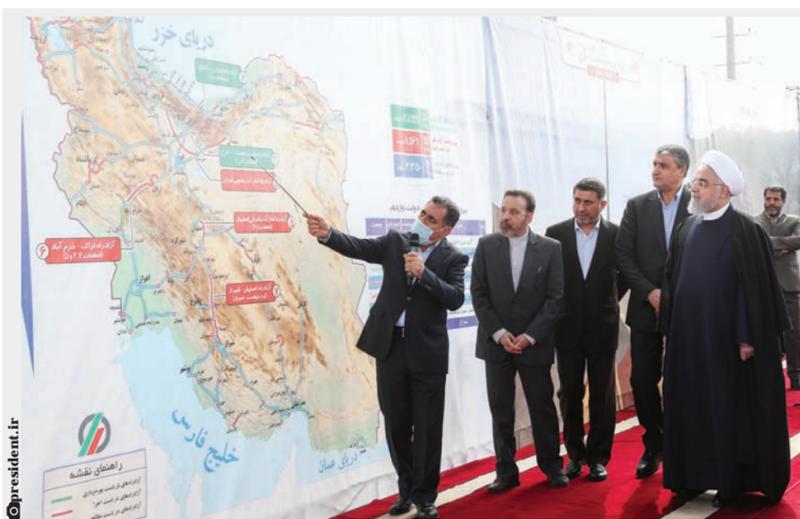
The strong-willed Iranian people are in the last days of a very hard Persian year (March 21, 2019-March 19, 2020) as the enemies embarked on resorting to maximum pressure policy against Iran. They have imposed debilitating sanctions, launched military aggression, and assassinated Iranian military commander among other things.

COVID-19, which is thought to have originated in Wuhan last December, has spread to more than 162 countries and territories. The global death toll from the virus as of March 17 passed 7,332 with more than 185,387 cases confirmed worldwide, according to the World Health Organization.

As of Tuesday, COVID-19 death toll in Iran reached 988. Also, 16,169 Iranians have been confirmed infected with the virus as of this date.

In order to stop the spread of the disease schools and universities have been shut down and cultural and religious gatherings have been cancelled. Also, public places, buses, and underground trains are being regularly disinfected and sanitized.

The resolved Iranian people are countering the pandemic disease under devastating sanctions and psychological warfare, which are intended to intensify maximum pressure against Iran. →2



Rouhani inaugurates Hemmat-Karaj Freeway

TEHRAN — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani officially inaugurated the Hemmat-Karaj Freeway on Tuesday, IRNA reported.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by senior officials including the Minister of Transport and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami, Deputy Transport Minister Kheirollah Khademi, and Presidential Chief of staff Mahmoud Vaezi. →4

Dear readers,
The next issue of the Tehran Times will be published on Saturday, April 4.

Cuban ambassador lauds Iranians fighting coronavirus amid 'genocidal' U.S. sanctions

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Alexis Bandrich Vega, the ambassador of Cuba to Iran, sent a message on Tuesday to the Tehran Times congratulating Iranians on the new Persian year and praised the Iranians who are working hard to contain coronavirus amid sanctions imposed on the country by the "immoral and genocidal" U.S.

Following is the text of his message:
Before the advent of the new Persian year, Cuba's embassy in the Islamic Republic of Iran would like to convey to the brother Iranian people a message of fraternity, prosperity, success and support to this great nation that is fighting against that enemy called Coronavirus and an enemy genocidal and immoral who tries in vain to suffocate you with sanctions. We want this message to reach all institutions, medical staff and people in general, our admiration and recognition for the extraordinary work they do and that will surely lead to victory against this virus.

We extend our most sincere wishes that the New Year be of prosperity, happiness for all; and that the level of friendship and exchange in all areas between both nations be raised even more.

I am sure that the Iranians support each other in this situation: British envoy

POLITICAL TEHRAN — British Ambassador to Tehran Robert Macaire said on Monday that Britain, Germany and France sent a package of aid to Iran which includes medical equipment and also financial aid up to five million euros.

"Iran, like some other countries, may have shortages of medicine and medical equipment. So, Britain, Germany and France sent a package of aid to Iran which includes medical equipment and an amount of money up to five million euros," IRNA quoted him as saying in a video message posted on Macaire's Instagram page.

He also said in his message that the Iranians support each other in fight against the coronavirus.

"Norouz [Iranian New Year holidays] is a time for festivity, however, unfortunately, this year will be different due to necessity to stay at home. However, I am sure that the Iranians support each other in this situation," he said.

During a cabinet meeting on March 11, President Hassan Rouhani said it is essential to cut the chain of the spread of coronavirus and avoid inter-city travels.

He noted it is necessary to avoid trips between cities and traffic. He called for observing all the healthcare guidelines during the Norouz (New Year) holidays to prevent spread of the coronavirus.

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

As of Tuesday, 988 Iranians died of coronavirus and 16,169 persons confirmed contracted the virus.

Ayatollah Sistani: Medical staff's care for corona patients as important as protecting borders

SHAFQAQA — "Efforts made by medical staff to treat and take care of patients affected by Coronavirus are as important as efforts made by fighting warriors in protecting country borders," the Grand Ayatollah Sistani has said.

The Grand Ayatollah Sistani's office issued the Shia Grand Marja's opinion in response to a question about the efforts of the medical staff who are working to deal with patients with corona disease.

The question and answer texts are as follows:
In the name of God, The Most Compassionate, The Most Merciful

The Office of the Grand Ayatollah Sistani (May God Almighty protect him)

Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuhu
What people suffering these days from the Coronavirus is not hidden from you. Also, the medical and nursing staff and volunteers at hospitals and medical centers that deal with patients are endangering their health and possibly sacrificing their lives because they are at risk of being infected by the virus or transferring it. What is the religious authority's opinion in this regard?

In the Name of God
Treating patients and caring for them and doing their affairs is a sufficient obligation for doctors, nurses, etc., but the relevant authorities must provide all the essentials supplies to protect them from the dangers of the disease and no failure will be accepted.

There is no doubt that the actions of those loved ones, despite all the challenges, is a great measure and is an effort that we cannot determine a price for it, even the importance of their work may be the same as the efforts of the heroic warrior forces at the borders who defend the country and its people.

Surely Allah (SWT) honors their efforts, and not only will grant them rewards in the Hereafter, but we hope to all who sacrificed their lives in this way, may be granted the reward and status the same as the martyrs on the Day of Resurrection. We appreciate them for their precious human action, and we ask God Almighty to protect them and protect them from any evil; as God is a Hearer.

Norouz can serve as 14-day quarantine time to contain coronavirus

1 → In my opinion Iran is now facing a much more serious problem than China first faced at the beginning. China was mostly grappling with the crisis in Wuhan. However, officials in Iran did not take the issue seriously. They should have followed the China model, which locked down Hubei province and prevented the virus spread all across the country.

Worse than that is that Iran is facing unprecedented illegal and suffocating sanctions in history at the hands of the U.S. and Donald Trump and his team are so cold-hearted and cruel that are not even ready to lift or even loosen sanctions.

At this critical moment using soft language to encourage citizens to stay at home is like playing with the lives of people.

And now the Norouz holidays are an opportune time. They can serve as a 14-day quarantine time to contain the virus. Failing to miss this opportunity may cause irreparable damages.

Calls rise to lift sanctions on Iran

Zarif: It is 'immoral' to observe sanctions

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Global opposition to U.S. sanctions against Iran is rising. Anger over illegal sanctions comes as Iran is grappling with the worst coronavirus crisis in West Asia and the crippling sanctions, including medical bans, are hampering an effective campaign against the rapidly-spreading deadly virus.

Until Tuesday, the coronavirus death toll in Iran reached about 1,000. The number of people who have also contracted the virus surpassed 16,000.

Prime Minister Imran Khan, in an interview with The Associated Press on Monday, called for lifting sanctions on Iran to enable it to combat coronavirus.

In a call for action from the international community, Khan said it was time to end U.S. sanctions on Iran.

Khan said Iran is a "classic example" of a place where the humanitarian imperative to contain the outbreak outweighs political rivalries or economic dogmas.

In a letter to certain world leaders on Saturday, President Rouhani warned about the human calamity that coronavirus is posing, saying containing this "huge and dangerous crisis" is not possible by a single country let alone Iran which has no access to international financial markets.

■ Russia calls sanction on Iran 'anti-human'

The Russian Foreign Ministry on Monday slammed as "anti-human" sanctions against Iran, the Anadolu Agency reported.

The sanctions create a strong barrier for Iran that has been hit heavily by the virus known as COVID-19, the ministry said in a statement.

"Illegal unilateral U.S. sanctions, imposed since May 2018 as part of the 'maximum pressure' campaign, are a powerful obstacle to effective fight against the infection. The reason for the many victims, caused by it, lies not only in the disease itself, but also in the fact that the U.S. purposefully hinders the resistance [to the coronavirus]."

"Millions of Iranian citizens were cut off from the possibility of purchasing necessary medical supplies, no matter how hard Washington tried to distort it. The anti-human policy of the U.S. provokes deep regret, alarm and serious concern," it said.

The ministry urged the U.S. to lift the



restrictive measures "hitting the human rights in Iran."

"The global pandemic is not a time for settling geopolitical accounts, especially those that have no basis, invented in Washington for the purpose of satisfying their own ambitions," it said.

■ China says sanctions could seriously affect Iran's efforts to contain the pandemic coronavirus

Also, on Monday Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang urged removal of sanctions on Iran as the country is fighting the coronavirus.

Noting that the Iranian government and people are at a critical moment to fight against the novel coronavirus disease, Geng stressed continued unilateral sanctions have deteriorated the situation and gone against the humanitarian spirit.

The sanctions could seriously affect Iran's fight against the pandemic and humanitarian

assistance provided by the United Nations and other international organizations, Geng added.

■ Kuwait allocates \$10 million to intensify fight against coronavirus in Iran

Kuwait's Foreign Minister Shaikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, in a phone call with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif on Tuesday, said his government has allocated a \$10 million aid package to counter COVID-19 outbreak in Iran.

"The Kuwaiti government and people stay with the Iranian government and people in these hard days," the Kuwaiti foreign minister said.

Zarif appreciated the Kuwaiti government and people for the aid as well as their sympathy, saying containing pandemic coronavirus requires regional and international cooperation.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan says Iran is a "classic example" of a place where the humanitarian imperative to contain the outbreak outweighs political rivalries or economic dogmas.

Russia to continue helping Iran to contain coronavirus: Ryabkov

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov has said that Moscow will continue helping Iran to contain the coronavirus.

"Russia's help to Iran in fighting the coronavirus will continue. The Russian officials are studying ways to take action in this respect after receiving President Hassan Rouhani's letter," Ryabkov told Iran's Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali in a phone conversation on Tuesday.

In a letter to a number of world leaders on Saturday, Rouhani said that fighting the coronavirus requires coordinated actions at the international level.

"No single country can manage this huge and dangerous crisis," he said.

Rouhani also said it is essential to break and remove United States' "cruel sanctions" against Iran and prepare common healthcare protocols among the neighboring countries.

"Management of this huge and dangerous crisis is not possible to be done by one single country, let alone a country that faces many problems in accessing international financial markets and providing its needed commodities," he said.

■ Moscow to expand cooperation with Tehran through INSTEX

Ryabkov also said that Moscow has taken actions to lift U.S. sanctions on Iran and makes efforts to expand cooperation with Tehran through the Instrument in Support

of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX).

INSTEX has been designed by the European Union to facilitate legitimate trade with Tehran. It was introduced on January 31, 2019, by France, Germany, and Britain, the three European countries party to the nuclear deal.

INSTEX was supposed to be a financial channel and a special mechanism for transferring money in spite of U.S. sanctions on Iran. Its objective was to facilitate Iran's transactions with European companies.

In late November 2019, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden issued a joint statement announcing becoming shareholders of INSTEX.

"In light of the continuous European support for the agreement and the ongoing efforts to implement the economic part of it and to facilitate legitimate trade between Europe and Iran, we are now in the process of becoming shareholders of the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) subject to completion of national procedures. INSTEX was established by France, Germany and the United Kingdom in January 2019," read the statement, published by the Foreign Ministry of Finland.

During a meeting with Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Russian Federation Council Konstantin Kosachev on March 3, Jalali said that no transaction has been done through INSTEX.

"The Europeans created INSTEX, however, no transaction

has been done within the framework of this mechanism up to this moment," he said.

Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said on February 23 that INSTEX is ineffective and useless.

Matthew Anthony Evangelista, a U.S. political science professor at Cornell University, has said that the Europeans have been "slow" in implementing INSTEX.

"The Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges was a European initiative to facilitate trade with Iran despite U.S. sanctions that particularly affected the banking sector. But the Europeans were slow in getting the process going, and they met fierce opposition from the United States, so INSTEX was only established in January 2019," ILNA quoted him as saying in an interview published late February.

"I think it is difficult for the Europeans to continue trying to support Iran," Evangelista added.

He also noted, "The situation does not seem fair to Iran."

On May 8, 2019, exactly one year after President Trump abrogated the JCPOA, Iran said its "strategic patience" is over and started to gradually reduce its commitment to the JCPOA at bi-monthly interval. Finally, on January 5 Iran took the last and final step in reducing its commitments to the JCPOA.

However, Iran has insisted that it will reverse its decisions if the EU abides by its obligations under the multilateral pact.

Iranians to Western nations: We will never do what you did to us in hard days!

1 → The most important part of the maximum pressure puzzle, according to its evil planners, was nothing but soft psychological operation against Iranians. It was first and foremost intended to create a sense of hopelessness among Iranians and make them surrender.

Following the ongoing disproportionate war against Iran, the enemies found the coronavirus outbreak as a very good chance to inflict the last losses on our society, however the enemies have been ignoring the almighty God's power which is superior than any other powers.

A fast review of subjects on which certain rancorous media outlets have been concentrating over the past weeks will disclose realities:

The mentioned media outlets mocked the developments in Iran after the country's media reported that Deputy Health Minister Iraj Harirchi contracted coronavirus. However, later they kept mum on the same developments when the British health minister and 10 French parliamentarians were infected with the pandemic disease!

They exaggerated normal shortage of face masks and disinfectant gel in Iran as a catastrophe amid the virus outbreak, but later the same story happened in the U.S. even before the virus outbreak in the country. None on the media outlets paid any attention to that issue!

They resorted to media hue and cry that Iran should close its borders, accusing Iran of a main source of spreading the virus. But now we are witnessing that both the U.S. and European countries have closed their borders in order to prevent transition of the virus!

They termed virus-related death of some Iranian political and religious figures as a crisis in the country. However after a short time the Canadian prime minister's wife, the U.S. defense secretary and his deputy contradicted the COVID-19 and were quarantined!

They lied that the Grand Ayatollahs in the holy city of Qom had banned fulfillment of healthcare instructions. Later, images of some American priests were released encouraging people to continue handshaking with each other regardless of the virus outbreak!

They employed a person to release a video of the man who had embarked on licking the holy shrine of Masoumeh (AS), the sister of Imam Reza, but later a video went viral showing a Swiss journalist was licking a street's asphalt!

They claimed that the Iranians are wrapped in superstitions. However, a TV program released a video from a Christian priest claiming that he enjoys the power of curing people hit by the virus!

They called Iranians some rumormonger people, but hundreds of photos were released about fight among people in Western coun-

tries over panic purchasing of toilet tissues which caused some countries' officials to offer using water pitchers for clean-up in toilets instead of using toilet tissues!

They claimed that the Iranians are unable to fight coronavirus outbreak and have resorted to praying, but a photo of mass prayers of the U.S. government officials in the White House went viral!

There are too many of such baseless accusations to damage the reputation of the Iranian society.

Undoubtedly, if the European countries as well as the U.S. had experienced only a part of the vast brutal sanctions on Iranians over the last 40 years, they have thus far collapsed.

It should not be noted that Iran has performed a wide range of anti-coronavirus measures across the country which according to the World Health Organization (WHO) none of the so-called advanced American or European countries could do under such devastating sanctions and pressures.

The abovementioned evidences are some realities which have so far been pursued by the enemies within the framework of different perceptual war scenarios.

No one can ignore that self-confidence, rich culture, deep humanitarian and religious beliefs have through the history turned the Iranians into a resilient and pioneering nation. Sacrifices of the country's medical

Zarif also condemned the U.S. illegal and unilateral sanctions against Iran, calling on Kuwait to participate in a global campaign aimed at halting such inhuman embargoes.

President Hassan Rouhani has said that the fight against the illness is being hampered by U.S. sanctions.

So far, Japan, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, the three European states of Britain, France and Germany, the Republic of Azerbaijan, and some other states have also allocated money or sent medical supplies to Iran to contain coronavirus.

■ Zarif: 'Unlawful sanctions impairing ability to fight COVID-19'

On Tuesday, Foreign Minister Zarif urged countries across the world to join a global campaign to disregard the U.S. sanctions against Iran.

Zarif said the "unlawful U.S. sanctions" have "drained Iran's economic resources" and thereby "impairing ability to fight COVID-19."

"They literally kill innocents," Zarif wrote on his Twitter account.

"It is immoral to observe them: doing so has never saved anyone from future U.S. wrath," Iran's chief diplomat stated, asking other countries to "join the growing global campaign to disregard U.S. sanctions on Iran."

Also in a tweet on Sunday, Zarif said, "It is IMMORAL to let a bully (Trump) kill innocents."

In an earlier tweet, Zarif had said Trump is intensifying unilateral sanctions on Tehran amid COVID-19 outbreak across the country, noting that the move was nothing but "medical terrorism."

"The world can no longer be silent as U.S. Economic Terrorism is supplanted by its Medical Terrorism," Zarif said.

On Thursday, Zarif sent a letter to United Nations chief Antonio Guterres urging the world to disregard sanctions on Tehran. 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.

Iranian lawyers urge Indian Bar Council to uphold Muslims' rights

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — A group of Iranian lawyers has denounced violence against Muslims in India, urging the country's Bar Council to uphold Muslims' rights.

The group, known as Lawyers Without Borders, wrote a letter to Chairman of the Bar Council of India Manan Kumar Mishra expressing concern over the significant and unjustified violence by extremist Hindu groups against Muslims protesters.

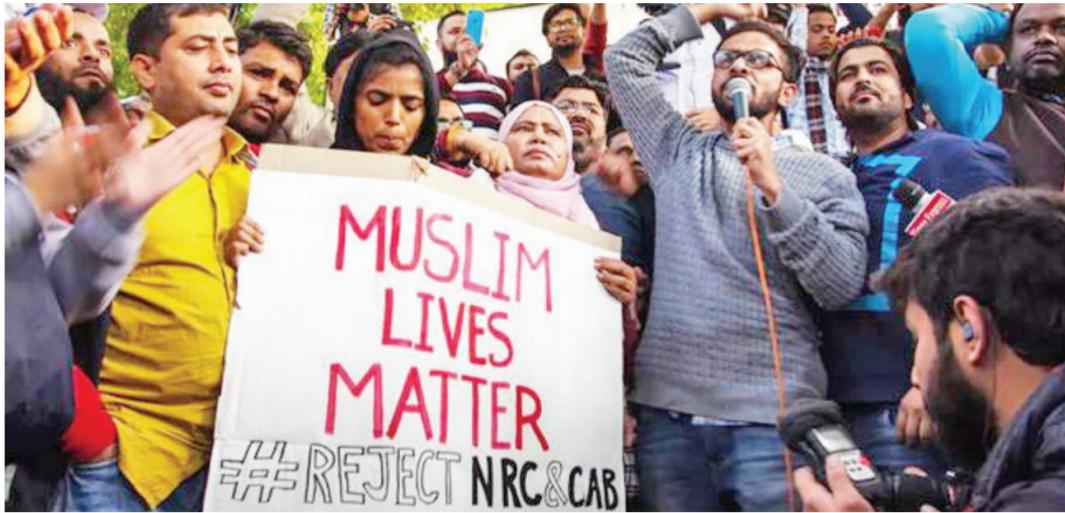
According to the group, the Muslim protesters were peacefully objecting to the newly-passed controversial "Citizenship Act". "Apparently the security forces have not been able to control the violence, and some of the extremists have been backed up so that security in some areas in New Delhi has been endangered," the letter read, Press TV reported.

They warned about the grave consequences of such policies, emphasizing that the "discriminatory" law has raised international concern.

"It is clear that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act distinguishes between refugees of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, Christian religion and Muslims in accepting Indian citizenship. It subsequently discriminates between refugees based on their religions and can be considered as a discriminatory act," the letter added.

It went on to say that Muslims in India have used their fundamental right to peaceful protest, but have faced "violent and inhuman treatment".

"Some Hindu extremist groups have taken advantage of this situation and resorted to violent and inhuman treatment of Muslims whether they had objected to the law or not, and thus have turned such



a peaceful protest into a conflict between Muslims and Hindus," it stated.

The Lawyers Without Borders reminded the chairman of India's Bar Council that the current violence and discrimination against Muslims is "clearly in contradiction with the UN Charter and the fundamental human rights instruments".

It also expressed the hope that the "prestigious" Bar Council of India will "take fundamental steps to uphold the rights of people, especially Muslims, and help to reduce violence."

The letter finally asked the Indian officials to take the necessary steps to end the serious concerns of the international community about

the situation of Indian Muslims.

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

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

Earlier this month, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned the government of India against continued massacre of Muslims, saying that the current pogrom going on against Muslim people in the South Asian country will lead to isolation of New Delhi in the Islamic world.

"The hearts of Muslims all over the world are grieving over the massacre of Muslims in India," Ayatollah Khamenei said in a statement tweeted in Urdu, English and Persian.

"The govt. of India should confront extremist Hindus & their parties & stop the massacre of Muslims in order to prevent India's isolation from the world of Islam," the tweet went on.

Tehran urges London to defy U.S. sanctions hampering coronavirus fight

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Tehran has urged London to defy the unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States against Iran due to their negative impact on the Islamic Republic's fight against the coronavirus outbreak.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif urged Britain to defy the sanctions in accordance with its obligations under the Iran nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

He made the remarks in a Monday phone talk with his British counterpart Dominic Raab.

Zarif further described the U.S. sanctions as an obstacle to Iran's fight against the highly contagious virus.

He also thanked the European Union and the three EU parties to the JCPOA — Britain, France and Germany — for dispatching aid to Iran.

The phone conversation came shortly after the Iranian ambassador to the UK announced Britain has agreed to pay an outstanding £400 million debt it owes to Iran plus the interest.

"The legal process of this long-running case, which has been going on for more than 50 years, is nearing its end," Hamid Baeidinejad said in an interview with Iranian newspaper Etemad, Press TV reported.

"The court has ordered the British government to pay the Iranian debt plus interest, and this cannot be changed.



At the same time, the opposing lawyers have tried to use every legal opportunity to delay the practical execution of the court's decision," Baeidinejad added.

Earlier in the day, Zarif also raised the issue of U.S. sanctions in a separate phone conversation with the foreign minister of Croatia, the rotating president of the European Union.

In his phone talk with his Croatian counterpart Gordon Grljic-Radman, Zarif emphasized that the EU must not abide by the U.S. unilateral and unlawful sanctions.

He said the EU should do this not only as a JCPOA obli-

gation, but also to prevent the deaths of innocent Iranians due to the cruel U.S. sanctions.

The Croatian foreign minister, in turn, expressed solidarity with the Iranian government and nation in their fight against the epidemic, and offered his condolences to the families of the victims.

Hit by the U.S. sanctions, Iran has been trying to contain the rapid spread of coronavirus which so far has infected more than 16,000 people and killed about 1000 until Tuesday.

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.

The virus has infected more than 182,000 people worldwide and killed more than 7,100. Nearly 80,000 people worldwide have recovered after being infected.

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.

MP wants UN Security Council to pass urgent resolution to annul U.S. sanctions on Iran

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh, a member of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, has urged the United Nations Security Council to pass an "urgent resolution" to revoke the illegal U.S. sanctions on Iran as the Islamic Republic is fighting the deadly coronavirus.

"Iran must officially ask removal of sanctions through a resolution of the United Nations Security Council in order to fight the coronavirus," he told ISNA in an interview published on Tuesday.

He noted that the coronavirus outbreak has become pandemic and must be countered based on international conventions. "We are fulfilling our duty [in fighting the coronavirus], but the international community does not help take action at the international level," the MP said.

Iran is currently battling the world's deadliest outbreak of the coronavirus in the Middle East.

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

The Trump administration has not only introduced the harshest sanctions in history against Iran, banning a total ban on Tehran's oil sale, it has also threatened to punish any country that does business with Iran. Fearing U.S. secondary sanctions, the companies and countries are even afraid to sell medicine to Iran.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang has urged removal of sanctions on Iran as the country is fighting the coronavirus.

Geng made remarks at a press briefing when asked to comment on a letter sent by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to leaders of several countries, in which he accused the U.S. government of continuing to thwart Iran's efforts to counter the pandemic, with sanctions having caused about 200 billion U.S. dollars of direct



damages to the Iranian economy in less than two years, Xinhua reported.

Saying the Iranian government and people are at a critical moment to fight against the novel coronavirus disease, Geng stressed continued unilateral sanctions imposed on Iran have deteriorated the situation and gone against the humanitarian spirit.

Russian Foreign Ministry also issued a statement on Monday saying "in light of incoming reports of the growing pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus, we cannot but pay attention to the unfair, unequal situation that the Islamic Republic of Iran, our good neighbor and partner, is facing ... The reason for the many victims caused by it [the spread of the virus] lies not only in the disease itself, but also in the fact that U.S. deliberately prevented Iran from resisting it."

The ministry stressed that "the U.S. inhumane policy causes deep regret, alarm and serious concern."

"We strongly urge the United States to face the truth and take an overdue decision to immediately lift the sanctions striking on the fundamental human rights in Iran. The global pandemic is not the time to settle geopolitical scores," the ministry said.

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."

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has sent a letter to 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 has 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.

Mehdi Sanaei, a top advisor to Zarif, has said from human rights perspective removal of "unilateral" and "illegitimate" sanctions on Iran is essential as country is the battling 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," he tweeted on Saturday.

Sanaei, Iran's former ambassador to Moscow, added that other countries have responsibility towards the Iranians and must not follow the U.S. sanctions.

Judiciary slams EU for complying with U.S. sanctions

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — Iranian Judiciary Spokesman Gholam Hossein Esmaeili slammed European countries for their compliance with the U.S. sanctions on Iran's medicine sector as the country is fighting the coronavirus outbreak.

"The U.S.-led global arrogance and hegemonic system is hostile not only to our ruling system but also to our people and our citizens," Esmaeili said in a press conference on Tuesday.

The cruel and unilateral sanctions imposed by the U.S. against Iran, including those hampering the country's medicine imports are a clear example of criminal moves by the U.S.-led global arrogance, he added.

He emphasized that while the U.S. is not expected to lift the sanctions because of its endless enmity, there is expectation from European countries that claim to be independent.

"Today is the time when European countries should prove their independence and their claim of supporting human rights by revoking the U.S. unilateral sanctions, especially in the field of medicine," he went on to say.

The remarks came as the total number of coronavirus cases in Iran rose to 14,991 on Monday, of whom nearly 5,000 have recovered and left the hospital, according to the Health Ministry.

Speaking at a daily press conference on Monday, Health Ministry Spokesman Kianoosh Jahanpoor said the death toll from COVID-19 in Iran has risen to 853.

Medical staffs in all 31 provinces of Iran have been working tirelessly over the past weeks to contain the novel coronavirus. First detected in Wuhan city in central China in December, the virus has spread to more than 140 countries.

More than 182,000 have been infected globally, according to the WHO. Of those, about 80,000 have recovered.

U.S. sanctions act similar to a devastating virus: Human rights official

TEHRAN — The U.S. sanctions resemble destructive viruses in the field of international relations and law, deputy head of Iran's Human Rights Headquarters for international affairs said.

Majid Tafreshi made the remarks in a meeting with Japan's Ambassador at the UN European Office Okaniwa Ken late on Monday, the FNA reported.

During the meeting, the Iranian side raised various issues, including continuation of mutual legal and judicial talks, identifying secondary, unilateral and extra-resolution sanctions as destructive viruses imposed on the international relations and law, need for ending instrumental use of human rights mechanism, especially under political resolutions against countries, possibility of canceling Olympic games in Japan if efforts to curb coronavirus fail, assassination of Lieutenant General Soleimani as a condemned act in international law as well as the assassination of a Japanese admiral by the U.S. 77 years ago.

Japanese ambassador, for his part, hailed good relations with Iran and the 90th anniversary of forging diplomatic relations between the two countries, saying that Japanese prime minister visited with President Rouhani three times last year.

Voicing his country's concern over implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Japanese envoy said that his country is aware of Iran's cooperation with IAEA.

Ken stressed the need for efforts to ease tensions, saying that Japan is trying to prevent politicization of human rights issues and promote legal and judicial dialogues with Iran.

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 171,000 people in the world, claiming more than 6,500 lives.

The Iranian health ministry announced on Monday that the number of coronavirus patients in the country has increased to 14,991, while the death toll rose to 853 people. A sum of 4,996 coronavirus patients have also recovered so far.

Last Wednesday, the Iranian foreign ministry declared that despite Washington's claims of cooperation to transfer drugs to Iran via the new Swiss-launched payment mechanism, the U.S. is troubling the process amid the coronavirus outbreak in the country.

Although US claims that medicines and medical equipment are not under sanctions, they have practically blocked the transfer of Iran's financial resources in other countries into the Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement (SHTA), Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Seyed Abbas Mousavi said.

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

The government also imposed travel restrictions, especially on Iran's north, which is among the red zones. The country has also adopted strict digital health control procedures at airports to spot possible infections.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The WHO is dispatching separate delegations to all countries.

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	502319.8
IFX	6491.01

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,968 rials
GBP	51,481 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$32.14/b
WTI	\$29.43/b
OPEC Basket	\$34.13/b
Gold	\$1,475.90/oz
Silver	\$12.44/oz
Platinum	\$646.60/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

The IMF should inject liquidity through SDRs, and fast

Central banks around the developed world are using expansionary monetary policy and coordinated liquidity actions to alleviate the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on the global economy.

While these are welcome, we think they are insufficient, as they leave out most emerging and low-income countries.

It is clear that the outbreak will have a significant impact on the global economy. Tourism is coming to a halt and international trade will take a serious hit. Commodity-producing countries, particularly of oil, will see export earnings plunge. The increase in asset purchases and liquidity funding is the right approach, as financial conditions are likely to tighten.



IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva

But it is being implemented only by G7 central banks, buying the same safe assets that the private sector is buying as a shield against risk, and leaving out most of the rest of the world economy.

This crisis finds developing countries in a much weaker position compared with the global financial crisis of 2008-09. Without the "China put" that brought commodity prices up in early 2009, this time it will be more costly to limit the downside on emerging markets and other developing countries. The fiscal space has all but disappeared.

In 2007, 40 emerging market and middle-income countries had a combined central government fiscal surplus equal to 0.3 percent of gross domestic product, according to the IMF. Last year, they posted a fiscal deficit of 4.9 percent of GDP. The deterioration is not new — they have been posting deficits of this magnitude since 2015. Nor is the phenomenon restricted to a few countries.

The deficit of EMs in Asia went from 0.7 percent of GDP in 2007 to 5.8 percent in 2019; in Latin America, it rose from 1.2 percent of GDP to 4.9 percent; and European EMs went from a surplus of 1.9 percent of GDP to a deficit of 1 percent. Only in the Middle East has the situation barely changed, but countries there had large deficits in both periods, hardly a source of relief.

So the ability of EMs to implement countercyclical fiscal policies will be limited this time around. Their capacity for expansionary monetary policies is also significantly more constrained.

For once, policy interest rates are already quite low in many EMs and their currencies are weakening fast against the U.S. dollar. Currency weakness is not unjustified.

In Latin America, our analysis of terms of trade, financial market volatility measured by the Vix index, the exchange rates of other EM currencies and the spreads over U.S. Treasuries of bonds in the benchmark JPMorgan Emerging Market Bond Index, shows that such factors explain most of the recent moves in the region's currencies.

The problem is that Latin American currencies are already between 20 and 30 percent undervalued compared with their historical mean in real effective terms, while they were overvalued compared with their means in 2008.

This may spark inflation concerns and limit the capacity of some central banks to act. On top of this, the level of EM corporate hard currency debt is significantly higher now than in 2008.

According to the IMF's October 2019 Financial Stability Report, the median external debt of emerging market and middle-income countries increased from 100 percent of GDP in 2008 to 160 percent of GDP in 2019. Corporate debt has increased significantly across the EM universe, leading to worsening credit fundamentals.

Foreign currency private sector debt maturities will put pressures on EM central bank reserves and on their currencies.

The IMF should alleviate these pressures by injecting liquidity into the global economy, as it did in 2009, through an expansion of the Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) of its shareholders.

The SDR is an artificial currency built from a basket of currencies that include the U.S. dollar, the euro, the renminbi, the yen and the British pound.

In August and September 2009, the IMF expanded the stock of SDRs tenfold compared to the previous level, by the equivalent of \$283 billion. The allocation of SDRs is made as a percentage of a member's quota, which in turn hinges on the size of its economy, so a measure like this would benefit all member countries.

SDRs, importantly, can be exchanged for hard currencies, thus bringing much-needed (hard currency) liquidity to developing economies.

Timing is of the essence to limit the economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak on the global economy, including the weaker developing countries.

Their fiscal and external debt positions are weaker now than in 2008, so the measures taken will have to be bolder this time. With a similar SDR expansion to that of 2008, countries such as India and Mexico would receive the equivalent of \$7.8 billion and \$5.3 billion, respectively. (Source: Financial Times)

Rouhani inaugurates Hemmat-Karaj Freeway

Stretching 14.5 kilometers (km), Hemmat-Karaj Freeway starts from the end of Shahid Kharrazi Highway in District 22 Municipality of Tehran and ends at the beginning of Chalous Road.

As reported, with this freeway going operational nearly 35 percent of Tehran and Alborz transportation traffic will be shifted

to this route and consequently the traffic in the mentioned provinces will be significantly reduced.

The project started nearly 10 years ago and the first section of the freeway, extending as long as 5.5 km, was completed with \$2.6 million of funding and went operational previously this year.



Iranian President Hassan Rouhani (1st R) inaugurates Hemmat-Karaj Freeway on Tuesday in a ceremony attended by Presidential Chief of Staff Mahmoud Vaezi (2nd L), and Deputy Transport Minister Kheirollah Khademi (1st L).

Non-oil trade at \$78.5b in 11 months



TEHRAN — The value of Iran's non-oil trade stood at \$78.5 billion during the eleven-month period from March 21, 2019 until February 19, 2020, IRIB reported on Tuesday, citing the data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

The IRICA data show that the country has exported 125 million tons of non-oil commodities valued at \$38.5 billion during the mentioned eleven-month period, with a 17-percent rise in weight while 4.4-percent fall in the worth compared to the same time span in the past year.

Iran's 11-month imports of non-oil

goods stood at 32 million tons worth \$40 billion, indicating 10.8 percent growth in weight and 2.3 percent rise in value year-on-year, the same report confirmed.

China, Iraq, Turkey, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Afghanistan were the major export destinations of Iranian non-oil commodities, while China, UAE, Turkey, India and Germany were the main import sources of such goods to Iran during the mentioned eleven-month period.

The value of Iran's non-oil exports stood at \$44.3 billion in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2019) while \$42.6 billion worth of commodities were shipped into the country.

Iran's annual horticultural output at nearly 13m tons: SCI



TEHRAN — Iran's horticultural output is expected to reach 13 million tons in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 19), IRNA reported on Tuesday, citing a Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) survey.

According to the mentioned survey, oranges, tangerines, apples, grapes, dates, pomegranates, and peaches accounted for 76 percent of the total production of horticultural products in the current year.

The results of the current survey showed an 11-percent increase in the production of such products compared to the figure for the SCI's previous survey which was carried out two years ago (calendar year of 1396).

The Horticulture Survey was conducted by the Iranian Statistical Center in collaboration with the Provincial Management and Planning Organization of Iran in the summer, with the aim of estimating the production of horticultural products, the area of the gardens and plots, and identifying the industry's required equipment and items.

According to SCI, production of oranges and tangerines is estimated at 9.2 million tons this year, a 36-percent increase compared to the figure for the Iranian calendar year of 1396.

The production of grapes also experienced a 10 percent growth in comparison to the previous survey.

Coronavirus could further weaken UK economy

UK economic growth is expected to slow sharply in 2020 amid disruption caused by the impact of Coronavirus, according to the latest economic forecast by the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC).

The leading business group has downgraded its UK GDP growth expectations for 2020 to 0.8%, from our previous forecast of 1.0%. Outside of the 2008/09 financial crisis, this would be the weakest full-year growth outturn since 1992 and down sharply from UK GDP growth of 1.4% in 2019.

UK GDP growth is then expected to pick up in subsequent years: to 1.4% in 2021 and 1.6% in 2022. Our forecast indicates that by the end of 2022, the UK economy will have grown below its historic average growth rate of 2.6% for eight successive years, the longest period since records began.

The disruptive impact of Coronavirus is expected to weigh significantly on key drivers of UK GDP growth through the first half of 2020. A lack of clarity on the UK's future trading relationship with the EU and other partners around the world and a struggling global economy is also predicted to limit UK's near-term growth prospects:



UK export growth in 2020 is projected to be its weakest since 2009 as a subdued global economy, the impact of Coronavirus and uncertainty over future trading arrangements constrain export activity.

Business investment is expected to contract by 0.7% this year as the impact of Coronavirus, the cost of doing business in the UK and a lack of clarity on the future trading conditions limit investment intentions.

Growth in household spending in 2020 is predicted to be at its slowest since 2011, as the effect of Coronavirus temporarily weakens consumer demand, despite historically low unemployment.

On the upside, historically strong levels

of government spending - both observed in Budget 2020 and anticipated in the upcoming Spending Review and Autumn Budget - are expected to support the UK economy through the forecast period. The measures announced by the Bank of England, including lowering interest rates and steps to support business access to finance, will also help mitigate some of the impact of the Coronavirus on the UK economy.

Commenting on this forecast Suren Thiru, Head of Economics at the British Chambers of Commerce, said: "Our latest forecast indicates that the UK economy faces a challenging short-term outlook.

"It is increasingly likely that the boost from higher government spending and more political certainty, will be surpassed over the near-term by the negative impact of Coronavirus on the UK economy.

"Although the scale and impact of Coronavirus remains highly uncertain, early evidence of disruption to supply chains and weakening in consumer demand and business activity could mean that even in the case of a temporary shock to the economy, there may be some long-term impact on economic output

— particularly if significant action is needed to combat its spread.

"Failure to achieve a UK-EU arrangement conducive to trade is also a key risk to the outlook for the UK economy as disruption in early 2021 could adversely affect economic conditions."

Adam Marshall, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce, added: "Coronavirus could further weaken an already stagnant UK economy, as many businesses are starting to report an impact on their cash flow and growth prospects."

"The Chancellor and the Bank of England have responded to the immediate challenge with measures to help firms hit by Coronavirus, and they must now ensure this support gets to businesses as quickly as possible.

"More will need to be done later in the year to boost business confidence and tackle prolonged economic stagnation. Securing new trading arrangements, taking real action to reduce the high upfront costs of doing business and putting spades in the ground on long-overdue infrastructure projects must be prioritized in order to secure our long-term economic prospects."

(Source: britishchambers.org.uk)

Asian stocks jittery after Wall Street plunge

Asian shares held their ground on Tuesday in a volatile session following one of Wall Street's biggest one-day routs in history as headlines about the coronavirus outbreak and its global economic impact whiplashed investor sentiment.

Financial markets cratered on Monday with the S&P 500 SPX tumbling 12%, its biggest drop since "Black Monday" three decades ago, as a series of emergency central bank rate cuts globally only added to the recent sense of investor panic.

Australian shares closed 5.9% higher, to record the biggest daily percentage gain since Oct 2008, following a nearly 10% plunge on Monday. But few investors are feeling confident and uncertainty prevails.

MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan .MIAPJ0000PUS was flat, as was Japan's Nikkei stock index .N225 which traded either side of even through a bumpy day. South Korea's KOSPI .KS11 was down 2.4%.

Futures trade pointed to a positive open in U.S. and European markets. The S&P 500 e-minis ES1, were up 3.8% at their upper limit of 2,508.5.

In Europe, the pan-region Euro Stoxx 50 futures STXEC1 were up 1.8% at 2,463. German DAX futures FDXC1 were up 1.7% at 8,873.5 and FTSE futures FFI1 were up 2.2% at 5,232.5.

"The move in U.S. stock futures prompted some buying of battered down shares and lifted dollar/yen," said Junichi Ishikawa, senior FX strategist at IG Securities in Tokyo.

"The focus is shifting to the fiscal response to the virus. We're locked in a pattern where markets bounce and then resume falling."

Some \$2.69 trillion in market value was wiped from the S&P 500 on Monday as it suffered its third-largest daily percentage decline on record. Over the past 18 days, the benchmark index has lost \$8.28 trillion.



Gold, which is normally bought as a safe-haven, extended declines on Tuesday as some investors chose to sell whatever they could to keep their money in cash.

Oil futures rebounded in Asia, but downside risks remain due to an expected slump in global energy demand and Saudi Arabia's plans to increase crude output to expand its market share.

The U.S. Federal Reserve stunned investors with another emergency rate cut on Sunday, prompting other central banks to ease policy in the biggest coordinated response since the global financial crisis more than a decade ago.

Investors, however, are worried that central banks may have spent all their ammunition and that more draconian restrictions on personal movement are necessary to contain the global coronavirus outbreak.

Group of Seven finance ministers are expected to hold a call on Tuesday night — though markets are wanting to see public health progress as well as huge fiscal stimulus.

"I think the priorities of the governments around the world

will probably move away from economic growth toward containing the virus," said Jim McCafferty, Nomura's joint head of APAC equity research.

"Safety of national citizens might become a bigger priority. But with that they want to keep the economies in a working situation."

Traders are also looking to data due later on Tuesday, which is forecast to show German investor sentiment tumbled in March.

The United States will release retail sales and industrial production for February, which is unlikely to reflect the impact of the coronavirus.

Some investors say markets will not settle unless the U.S. government announces a big fiscal spending package to match the Fed's bold actions to slash rates and keep credit markets functioning.

Others say liquidity in some financial markets is starting to fall because there's such a high degree of uncertainty, meaning even some traditional safe-havens may not be that safe.

Spot gold XAU= fell 0.93% to \$1,497.60 per ounce.

In the currency market, the dollar rose 0.5% to 106.40 yen JPY=EBS, recovering slightly from a 2% decline from the previous session as the Fed's rate rippled through financial markets.

U.S. crude CL1 ticked up 4.25% to \$29.92 a barrel. Brent crude LCO1 also rose 2.40% to \$30.77 per barrel, but these gains are likely to be temporary.

Saudi Aramco reiterated on Monday plans to boost output to record levels. Top global oil producers Saudi Arabia and Russia started a price war after failing to agree on a plan to curb supply.

The coming flood of supply from Saudi Arabia and other producers could result in the largest surplus of crude in history, said global information provider HIS Markit.

(Source: Reuters)

NISOC to start 7 new projects to develop southern oil fields

E N E R G Y TEHRAN – Managing director of National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) said the company was about to begin seven new development projects in southern Iran, under the framework of a program for maintaining and enhancing oil production in 28 reserves in the mentioned region, Shana reported.

"The projects include Ahwaz 14, Ramin, Maroon 25, Maroon 14, Mansourabad, Siyah-Makan, and Zilaie," Ahmad Mohammadi said.

All the mentioned projects are going to be carried out by Iranian companies and the contractors for all of them have been determined and the projects will be started in the near future, according to the official.

According to Mohammadi, the projects have been awarded under Engineering,

Procurement and Construction (EPC) and Engineering, Procurement, Drilling (EPD) contracts, and all the funding will be supplied from domestic sources.

NISOC which contributes to nearly 80 percent of Iran's crude oil output, has defined 28 such project packages to be implemented in the fields it operates in southern Iran.

Back in January, managing director of Iran's Petropars Group, which is the Monitoring and Controlling (MC) body in the 28-reserve program, said all the projects defined in this program will be handled by domestic firms.

"The project which includes more than a hundred sub-projects, including drilling of about 280 new wells and repairing hundreds of wells, could boost domestic trade and employment," Hamidreza Masoudi said.



Back in May 2019, NISOC's former Managing Director Bijan Alipour had announced that with the new reserves developed in the region, the company's oil production capacity would increase by 340,000 barrels over the next two years.

"About 70 percent of the program is implemented in Khuzestan province [southwestern Iran] and 30 percent in other

neighboring provinces in the vicinity of the National Iranian South Oil Company's territory," he said.

In the preparation and implementation of this program, promoting domestic production through the use of the domestic workforce, domestic technology, and Iran-made equipment has been a priority for NISOC.



Rates to store oil at one of the world's biggest trading hubs are surging, as traders globally scramble to secure space in tanks to cope with slumping demand from the coronavirus outbreak and a flood of supply from the Saudi-Russia price war.

The need for a place to park all that surplus crude is breathing new life into the market at Cushing, Oklahoma, the nation's hub for

Price shock sets off search for tanks, revives dormant Cushing storage trade

trading of billions of dollars of crude a day and the town that bills itself "the pipeline crossroads of the world."

Analysts estimate the glut could reach more than 1 billion barrels. Some of the excess crude will be absorbed by nations snapping up cheap oil for their strategic reserves, including India and the United States, but that will only mop up some of the supply.

Storage rates in the Caribbean, which have been weak over the past couple of years, have also strengthened over the past week, market sources said.

And oil majors have shown interest in storing oil offshore in tankers, shipping sources said, although most vessels have

already been chartered for transporting crude instead as freight rates surge. "They can ask, but ship owners don't want it," one shipping source said.

Storage rates at Cushing, doubled over the past month, and were seen as high as about 50 cents per barrel per month by Friday, two traders familiar with the matter said. Storage for about 540,000 barrels at Plains All American's Cushing tanks for sublease was offered at 50 cents per barrel (cpb) for a term of one year, one source said.

"We average about 2 deals per day. Last week we booked 60 deals," said Ernie Barsamian, founder and CEO of The Tank Tiger, a terminal storage clearinghouse based in Princeton, New Jersey.

The United States currently has more than 450 million barrels in crude storage, not including strategic reserves. The drop in prices has sparked numerous storage inquiries, particularly at Cushing, the delivery point for benchmark U.S. crude futures.

Nearly 38 million barrels are currently parked there, half the about 76 million barrels in capacity. The rest of U.S. storage is at smaller tank farms or refining facilities. Inventories at Cushing rose more than 640,000 barrels in the week through Friday, traders said, citing data from market intelligence firm Genscape.

"Everyone and their mother is scrambling to fill up tankage," one trader said.

(Source: Reuters)

Oil prices jump \$1 as sharp falls draw investors, bargain buyers

Oil rose more than \$1 on Tuesday as bargain hunters emerged after recent sharp falls due to the coronavirus pandemic and the price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia, but fears of a recession still dragged on the market.

Brent crude was up by 1.8 percent, or 55 cents, to \$30.60 a barrel by 0410 GMT, after hitting a high of \$31.25.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude rose 3.7 percent, or \$1.06, to \$29.76, having come off a high of \$30.21.

"Presumably, the market is getting supported by physical bargain hunters and short covering," said Stephen Innes, chief markets strategist at AxiCorp.

The United States has said it will take advantage of low oil prices to fill its Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR), and other countries and companies are planning similar measures to fill storage tanks.

"But those storage facilities are rapidly filling. If storage does fill, quashing that demand, oil prices are sure to collapse further, and the global markets will then have to hope that the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Russia is resolved before we reach that point of no return," Innes said.

Amid heavy demand loss from the global spread of the virus that causes COVID-19, Saudi Arabia and Russia started a price war after failing to agree to extend their pact to cut output to support the market.

Saudi Aramco has said it would likely carry over its planned higher oil output for April into May, and that it was "very comfortable" with an oil price of \$30 a barrel.

"A deeply imbalanced supply and demand



outlook has not changed as Saudi and Russia have ramped up production in a time when global energy demand is badly hurt by border controls and travel bans," said Margaret Yang of CMC Markets.

Countries including the United States and Canada, and nations in Europe and Asia, are taking unprecedented steps to contain the virus, severely crippling demand for crude and refined products including gasoline and jet fuel.

Gasoline refining margins in the United States, the world's largest consumer of the motor fuel, plunged around 95 percent on Monday, briefly turning negative, as people stayed off the roads.

U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday said economic disruptions from the spread of the coronavirus and measures taken against it could lead to a recession.

In Asia, margins for transportation fuels also plunged to multi-year or multi-month lows after more countries imposed travel restrictions and curbed domestic movements as part of measures to slow down spread of the coronavirus.

(Source: Reuters)

Collapse of oil price threatens 'vulnerable' producers

The International Energy Agency has warned that the collapse in oil prices threatens to cut the revenues of "vulnerable" producing countries by up to 85 percent, as the coronavirus pandemic slashes demand and Russia and Saudi Arabia increase supplies.

The Paris-based agency said that countries such as Ecuador, Iraq and Nigeria would be particularly hard hit by the price slump, and said the IMF may need to be prepared to intervene as collapsing revenues threaten their ability to respond to public health crises.

"If prices remain at these levels — around \$30 a barrel — we see the income for the vulnerable producer countries will fall by between 50 and 85 percent," said Fatih Birol, chief of the IEA, warning that collectively the most vulnerable oil producers were facing the lowest revenues in two decades.

"International financial institutions may need to step in and take special measures."

The IEA said that other OPEC members, such as Algeria and Angola, were also at risk because of their high dependence on oil and gas revenues. That poses the risk of a growing split within the cartel, as Saudi Arabia — the 13-member group's largest producer — has said it will ramp up production in a fight with Russia for market share.

The two oil powerhouses disagreed earlier this month over how to respond to the coronavirus crisis, which threatens one of the biggest drops in demand ever seen in the oil market as flights are cancelled and commuting falls dramatically in Europe



and North America.

The IEA and OPEC took the rare step of producing a joint statement on Monday expressing their mutual concern, saying that the price collapse from \$70 a barrel in January would probably "have major social and economic consequences, notably for public sector spending in vital areas such as healthcare and education."

The IEA said in a special report on the crisis that many countries were less well prepared to respond to crude's slump than the previous time prices fell sharply in 2014.

Iraq will face a monthly \$4bn budget deficit even to meet civil servants' salaries and pensions and is likely to face further pressure on its health service. Nigeria's economy is less prepared to tackle a "price shock" than five years ago, because per capita GDP has shrunk by almost a third.

Oman, one of the largest Middle Eastern producers outside OPEC, could struggle to defend its currency's peg against the US dollar, Birol said, and will probably need to draw down on foreign currency reserves.

(Source: Financial Times)

Iran authorizes 74 domestic companies to build petro-refineries

E N E R G Y TEHRAN – Iranian Oil Ministry has authorized 74 domestic companies for the construction of petro-refineries across the country, IRNA reported on Monday, quoting Deputy Oil Minister for Planning Houshang Falahatian as saying.

According to Falahatian 117 companies had submitted their requests to the Oil Ministry among which 74 have been approved.

Increasing the country's petro-refining capacity has recently become a priority for the Oil Ministry as a key defense mechanism against the impacts of the U.S. sanctions on the country's oil industry.

In this regard, one of the major goals that the ministry has been pursuing is signing various contracts with domestic contractors.

In early February, Head of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA)'s energy committee, Reza Padidar, had announced that the country's capable private sector is ready for participation in the oil ministry's refinery and petro-refinery projects.



Back in June 2019, the Research Center of Iran's parliament said in a report that petro-refineries are two times more profitable than refineries and suggested that National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC)'s new refinery projects be defined as petro-refineries.

The report dubbed "Petro-refineries, their role in completing the oil value chain and the status in Iran's oil industry" stated that constructing petro-refineries is one of the most important ways to alleviate severe economic impacts of price fluctuations and achieve a much higher margin of profit.

Oil and gas companies see opportunity in offshore wind energy

Oil and gas markets are ensnared by oversupply and falling prices, not to mention a global pandemic. It illustrates the need to be more responsive to changes in the energy climate. And the good news is that the signs are pointing to more investment in renewables, specifically offshore wind power.

It's a business decision that is also addressing climate change. A new report by Wood MacKenzie says that \$211 billion will get invested in offshore wind over the next five years — something that is well-suited for oil and gas companies. That is because they have an implicit understanding of the waters where the infrastructure would be placed. And as the coronavirus is demonstrating, those companies are also seeking to diversify their portfolios.

"We expect the offshore wind market to grow more attractive for traditional oil and gas players," writes Soren Lassen and Mhaird Evans, with the global consulting firm. "There is limited crossover today, but first movers have gone with the wind and more will soon follow. As interest and investment in offshore wind grow, investment in offshore oil and gas is likely to stabilize, narrowing the gap between the two sectors."

Consider Norway's Equinor: It has a goal of reducing its carbon intensity by half by 2050. Part of the strategy is to expand its renewable energy ventures and specifically those in offshore wind: As much as 6,000 megawatts in six years and 16,000 megawatts in 15 years.

The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that offshore wind energy has a capacity of 2,000 gigawatts here. But just 30-megawatt off the shores of Rhode Island called Block Island Wind Farm is online. It revved up in 2016. New York State is now soliciting 800 megawatts of offshore wind projects — something that it hopes will lead to 2,400 megawatts of such power by 2030.

While the United States may not be ideal for offshore wind energy, the global markets may have better opportunities. China, in fact, is growing its offshore wind market, while Japan, Korea and Taiwan are in the early stages of development. India, too, is making forays. Europe, though, is the international role model, with more than 18,000 megawatts of offshore capacity.

Obvious Questions

The main obstacle is the high associated costs. In some cases, the price of offshore wind power is two-three times as high as onshore wind power, says Navigant Consulting. Industry, though, is working on deploying larger wind turbines to achieve better value.

"The shift to a low-carbon economy presents the question of what role oil and gas companies will play in this transition, and what their strategic options are in the more immediate and longer-term," Luke Fletcher, senior analyst at CDP said. "Equinor's recent rebrand to a broad energy company, expecting to invest 15%-20% of (its capital expenditures) in new energy solutions by 2030, is symbolic of this shift."

The Wood MacKenzie report poses the obvious question, which is that oil and gas investors are oftentimes expecting double-digit returns and that renewable energy investors anticipate more modest results. But as the current scenario is showing, what goes up can also come down — that oil and gas are helping to drag down the world economy because of its vulnerability to the coronavirus. Simply, green energy projects are not as volatile, given that developers can sell their output under long-term power purchase agreements.

Oil and gas companies spent 1.3% of their 2018 budgets on such things as wind and solar power or battery storage and carbon capture. And the CDP, formerly known as the Carbon Disclosure Project, said that Europe's Equinor, Total, Shell and Eni ranked highest for leading the low-carbon transition while China's CNOOC, Russia's Rosneft and U.S.'s Marathon Oil lagged further behind. Altogether, it says that oil and gas companies have invested \$22 billion in alternative energies since 2016.

Offshore wind and oil and gas companies may be a good match. But obstacles remain. Besides costs, logistics are also an issue: While it may be less hassle to build turbines in the ocean and out of view, developers must still connect the electricity to transmission. And that means building underseas cables before hooking up with the wires that are onshore.

(Source: Forbes)

Asian petrochemical prices nosedive to historic lows amid COVID-19 pandemic

Asian petrochemical prices nosedived to historic lows Monday, crippled by plunging crude oil values amid the havoc caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and an oil price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia.

The FOB Korea benzene benchmark plunged \$22.67/mt day on day to hit a price level below \$500/mt Monday, after persistent bearishness in upstream oil markets took a toll on benzene sentiment. The marker was assessed at \$497.33/mt Monday. Selling interest was more obvious Monday, with a flip in market structure from one of flat to contango.

Downstream, Asian styrene plunged following the collapse in crude oil and Asian benzene values, diving \$24/mt from last Friday, or \$94.50/mt on the month, to \$733/mt CFR China Monday, the lowest since February 11, 2009. Prices were last assessed lower at \$728.75/mt on February 10, 2009.

Domestic China styrene prices also followed suit during Monday trading session to register a new low since February 25, 2009. The prompt marker fell Yuan 190/mt from the last trading day at Yuan 5,825/mt ex-tank Monday, down 13 percent on the month.

Asian paraxylene also tumbled to hit a fresh 11-year low at \$580.67/mt CFR Taiwan/China and \$562.67/mt FOB Korea Monday, on further sharp falls in the upstream oil complex. Prices have breached the \$600/mt mark for the second time this month, weighed down by the plunge in oil and deep falls across the aromatics chain. The CFR Taiwan/China marker was last assessed lower at \$575.50/mt on November 21, 2008.

Downstream, the Asian purified terephthalic acid CFR



China marker tumbled \$15/mt from last Friday at \$480/mt Monday amid weak upstream and poor demand -- the lowest since S&P Global Platts started assessing it on April 7, 2008. Similarly, the Chinese domestic prompt PTA marker also fell to the lowest level since then at Yuan 3,675/mt Monday, equivalent to around \$464/mt CFR China on an import-parity value.

On gasoline blendstock front, the Asian toluene market plummeted to the weakest level in nearly 12 years at \$436/mt FOB Korea on Monday's close as the week opened with most aromatics products in the red. The FOB Korea toluene marker was last lower at \$430/mt on December 11, 2008. At 0130 GMT Tuesday, prompt-loading toluene cargoes continued to be seen offered by participants in the region.

An offer for a 2,000 mt H1 April-loading toluene parcel on FOB Korea basis was heard at \$390/mt.

The Asian isomer-grade mixed xylenes market was also not spared. The FOB Korea isomer-grade mixed xylene physical landed at \$483.50/mt on Monday, and the marker had only been last lower at \$467/mt on December 11, 2008. Activities during Tuesday's Asian midmorning hours remained thin, as participants continued to bide for more directional signals in the market.

The FOB Singapore MTBE marker nosedived to \$304/mt Monday, down \$48/mt, or 13.64 percent, day on day, which marked the lowest level ever since Platts started assessing it on June 6, 2014. The benchmark has hit new all-time lows every trading cycle since last Thursday. Platts data showed.

Asian monoethylene glycol fell \$5/mt to \$471/mt CFR China Monday following the collapse in crude oil, a historic low since March 2009, Platts data showed.

Soaring dollar, poor Chinese economic data

The plunging petrochemical prices were largely triggered by collapsing crude oil prices, led by an ongoing price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia as well as volatile global financial markets amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Front-month ICE Brent crude futures collapsed to a fresh over-four-year low at \$31.57/b at 4:30 pm Singapore time (0830 GMT) Monday, down \$3/b, or 9 percent, from last Friday, even as emergency quantitative easing by the US Federal Reserve and an interest rate cut failed to boost market sentiment.

(Source: Platts)

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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.

Iranian manufacturers indigenize strategic petchem equipment

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- All countries except 3 terrorist regimes in favor of...
- Islamic Revolution Leader casts his vote in ballot...
- Polls open across Iran
- CAO rejects rumors on continuation of Iran-China flights
- Hatami hails Iran aviation efforts to neutralize sanctions
- Iran's envoy, OPEC secretary-general discuss oil market
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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

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The coronavirus present to Earth

By Faezeh Khosravi

TEHRAN — Every year, about 8.3 million people around the world die from environmental pollution. Many of them are victims of air pollution and many other also die from unprecedented heat waves. Global warming also leads to polar ice caps melting, flooding and submergence of lands resulting in human death. The deaths are a consequence of living in an industrial world with high carbon emissions and huge use of fossil fuels. Being aware of these damages, world powers have been trying to make good changes in this global warming by setting punitive and persuasive laws and conventions. However, they have not been very successful in this regard.

These days, however, the emergence of a microscopic particle with marvelous abilities has become a hot button subject for the world's people to talk about. Currently, the concern of many countries is that how to contain the coronavirus and handle this specific situation, but the point that is less considered is that how such a little and dangerous particle could do something that world's powers have failed to do for many years!

Evidence show that the coronavirus has reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 200 million tones and consequently worldwide pollution. Satellite images also shows that in countries such as China and Italy where the coronavirus crisis is more serious, pollution levels have dropped significantly and greenhouse gas emissions have fallen sharply.

The amount of suspended particulate matter (spm) in air that causes the deaths of 9 million people a year in the world, declined by 20 to 30 percent over the same period last year in China.

Although the battle with Corona is now a major concern in the world, and fewer people have the opportunity to pay attention to its other aspects, it is a pity not to praise



the treasure that COVID-19 has left for Earth and take it a road map for the future. All these events came at a time when many industrialized nations have not seriously involved in COVID-19, and the outbreak is expected to occur soon in these countries.

On the other hand telecommuting culture, which is gradually forming and institutionalizing in current situation,

can be adopted as a pattern for world's pollution and traffic control in the future.

Although the battle with the coronavirus is now a major concern in the world, and fewer people have the opportunity to pay attention to its other aspects, it is a pity not to praise the treasure that COVID-19 has left for Earth and take it a road map for the future.

Intl. community should act responsibly regarding Iran amid outbreak: U.S. academic

TEHRAN (MNA) — A US academic censured illegal sanctions imposed by the United States against Iran, urging the world to act more responsibly towards Iran which is fighting with the coronavirus outbreak as sanctions are hampering efforts to contain the disease.

Iran is one of the hard-hit countries by the COVID-19 pandemic with more than 14,900 infections and 850 deaths so far. While the Iranian government has established a special task force to combat the outbreak from the moment early cases were reported, but unilateral sanctions imposed by the Trump administration after walking out of JCPOA some two years ago are hampering Tehran's efforts to fight back the disease. For instance, US claims food and medicine are not sanctioned but pharmaceutical companies are reluctant to sell products to Iran because they fear US sanctions and also the bans on banking relations have greatly impeded the country's efforts to buy the required materials and medical equipment.

"US unilateralism and ever-increasing scrofflaw behavior in the service of its global empire present the greatest challenge to the continuation of a multilateral, rules-based global order governed by international law, trade agreements, regional security agreements, and immigration protocols. The international community should be responsible to Iran, and to itself by manifesting the recognition that these principles, institutions, and agreements must be maintained through collective adherence to international law, especially in the face of bullying by a rogue empire," David Yaghoubian, professor of history at California State University San Bernardino, told Mehr News Agency on Monday.

Here is the full text of the interview:

■ Now it's more than one year that the Trump administration has started



the so-called 'maximum pressure' policy against Iran which has influenced the Iranian economy. Its effects can now be seen as the country is facing problems to acquire its needed funds to battle the coronavirus outbreak. Are these sanctions legal in the first place?

A: The blizzard of primary and secondary sanctions which constitute the core of the Trump administration's so-called "maximum pressure" policy of economic terrorism against the Islamic Republic of Iran grossly violate the unanimously-passed UN security council resolution 2231 in both letter and spirit, as well as international humanitarian law, such as the 2018 International Court of Justice ruling requiring the United States to lift sanctions linked to humanitarian goods and civil aviation imposed on Iran. Moreover, it is an absurdity and an unprecedented slap to the rules-based international order that a UN security council member and signatory to a unanimous resolution threatens other security council members and United Nations

member states with punitive secondary sanctions should they continue to meet their obligations under UNSCR 2231 and/or international humanitarian law.

■ Now the international community has started to feel the sanction's real effects on Iranian people as they are endangering the public health. What is the responsibility of the world towards Iran and also towards US unilateralism?

A: US unilateralism and ever-increasing scrofflaw behavior in the service of its global empire present the greatest challenge to the continuation of a multilateral, rules-based global order governed by international law, trade agreements, regional security agreements, and immigration protocols. The international community should be responsible to Iran, and to itself by manifesting the recognition that these principles, institutions, and agreements must be maintained through collective adherence to international law, especially in the face of bullying by a rogue empire, which should make the point self-evident. Alas, verbal

international recognition of these critical principals and the dark specter of "law of the jungle" that the United States extends is not lacking, while courage and action based on this verbal recognition has been essentially absent.

■ Both President Rouhani and Foreign Minister Zarif have recently penned letters to their counterparts and international bodies, urging them to disregard US sanctions at this time of crisis. What do you think the response of the world leaders would be to these requests?

A: Unfortunately, and as per the above, it can be expected that world leaders will provide verbal support to the idea of assisting Iran during this time of crisis, but I believe the expectation that they will stand up to the American imperial bully and come to Iran's aid at this juncture has no basis. In imposing the so-called "maximum pressure" policy of economic terrorism against Iran, Sec. of State Mike Pompeo stated explicitly that Iran would accept his 12-point maximalist plan for the relinquishment of national sovereignty and rights, "if they want their people to eat." The international cavalry of the rules-based order did not come to the Islamic Republic's rescue after this explicit terrorist threat of collective punishment and mass starvation, and subsequent sanctions to achieve this political goal, nor in the wake of subsequent provocations, assassinations, and deprivation of humanitarian and medical supplies. While it is possible that the more responsible and militarily capable JCPOA signatories and members of the UNSC, such as China and Russia, might be in a position to demonstrate their adherence to law and multilateralism through action that breaks these illegal sanctions, they too fear the economic bat wielded by the Trump regime, and thus cannot be relied on to provide relief in this time of even greater crisis.

10th anniversary of war against Syria; Challenges, achievements

1 → More than 250 terrorist groups in Syria were active against Bashar al-Assad government and at the beginning of the crisis, the terrorist groups even reached as far as Bashar al-Assad's palaces in Damascus.

Of course, the main differences between the protests and the military conflict in Syria with the rest of the Arab countries was important in several respects. First, the protests in Syria started from the border zones and did not engulf the capital. Secondly, the protests have not anti-Israeli and anti-US motivations. Thirdly, more than 80 percent of these groups were imported from outside the Syrian borders, with more than 10000 European terrorists dubbed blue-eyed terrorists.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia, as the godfather of Wahhabism and ISIL, also played the role of the intellectual father for these terrorist groups in addition to political and financial support.

Qataris were also at the forefront of media support for the terrorists present in Syria, especially as the Al Jazeera channel officially served as the official tribune of ISIL and Al-Nusra and other terrorist groups.



Perhaps this media support caused that ISIL is described as a powerful terrorist group in the media arena. The consensus of the Saudis, Qataris, the US, Turkey, and the Zionist regime paved the way for an all-out war against Syria, which has claimed some 400000 lives so far, most of them civilians, mostly beheaded by ISIL and the Al-Nusra Front.

Meanwhile, even some Palestinian groups had fallen into the trap of cutting ties with Syria, but gradually reformed their approach. Today, as the crisis has entered its tenth year, most infrastructures, schools, and clinics have been destroyed.

Syria, however, has also gained significant achievements in the military field, much of which is due to Islamic Resistance forces in Tehran's support zone. The creation of new models of combating, using the Islamic Republic of Iran's patterns and trust in the discourse of the Islamic Resistance were the most important elements in completing the victory chain in Syria.

The Syrian army holds all its territories except some parts of Idlib, and terrorist groups have been expelled or defeated. Terrorist groups owe their presence in a small part of Syria's territory to US support and Turkish interventions.

Politically, Syria has maintained and strengthened its political legitimacy, something that Westerners have been concerned about since the beginning, as they have repeatedly stated that Syria would be more powerful once the country overcomes the crisis.

In the midst of the Syrian crisis, many Arab countries, such as Qatar, have returned to Syria, and some have reopened their embassies.

The Axis of Resistance has passed a successful though difficult experimental, and Political field experience and has recovered its military and field balance. The role of the Axis of Resistance forces, especially Hezbollah, in providing new field experiences to overcome this crisis should not be overlooked.

Syria paying price for defending axis of Resistance against Israel: Syrian fmr. MP



TEHRAN (MNA) — Former member of the Syrian parliament Maria Saadeh says the Syrian crisis is the result of its defense of the Resistance movement.

In an interview with Mehr News Agency, Maria Saadeh said that the war against Syria is a full-fledged one in many aspects.

She stressed that the triangle of people, the army and the resistance in Syria have obtained many achievements and today the territorial integrity of Syria has been restored.

Saadeh noted that after 9 years of war against Syria, there is an economic crisis against the people that can be called economic terrorism.

She added that the West did its best to put the people under economic pressure to undermine the government, but today the Syrian people continue to live by taking the initiative and persist on their principles and will succeed in overcoming these pressures.

In my opinion, Syria today is paying the price for defending the axis of Resistance against Israel, said the Syrian diplomat.

Rachel Corrie Symbolizes censorship in US media: American politician

By Mehdi Azizi

TEHRAN (MNA) — American politician and director Art Olivier noted, "If we look at the letters Rachel Corrie wrote to her parents from Palestine, we will realize her depth of understanding."

March 16 marks the 17th anniversary of Rachel Corrie's martyrdom, an American peacekeeper who was run over by Israeli bulldozers in 2003 in Gaza.

She was the symbol of peacekeeping and freedom-seeking. She went to Gaza Strip in Palestine in 2003, and when an Israeli bulldozer was trying to destroy a Palestinian home, she stood in front of it and was run over deliberately and brutally.

A side street is named after her around the Argentine square in Tehran.

In an interview with Mehr News Agency, American politician and director Art Olivier noted that Rachel Corrie was the symbol of US media censorship and a reflection of Israel's inhumane character.

"Regardless of the moral and humane significance of what Rachel did, she awakened American conscience to take a fresh

look at world events which lead to the massacre and genocide of innocent people with the interference of its leaders and the Israeli policies," he added.

"The driver was coordinated with the Israeli officials, especially since he was later acquitted and the court ignored the defenses of Rachel's parents and friends." He said

The American politician went on to say that if we look at the letters Rachel sent to her parents from Palestine during that short period of time, we notice her deep understanding of her surrounding developments, especially since this issue is insignificant to most US citizens.

"In her letters, Rachel repeatedly compared the living conditions of Palestinian and American regions and criticized the US government for contradictory behaviors towards Palestinians and its support for Israel. It is clear that she had a proper understanding of political developments, humanitarian issues, and human rights." He noted.

According to this American director, US media ignored Rachel's death and never



wanted to mention her name. However, some insignificant individuals are seen as heroes in the country. He reportedly has written a screenplay called "Rachel forever" about Rachel Corrie.

Art Olivier pointed that this 23-year-old

American girl was a peacekeeping student at the age of 10 and despite the fact that she had a good economic condition, she preferred to work on more important issues than welfare. That is why she joined peacekeeping organizations.

Tehran province exports over \$73m of handicrafts in year

TOURISM TEHRAN — Handicrafts exports from Tehran province reached \$73 million during the current Iranian calendar year 1398 (started March 21, 2019).

"Craftspeople of Tehran province have exported handicrafts valued at more than 73 million dollars during the year 1398," ILNA quoted provincial tourism chief Parham Janfeshan as saying on Sunday.



Traditional glassware, mosaic, woodwork, hand-woven klim carpets and rugs, personal ornaments, and semi-precious stones constitute majority of Tehran's handicrafts mostly exported to Turkey, Iraq and Persian Gulf littoral states, the official said.

Handicrafts exports from the province reached \$84.12 million during the previous Iranian calendar year 1397, according to official data compiled by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

Iran's handicrafts exports hit \$289 million in the year 1397, showing three percent growth year on year.

Coronavirus: 3,000 tourism businesses 'may not survive' in Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland tourism industry has told the economy minister 3,000 tourism businesses might not survive without immediate help.

Minister Diane Dodds said there had been "an alarming drop-off in activity" in the sector.

She revealed Titanic Belfast, a major attraction, was seeing visitor numbers down 50% on this time last year.

Meanwhile the Balmoral Show has been postponed until August. It is Northern Ireland's biggest agricultural event and attracted 120,000 people last year.

Seven new coronavirus cases were confirmed in NI on Monday, bringing the total to 52.

Mrs Dodds said the executive was working on a stimulus package. She said there would be some measures on business rates, the property taxes paid by companies.

However, she did not commit to the same measures introduced in England.

Mrs Dodds also suggested a recession was likely, saying the modest growth forecast for Northern Ireland this year will be "wiped out or worse".

Balmoral Show

The decision to postpone the Balmoral Show followed a meeting of the management on Monday afternoon.

The show was due to have been held over four days from 13-16 May at the Maze near Lisburn.

It has now been pushed back to 19-22 August.

Belfast City Council has taken the decision to close concert venues the Waterfront Hall and Ulster Hall as well as St George's Market.

Also on Monday, Finance Minister Conor Murphy said he hopes to make an announcement soon regarding support for NI businesses under pressure as a result of the coronavirus crisis.

(Source: BBC)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Saloum Delta

Fishing and shellfish gathering have sustained human life in the 5,000 km² property, which is formed by the arms of three rivers in Senegal.

The site comprises brackish channels encompassing over 200 islands and islets, mangrove forest, an Atlantic marine environment, and dry forest.

The region of the Saloum Delta is a remarkable testimony to the synergy between a natural environment with extensive biodiversity and a style of human development that is still present albeit fragile.



Sustainable shellfish gathering and fishing practices in brackish water, and the processing of the harvest for its preservation and export was developed here. The shell mounds and the tumulus mounds form specific and exceptional cultural landscapes.

The numerous shell mounds in the Saloum Delta are generally well-preserved and they sometimes have imposing dimensions. They are direct testimony of sustainable and very ancient socio-economic practices. Over the centuries, they have led to the formation of numerous man-made islets contributing to the stabilization of the delta's land and channels.

With their characteristic vegetation within the delta's natural environment, the shell mounds form typical cultural landscapes. Some mounds include tumuli; they form, with their baobab vegetation and their undulating forms, funerary sites with specific landscape features.

(Source: UNESCO)

No excuses, no exceptions: UNWTO urges travelers to care others amid corona threat

TOURISM TEHRAN — The United Nations World Tourism Organization has urged travelers to exercise more responsibly by both caring about themselves and others amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"Anyone traveling has a duty of care to themselves and to others! There are NO EXCUSES and NO EXCEPTIONS?," UNWTO tweeted on March 15.

"As the COVID-19 situation evolves, many people around the world continue to travel: for leisure, for business and for vital humanitarian reasons. Anyone travelling has a duty of care to themselves and to others. There are no excuses and no exceptions!"

The organization also gave some safety guidelines as below:

Should I still travel?

Before you travel, consult your national health authority and check the guidelines

You have a responsibility to keep yourself and others safe.

If you become sick while travelling, isolate yourself and seek medical attention as soon as possible.

Just returned home?

If you've returned from a destination experiencing a severe COVID-19 outbreak, stay at home and isolate yourself as well as possible, even if you don't feel ill.

Should you start feeling unwell and believe you might have COVID-19, call your local healthcare provider. Follow their instructions and, unless advised otherwise, stay home.

Keep safe while travelling?

The best way to stay safe while travelling



is to follow the latest World Health Organization guidelines as closely as possible.

Wash your hands regularly and thoroughly, avoid shaking hands or touching your face, try and stay away from crowded places.

Where possible, maintain at least 1 meter between yourself and others.

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.

Iran's travel market become upset a time when hoteliers, airlines, tour operators and other activists were preparing to reap

a bonanza over a traditional peak season, which starts days before Noruz, the Iranian new year, starting March 20 this year. Local and government authorities have recently 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.

'Mantis-man' describes puzzling petroglyph found in Iran



The 'squatter mantis man' petroglyph next to a 10 cm scale bar. (Credit: Dr. Mohammad Naserifard)

TOURISM TEHRAN — A team of entomologists and archaeologists has concluded a previously founded petroglyph showcases a six-limbed creature with the head and arms of a praying mantis.

The rare 14-centimetre rock carving was first spotted in the Teymareh rock art site in Khomein county, central Iran, during surveys between 2017 and 2018, but could not be identified due to its unusual shape.

The new findings were recently published in the open access Journal of Orthoptera Research, contributed

by entomologists Mahmood Kolnegari from Islamic Azad University of Arak; Mandana Hazrati from Avay Dornaye Khakestari Institute; and Matan Shelomi from National Taiwan University teaming up with freelance archaeologist and rock art expert Mohammad Naserifard.

The petroglyph shows a six-limbed creature with the head and arms of a praying mantis, but with two circles at its sides, similarly to the famous 'squatter man' petroglyph found at several locations around the world. ScienceDaily reported on Monday.

"It has six limbs has been described as part man, part mantis."

Rock carvings, or petroglyphs, of invertebrate animals are rare, so entomologists teamed up with archaeologists to try and identify the motif. They compared the carving with others around the world and with the local six-legged creatures which its prehistoric artists could have encountered, the report said.

The six limbs suggest an insect, while the triangular head with big eyes and the grasping forearms are unmistakably those of a praying mantis, a predatory insect that hunts and captures prey like flies, bees and even small birds.

Even more mysterious are the middle limbs, which end in loops or circles. The closest parallel to this in archaeology is the 'Squatter Man,' a petroglyph figure found around the world depicting a person flanked by circles. While they could represent a person holding circular objects, an alternative hypothesis is that the circles represent auroras caused by atmospheric plasma discharges.

It is presently impossible to tell exactly how old the petroglyphs are, because sanctions on Iran prohibit the use of radioactive materials needed for radiocarbon dating. However, experts Jan Brouwer and Gus van Veen examined the Teymareh site and estimated the carvings were made 40,000-4,000 years ago.

One can only guess why prehistoric people felt the need to carve a mantis-man into rock, but the petroglyph suggests humans have linked mantis to the supernatural



A praying mantis, *Empusa hedenborgii*, which may have inspired the petroglyph, according to the research team. (Credit: Mr Mahmood Kolnegari)

since ancient times. As stated by the authors, the carving bears witness, "that in prehistory, almost as today, praying mantis were animals of mysticism and appreciation."

Prehistoric rock art provides insights into past eras and cultures as archaeologists classify the tools for the carvings by specific eras. Incising tools include flint, metal, or thigh bones of hunted prey.

Coronavirus: France imposes lockdown as EU calls for 30-day travel ban

France has imposed a near-total lockdown and the EU is to ban foreigners entering the bloc for 30 days as governments adopted measures rarely seen outside wartime in a draconian effort to curb the rapid spread of the coronavirus outbreak.

As the head of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, urged countries to "test, test, test" for the virus, the French president, Emmanuel Macron, said the citizens must stay at home from midday on Tuesday for at least 15 days.

"We are at war — a public health war, certainly but we are at war, against an invisible and elusive enemy," Macron said, outlawing all journeys outside the home unless justified for essential professional or health reasons. Anyone flouting the new regulations would be punished, he said.

"There can be no more outside meetings, no more seeing family or friends on the street or in the park," he said. "We must slow the spread of this virus by limiting the number of people we are in contact with each day to the strict minimum. If we do not, we endanger the lives of those we hold dear."

He pledged to help both the French economy — with a €300bn (£273bn) package, saying "not a single firm will go bankrupt" — and French households, promising that all gas, electricity and heating bills and rents would be suspended throughout the crisis.

Macron said France's borders would be closed from Tuesday, although French citizens would be allowed to return home. The European commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, called earlier on Tuesday for an end to all non-essential travel to Europe.

"The less travel, the more we can contain the virus," she said. "We think non-essential travel should be reduced right now in order to not spread the virus further, be it

within the EU or by leaving the EU."

Von der Leyen said the restrictions — which would not apply to UK nationals — should last for 30 days initially but may be extended. Permanent EU residents, family members of EU nationals, diplomats, doctors and coronavirus researchers would be exempted, she said.

Officials said the move, which could be approved by leaders in a video conference on Tuesday, was aimed mainly at removing the need for national controls at borders between the 26 members of the passport-free Schengen zone.

France, which has reported 5,423 confirmed coronavirus cases and 127 deaths, closed all bars, restaurants and non-essential shops from midnight on Saturday and creches, schools and universities from Monday morning. Paris closed all its parks and gardens.

Germany, which has recorded 5,813 cases and 13 deaths from Covid-19, introduced border controls with Austria, Denmark, France, Luxembourg and Switzerland on Monday, allowing through only those with a valid reason for travel such as residents, cross-border commuters and delivery drivers.

In line with a growing number of EU countries, the federal government and state leaders also agreed to close almost all shops except food stores, banks, pharmacies and petrol stations, ban religious gatherings, shutter hotels and restrict visits to hospitals and care homes.

The German chancellor, Angela Merkel, said these were measures "we have never had in our country, but they are necessary to reduce the number of illnesses and avoid overwhelming our health services. The more people stick to these rules, the quicker we get through this phase."

In Spain, where the coronavirus toll climbed to 309 on Monday with 9,191 confirmed cases, the government

announced sweeping measures allowing it to take over private healthcare providers and requisition materials such as face masks and Covid-19 tests.

The health minister, Salvador Illa, said private healthcare facilities would be requisitioned for coronavirus patients, and manufacturers and suppliers of healthcare equipment must notify the government within 48 hours.

The Spanish government declared a state of emergency on Saturday, placing the country in lockdown and ordering people to leave their homes only if they needed to buy food or medicine or go to work or hospital. The transport minister, José Luis Balboa, said it was "obvious" the measures would be extended beyond the planned 15-day period.

The U.S. Federal Reserve and other central banks unveiled sweeping emergency measures over the weekend to boost the global economy amid mounting fears that the epidemic, which has infected nearly 170,000 people globally and killed more than 6,500, may tip the world into a recession.

Italy said it was ready to intervene again if needed. The prime minister, Giuseppe Conte, told Corriere della Sera the measures unveiled so far were "not sufficient". Italy's death toll from Covid-19 passed 2,000 on Monday with the announcement of another 349 victims.

"Damage will be serious and widespread," Conte said. "Scientists are telling us that the outbreak has not reached its peak, these weeks will be the most risky, and the maximum precaution is needed."

Police have fined 20,000 people in four days for not complying with the rules, and some Italian Riviera beaches and promenades around the northern city of Genoa were closed after crowds filled them over the weekend in violation of lockdown rules.

(Source: The Guardian)

UNHCR 'fully mobilized' to help Iran contain COVID-19

SOCIETY TEHRAN — UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is fully mobilized to help contain the spread of COVID-19 in Iran, said Ivo Freijksen, UNHCR Representative in Iran.

UNHCR has further enhanced its emergency support to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran's response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

"We stand in solidarity with the Iranian people and authorities and are fully mobilized to help contain the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate the impact on the most vulnerable, including refugees," Freijksen said.

To address the critical and urgent lack of hygiene materials in Iran, UNHCR in coordination with its government counterpart, the Bureau for Foreign Aliens and Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA), has begun distributing items such as soap and disposable paper towels to some 7,500 refugee households living in refugee settlements



Representative of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Iran Ivo Freijksen addresses a press conference on the 'World Refugee Day' in Tehran, July 1, 2019.

across the country. These, along with infra-red no-contact thermometers, will also assist our partners, who remain committed to maintaining their assistance to refugees, UNHCR website reported on March 15.

Since February, the number of individuals who have contracted the new Coronavirus in Iran has increased exponentially and the virus has now spread to all 31 provinces of the country. Refugees, most of whom live side by side with host communities in villages, towns and cities, are at the same risk of catching and transmitting the new Coronavirus as Iranians.

Refugees in Iran have access to primary health care services and are included in the national COVID-19 response.

UNHCR is working closely with BAFIA, the Iranian Ministry of Health and Medical Education, the World Health Organisation, other UN agencies and national and

international NGOs to raise awareness of key prevention measures amongst refugees and host communities and mobilize support.

"The humanitarian community is coming together to support Iran, but much more support is needed. UNHCR is fully committed and will continue to work with local authorities and partners to assess the needs of, and further support, refugees, including those whose livelihoods may have been impacted by the virus", said Freijksen.

UNHCR is urgently seeking an initial US\$33 million to boost the preparedness, prevention and response activities to address the immediate public health needs of refugees and host communities prompted by COVID-19 around the world. In Iran, UNHCR needs US\$6.3 million for its COVID-19 emergency measures, which is part of the UN Country Team's COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan.

Iran allocates €250m to import anti-corona medicine, equipment

SOCIETY TEHRAN — The Central bank of Iran has allocated at least 250 million euro to import medicine and medical equipment required to fight the novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

The number of people diagnosed with the novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19, in Iran has increased to 16,169, of whom 988 have died and 5,389 recovered so far.

Over the past 24 hours, 1,178 new cases of people having the virus have been identified, Deputy Health Minister Kianoush Jahanpour said, ISNA reported.

The highest number of new cases were

reported from the provinces of Tehran, Alborz, and East Azarbaijan with 273, 116, and 78 cases, respectively.

More than 40 consignments of medical and sanitary equipment have been dispatched by foreign countries and world organizations over the past month to Iran to help the country in battle against the coronavirus.

China has sent more than 30 consignments of pulse oximeters, test kits, face masks, antiseptic gels, alcohol pads, gloves, isolation gowns, and medicine since February 20, said Mehrdad Jamal Aronqi, an official with the Iran Customs Administration.

Another consignment consisting of gowns and face masks has been delivered by France, IRNA quoted Aronqi as saying on Sunday.

Moreover, four consignments by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and one consignment by the World Health Organization (WHO) have been released so far, he added.

The Iranian health ministry has announced that testing a domestically-made medicine has resulted in improvement of symptoms in severe cases of coronavirus.

An immunomodulatory drug called "Actemra" in patients with coronavirus in a hospital in Isfahan city has led to a partial

improvement of the patient's symptoms in scans, Jahanpour said on March 11.

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

"Iran benefits from one of the strongest healthcare systems in the region. Iran has made notable achievements in the field of battling coronavirus," the WHO official said in a press conference in Tehran on March 7, IRNA reported.



Staff at the coronavirus ward of Tehran's Masih Daneshvari hospital pose for a photo, March 9, 2020.

Google Play removes Iranian app intended to curb COVID-19

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Google Play has removed an Iranian application from its app store, claiming that it is suspected of spying on its users.

The Google Play's move is rooted in a false claim made by the London based Farsi language channel Manoto's presenter Nariman Gharib.

This is while Health Minister Saeed Namaki has said 14 million people have been screened through the application for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms as part of a national mobilization plan to curb the pandemic.

Namaki said on Monday that a significant number of those people had been screened over the past four days via the Health Ministry's online platform - salamat.gov.ir - and

the rest through phone calls, electronic health dossiers and two online health screening systems run by the ministry.

"Out of the 14 million monitored for the coronavirus infection, some 73,435 had symptoms. After evaluations, 3,415 of them were referred to hospitals, out of whom 1,605 were hospitalized and the remaining were either discharged with prescriptions or sent to other centers," he noted.

The screening process, he added, helped the ministry reduce hospital referrals by diagnosing and suitably addressing the cases of those vulnerable to infection, the individuals carrying the virus without symptoms and the people in contact with the infected.

Coronavirus, a vaccine to prevent World War III!

By Payam Mohebi

Over the past centuries, countries have been proud of their high incomes and wealth, and have always sought to rule over other countries, a move which ultimately has led to war. It has also been considered as one of the main causes of World War I and World War II.

On the other hand, epidemics that had spread in the past resulted in huge casualties due to the lack of vaccines and antibiotics and acted as controlling factors

of the world's natural population. By taking a look at the outcome of these events, one will find out that the First World War, which had been waged due to the same territorial expansions, ended with the outbreak of Spanish flu, as it inflicted financial burden and living costs on countries and made political leaders to make peace.

It is noteworthy that rich countries in the past, because of their high income, used to turn to making arms and inciting

the world to war. Therefore, the world's leaders talked with each other through the power of weapon. But, at the present time, when the world is struggling with a global pandemic (the coronavirus), instead of thinking about the former ideals, all states and leaders around the world should find a way to protect people from a hostility that is not even seen.

This global pandemic has proven to the whole world that the rich and the poor are all equally vulnerable to disease and class

gap does not have anything to do with it. In fact, the possibility for a rich country to be infected is as the same of a poor country, and the casualties will be same at the end.

It is true that the coronavirus has resulted in many difficulties and deaths, but, by creating the sense of sympathy and weakness, it could make us all realize that it does not matter whether we are Iranian, American, rich, poor, black or white, as we are vulnerable to the virus to the same degree.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

500,000 policemen ready to ensure road safety during Noruz

Traffic police teams comprising 500,000 policemen will stand guard to ensure safety by monitoring road regulations during the new year holidays (Noruz, starting March 21), road traffic police chief Mohammad Hossein Hamidi has announced.

In this regard, coordination has been made with the related bodies to fully control the country's roads and prevent the probable accidents, he added.

Given that this year's holiday is longer, trips certainly increases compared to past years, so we decided to constantly monitor the highways, he stated.

۵۰۰ هزار پلیس نوروز ۹۸ جاده های کشور را کنترل می کنند

محمد حسین حمیدی رئیس پلیس راه راهور نیروی انتظامی کشور گفت: با هدف ارتقا هرچه بیشتر امنیت مسافران، ۵۰۰ هزار نیروی پلیس در ایام نوروز ۱۳۹۸ جاده های سطح کشور را کنترل می کنند.

سردار محمد حسین حمیدی روز دوشنبه در گفت و گو با خبرنگار انتظامی ایرنا افزود: در این ارتباط هماهنگی های لازم با دستگاه های مربوطه نیز به انجام رسیده است و آمادگی برای کنترل هر چه بیشتر سطح جاده های کشور برای جلوگیری از تصادفات وجود دارد. وی خاطرنشان کرد: پیش بینی امسال ما با توجه به میزان تعطیلات نوروز افزایش سفرها در مقایسه با سال گذشته است که همین امر موجب شده از همه ظرفیت ها به صورت ۲۴ ساعته بهره مند شویم.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"-crat"

■ **Meaning:** government
■ **For example:** The **bureaucrats** imposed rules and regulations on big business.

PHRASAL VERB

Hinge on/upon something

■ **Meaning:** if a result hinges on something, it depends on it completely
■ **For example:** His political future hinges on the outcome of this election.

IDIOM

A bundle of nerves

■ **Explanation:** if you describe someone as a bundle of nerves, you mean that they are very nervous, tense or worried
■ **For example:** My son is doing his driving test today. Needless to say he's a bundle of nerves!

Coronavirus: 91-year-old Iranian man beats disease

SOCIETY TEHRAN — A 91-year-old man has become the oldest person in Iran to beat coronavirus and return home.

Living in the southeastern city of Bam, Kerman province, he recovered from the disease after receiving treatment for just two days at a hospital in Bam.



file photo

Despite suffering from high blood pressure, kidney disease, and asthma, the centenarian regained health thanks to his strong faith, his doctor Kiyumars Kazemi said, IRNA reported.

He was diagnosed on February 7 at my office and I examined him having fever and cough symptoms, Kazemi added.

At last, He was referred to a hospital on March 12 and his was tested positive, the doctor noted.

Older people and those with pre-existing medical conditions are more at risk of developing severe coronavirus symptoms.

New evidence shows how COVID-19 has affected global air pollution

The COVID-19 pandemic is getting more overwhelming by the day, with increasing lockdowns, a death toll of more than 7,000 people across the world, and a direct hit to the global economy.

But if there's a sliver of good news, it's about how the spread of the new coronavirus has been decreasing air pollution, and possibly even saving lives in the process.

Back on March 8, Stanford University environmental resource economist Marshall Burke did some back-of-the-envelope calculations about the recent air pollution drop over parts of China and potential lives saved, posting it on a global food, environment and economic dynamics blog, G-FEED.

The situation has continued to unfold since then, so those numbers won't stay current for long; but according to Burke, even conservatively, it's very likely that the lives saved locally from the reduction in pollution exceed COVID-19 deaths in China.

"Given the huge amount of evidence that breathing dirty air contributes heavily to premature mortality, a natural - if admittedly strange - question is whether the lives saved from this reduction in pollution caused by economic disruption from COVID-19 exceeds the death toll from the virus itself," Burke writes.

"Even under very conservative assumptions, I think the answer is a clear 'yes.'" The two months of pollution reduction, Burke calculates, has probably saved the lives of 4,000 children under 5 and 73,000 adults over 70 in China. That's significantly more than the current global death toll from the virus itself.

Although this might seem a little surprising, it's something we've known about for quite a long time. Earlier this month, research suggested that air pollution costs us three years, on average, off our global life expectancy.

"It is remarkable that both the number of deaths and the loss in life expectancy from air pollution rival the effect of tobacco smoking and are much higher than other causes of death," physicist Jos Lelieveld from the Cyprus Institute in Nicosia stated at the time.

"Air pollution exceeds malaria as a global cause of premature death by a factor of 19; it exceeds violence by a factor of 16, HIV/AIDS by a factor of 9, alcohol by a factor of 45, and drug abuse by a factor of 60."

So, it's well established that air pollution really does kill. But Burke's analysis was just using data from China, and was completed before there was more information about how COVID-19 has affected the rest of the world.

With the second largest number of cases occurring in Italy, and the country putting in place strict quarantine measures, satellite data over northern Italy have now shown a large drop in air pollution - specifically nitrogen dioxide, a gas mainly emitted by cars, trucks, power plants and some industrial plants.

(Source: Science Alert)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Bali bomber trial

(12 May 2003)

The trial of the first suspect arrested in connection with the Bali bomb attacks last October has opened and adjourned. The man, known as Amrozi, has been charged with four counts of terrorism.

For more than an hour, Amrozi sat quietly listening to the long list of charges brought against him. Wearing cut-off trousers and flip-flops, from time to time, he shuffled uncomfortably in his chair.

The first person arrested after the devastating bomb attacks last October, Amrozi is now the first of more than thirty suspects to face the courts. He's **accused** of buying the chemicals to make the bombs and of supplying the van which delivered them. Under Indonesia's new **anti-terrorism** laws, if found guilty, he could face the death **penalty**. Outside the court, a crowd of local people watched proceedings on live television. Every time Amrozi appeared on screen, they jeered and threw **makeshift** missiles at this image.

Inside the court, Amrozi's lawyers began their **defence**. Amrozi naively admitted his role in the attack, they said, but the law needs more than **confessions**, it needs **evidence**.

This could be a long and complex case. It could be many months before the panel of five judges reach their **verdict**.

■ **Words**
charges: a formal statement saying that someone has done something wrong
suspects: persons thought to be guilty
accused: someone who is said to have done something wrong
anti-terrorism: against the use of violence for political reasons
penalty: punishment
makeshift: temporary, of poor quality
defence: the action taken by lawyers to support as suspect's denial of an illegal action
confessions: a confession is an admission of a crime
evidence: something you see or experience that make you believe that something is true
verdict: the decision at the end of a trial

(Source: BBC)

Iraqi President appoints Adnan al-Zurfi as new PM-designate

His appointment came more than two weeks after former premier-designate Mohammed Allawi withdrew his candidacy for the post following the parliament's failure to approve his cabinet. Allawi said he had made the decision after seeing that "certain political factions are not yet ready for reform," and that continuing his tenure under such circumstances would run contrary to his promises to the Iraqi people.



He was tasked early February with forming a new administration after Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi resigned in late November in the wake of demonstrations calling for economic reforms and a meaningful fight against corruption in state institutions. Zurfi has to win the confidence of parliament for his new cabinet, a difficult task as several Iraqi groups have objected to his nomination.

"Zurfi will face tough resistance inside parliament and he will need a miracle to pass his government," Reuters cited a lawmaker as saying on condition of anonymity.

If Zurfi can secure parliamentary approval for his cabinet, he would run the country until early elections can be held.

Prior to the official nomination, a leader of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, which is part of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces or Hashd al-Sha'abi, reacted to news of Salih's decision to nominate Zurfi.

He described the appointment as a conspiracy against the axis of resistance.

In a statement carried by Al Ekhbariya TV network, Jawad al-Talibawi said the appointment is a betrayal of the blood of martyrs.

Some members of the Nasr alliance also told Iraqi media that al-Zurfi's appointment had not been made on behalf of the group.

Since October, Iraqis have staged street protests in several cities over unemployment and a lack of basic services, calling for early elections.

The anti-government rallies, however, took a violent turn later. Reports say more than 550 people have been killed and about 25,000 injured in the course of the violent protests.

(Source: agencies)

Israeli spy sparks dispute between Lebanon, U.S.

He was detained after returning to Lebanon from the U.S. in September and had worked as a senior warden at the Khiam Prison in southern Lebanon.

In accordance with the protocol, Shea has visited senior officials, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and Prime Minister Hassan Diab.

According to sources, Shea requested releasing Fakhoury, who suffers from an incurable disease and is receiving treatment in a hospital under the supervision of the Lebanese judiciary.

She requested allowing him to travel to Washington because he holds U.S. citizenship.

Sources stressed that Shea didn't receive any response and was told that being Lebanese, Fakhoury is currently tried before the military judiciary and has the right to appoint a lawyer to defend his case.

She was also told that his extradition to the United States and being allowed to receive treatment there will not happen anytime soon, sources noted, adding that the decision, in this case, is only to be taken by the military judiciary.

The same sources said Washington had earlier requested Fakhoury's extradition, noting that the former US ambassador to Lebanon, Elizabeth Richard, had raised this issue with several prominent figures in Lebanon.

U.S. diplomat David Hale reportedly discussed during his visit to Lebanon late 2019 the possibility of releasing Fakhoury and handing him over to the US authorities, yet he hasn't received any response.

Khiam was run by an Israeli-backed militia until Israel ended its 18-year occupation of the area in 2000.

(Source: agencies)

Europe to shut borders as lengthy virus crisis looms

European Union leaders meeting via videoconference on Tuesday are likely to seal off Europe's external borders and stress a "whatever it takes" approach to easing the economic fallout as the continent braces for a long coronavirus crisis.

France was going into lockdown on Tuesday to contain the spread of the disease as the death toll in Italy jumped above 2,000.

The EU has scrambled to find a coherent response to the outbreak, with countries imposing borders checks in what is normally a zone of control-free travel, limiting exports of medical equipment or failing to share key information swiftly.

The executive European Commission warned member states that this was just the beginning of the crisis and Germany said it would take "months rather than weeks", diplomats said after talks on Monday evening to prepare for Tuesday's call.

Three Baltic countries - Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia - criticised Poland for blocking their citizens in transit from returning home.

The chairman of EU leaders, Charles Michel, said he called Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte to demand "policy coherence" after The Hague was seen to be resisting a broader closure of schools, businesses and other public venues.

Pushed by French President Emmanuel Macron, the Commission proposed closing Europe's external borders to foreigners.

"That was meant to convince European countries to drop internal and unilateral border moves. But it's hard to see anyone doing it," an EU diplomat said, adding the move was largely symbolic as the virus was already within.

The leaders will also discuss repatriating Europeans stranded abroad as airlines cut flights. For example, Denmark has around 1,000 citizens in Morocco currently, EU sources said.

EU leaders will also stress their "whatever it takes" approach to cushioning the economic fallout of the pandemic, including by relaxing limitations on state aid.

(Source: Reuters)

Iraq lodges complaint with UNSC over U.S. airstrikes

Iraq says it has lodged a formal complaint with the UN Security Council (UNSC) over a string of airstrikes carried out by the United States against multiple targets in the Arab country.

The spokesman for the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ahmed al-Sahaf, said Tuesday that the ministry has sent two protest letters to the UNSC over the attacks, which targeted positions of the Iraqi army, police and Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), better known by the Arabic name Hashd al-Sha'abi, on Thursday night.

He described the airstrikes as a "hostile act and a clear violation of the terms of U.S. military presence" in Iraq.

The attacks killed three Iraqi soldiers, two police officers and a civilian worker, and damaged an unfinished airport.

The Iraqi military says the U.S. strikes amount to a targeted act of aggression against Iraq's armed forces and a violation of its sovereignty.

On Friday, Baghdad summoned the U.S. and British ambassadors to Baghdad over the aggression which "has clearly indicated repeated U.S. violations against Iraq, its people and armed forces."

That deadly attack was conducted hours after the U.S.-led military coalition purportedly fighting the Daesh terror group 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.

On Saturday, a second similar rocket attack on Taji wounded three U.S. troops. The Iraqi military said several Iraqi air defense servicemen were also critically wounded.

A new group calling itself Assaba al-Thaerin claimed responsibility for the attack on Taji.

U.S. President Donald Trump claimed that the attackers were a group that "most likely looked like it could be backed by Iran," a claim rejected by Tehran as "baseless."

'Rockets hit Iraqi base hosting foreign troops'

Meanwhile, Iraqi military said in a statement on Tuesday that a pair of rockets hit another Iraqi base hosting U.S.-led coalition and NATO troops, marking the third such attack on installations hosting foreign forces within a week.

The rockets slammed into the Besmaya base south of Baghdad late Monday night, said the statement, which made no mention of casualties.

Spanish forces linked to the U.S.-led co-

alition as well as NATO training forces are present in Besmaya.

Anti-American sentiment has been running high in Iraq following the assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), along with the deputy head of the PMU, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, and their companions in a U.S. airstrike authorized by President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3.

The U.S., backed by Britain, invaded Iraq in 2003 claiming that the former regime of Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. No such weapons, however, were ever found.

The invaders withdrew from Iraq, after nearly nine years of a military campaign that cost tens of thousands of Iraqi lives.

A U.S.-led military coalition, however, returned to the Arab country in 2014, when the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group unleashed a campaign of destruction there.

Widespread reports said the Washington-led operations largely spared the terrorists and led, instead, to civilian deaths and inflicted damage on the Iraqi infrastructure.

Iraq's army troops, backed by volunteer forces, managed to liberate all Daesh-held areas, thanks in part to effective military advisory assistance from neighboring Iran.

Baghdad declared the end of the anti-Daesh campaign back in 2017.

(Source: Press TV)

Yemeni forces size major military base in Ma'rib

Yemeni army soldiers, backed by allied fighters from Popular Committees, have reportedly seized control of a strategic military base in the country's central province of Marib from Saudi-sponsored militiamen loyal to former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi.

Local sources, requesting not to be named, said Yemeni troops and their allies established full control over Kofel camp in the Sirwah district, which lies about 120 kilometers east of the capital Sana'a, on Tuesday morning after Hadi loyalist fled the area in the wake of the former's multi-pronged operation. Arabic-language al-Khabar al-Yemeni news website reported.

Yemeni air defenses thwart Saudi airstrike in Sirwah

Moreover, the spokesman for Yemeni Armed Forces, Brigadier General Yahya Saree, said the country's air defense units had managed to thwart Saudi-led airstrike against areas in Ma'rib Province.

Saree said a squadron of Saudi-led fighter jets sought to bombard areas in the Sirwah district early on Tuesday, when the domestically-built and long-range Fater-1 (Innovator-1) surface-to-air missile defense system intercepted the jets and forced them off Yemeni airspace.

The high-ranking Yemeni military official noted that the aircraft left the area without carrying out any act of aggression.

The development came only a day after Fater-1 missile defense system foiled an airstrike by a squadron of Saudi F-15 fighter jets against areas in the northern Yemeni province of al-Jawf, located approximately 110 kilometers (68 miles) north of Sana'a.



Ansarullah: Saudi-led invaders to blame if virus reaches Yemen

Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement says the Saudi-led coalition of aggressors — which has imposed an all-out blockade on the war-torn country — will be responsible for the possible spread to Yemen of a coronavirus that is plaguing many world states.

Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, the chairman of the Supreme Revolutionary Committee of Yemen, said Monday that the aggressors in the occupied Yemeni territories deliberately ignore precautionary measures that should be taken to prevent the spread of the virus that has infected and killed tens of thousands of people across the globe, Yemen's al-Masirah reported.

He censured the Saudi regime and its coalition allies for allowing flights into the areas under their occupation at a time when many world states have suspended all flights to

contain the pandemic.

Allowing four commercial planes to reach Yemen with a total of 1,000 passengers amid the pandemic is a dirty U.S.-Saudi aggression tactic, he said.

He said those who have been killing the Yemenis with their weapons do not hesitate to take their lives through less costly means.

The U.S.-Saudi coalition is responsible for the consequences, al-Houthi said.

In addition to the siege and the massacre of Yemeni citizens, he added, the aggressors are blocking international humanitarian aid delivery to the war-ravaged country.

As of March 16, the virus has infected nearly 183,000 people worldwide and killed more than 7,165 others, according to Reuters tallies.

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

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

In particular, the closure of the airport in the Yemeni capital of Sana'a has made it impossible for food and medical supplies to reach the poor.

The aggression has also led to the world's worst humanitarian crisis in Yemen, where over 1,000 people, including many kids, were killed and hundreds of thousands afflicted by cholera, diphtheria, measles and dengue fever in 2019, according to the World Health Organization.

(Source: agencies)

Covid-19 pandemic could continue for 2 YEARS, German health expert warns

A senior German disease control expert has warned that the coronavirus pandemic could continue for two years, depending on how long it takes for an effective vaccine to be developed and if people develop immunity after illness.

Speaking on Tuesday, the Robert Koch Institut's (RKI) president, Prof. Lothar Wieler, said pandemics tend to run their course in waves, and factors influencing how it unfolds from this point include how many people become immune to it after contracting the virus — and how quickly a vaccine is made.

The RKI, a German federal agency responsible for disease control and prevention, on Tuesday raised the country's threat level from the ongoing coronavirus pandemic from "moderate" to "high".

It said the revision comes in light of the continuing increase in new infections of the rapidly-spreading virus, which originated in China late last year and whose symptoms range from fever to serious respiratory illness. Germany has recorded over 7,900 cases of Covid-19 to date, with 20 deaths.

New research from RKI scientists and

the Helios clinic group also says that the novel coronavirus can more seriously afflict adults aged under 60 who have no underlying health conditions than similar patients suffering severe pneumonia in the regular flu season.

Although countries around the globe have largely stepped up measures to counter the spread of the virus, including border closures, shutting schools and limiting mass gatherings, Covid-19 cases outside of China recently surpassed the total figure recorded inside the country that had, until now, suffered the worst of the outbreak. Italy, in particular, is struggling with the pandemic and recorded a larger single-day number of deaths last weekend than China did at the worst of the peak there.

On Monday, the World Health Organization's chief described the novel coronavirus as the "defining global health crisis of our time." He also urged countries to "test, test, test" for the virus, saying: "You cannot fight a fire blindfolded. And we can't fight this pandemic if we don't know who is infected."

(Source: RT)

In China, life returning to normal

"Look! What a big fish!" Ding Shijiu exclaimed in joy after catching a carp from the lake where he normally goes fishing.

Sitting under a tree full of spring blossoms on a warm day, Ding is finally able to catch up with old friends over a few fishing sessions - something he has been unable to do since the coronavirus pandemic started to sweep across China in January, prompting a major lockdown of cities and provinces across the country.

"The last two months felt surreal and, trust me, I'm almost 70 years old, and I've seen a lot of things," Yang said while pointing at his friends, unable to contain his excitement of seeing them again.

"But we're all still alive, and I'm just so happy that the worst has passed.

"This is the first time I came back fishing at this lake since Lunar New Year - I'm very happy," Yang said with a smile, before trying to reel in another fish.

Like many people in China, Yang has spent nearly all of the last two months at home as the central government imposed

unprecedented quarantine measures across the country in a drastic bid to contain COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus. The central province of Hubei and its capital Wuhan, where the virus was thought to have originated, were completely sealed off.

As the number of COVID-19 cases confirmed overseas daily have surpassed those within China, the draconian measures that appear to have quelled the outbreak domestically - particularly outside Hubei - are gradually being relaxed.

Chongqing, Yang's hometown bordering Hubei, has had more than 500 confirmed cases since the disease started to spill into the municipality. But now, there have been no cases in the city for several days.

The slowdown is not only in Chongqing. Across the country, 13 out of 34 provinces in China have cleared their remaining cases, and approximately 69,000 of 81,000 confirmed cases have been discharged.

(Source: al Jazeera)

India closes Taj Mahal, Pakistan cases spike after quarantine errors

India closed the Taj Mahal, its principal tourist site, and the financial hub of Mumbai ordered offices providing non-essential services to keep half their staff at home in ramped up measures to curb the coronavirus in South Asia.

Mumbai, a densely populated metropolis of 18 million people, also authorized hospital and airport authorities to stamp wrists of those ordered to self-isolate with indelible ink reading "Home Quarantined" and displaying the date the quarantine ends.

The moves, announced late on Monday, come just days after the city shut down schools, cinemas, malls and gyms, and also banned mass gatherings.

India's western state of Maharashtra, home to Mumbai, has been the hardest hit with 39 confirmed coronavirus cases, or roughly a quarter of the 126 cases in the country.

A patient in the state died after contracting the virus on Tuesday, Praveen Pardeshi, who heads Mumbai's civic body, told Reuters: the third death in India.

Along with the Taj Mahal, dozens of other monuments and museums including the Ajanta and Ellora caves and religious sites such as Mumbai's Siddhivinayak temple were closed.

India expanded its travel restrictions on Monday, banning passengers from countries of the European Union and European Free Trade Association, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

Pakistan spike

Pakistan reported the number of confirmed cases had more than doubled for a second consecutive day, reaching 187.

Officials said the jump was largely due to errors in testing and quarantine of travelers who recently returned from

Iran through a border crossing in Balochistan province.

"If the arrangements were better we could have saved these people from the virus," Saeed Ghani, a minister in the provincial Sindh government where many of the cases were detected, told a television channel on Monday night.

Pakistan postponed its flagship Pakistan Super League cricket tournament on Tuesday at the semi-final stage.

Authorities in India and the wider South Asian region have struggled to get travelers to self-isolate or stay quarantined in medical facilities that many view as poor and unhygienic.

At least 38 Afghans, who recently returned from Iran and were in isolation, escaped from a facility in western Afghanistan on Monday after breaking windows and attacking hospital staff.

(Source: Reuters)

Amir Abedzadeh has big dreams in football

Amir Abedzadeh has had quite a football journey. Still only 26 years old, the Marítimo goalkeeper's insistence on "chasing my dream" saw him try his luck in England and the United States of America, as well as his home country, before finding consistent top-level football in Madeira.

Amir talks about life on the island known as The Pearl of the Atlantic, working with José Gomes, going to the World Cup under the orders of Carlos Queiroz, fellow Iranians also making a name for themselves in Portuguese football and his ambitions in the game.

■ Before coming to Portugal you played in Iran, England and the United States. What made you decide to come to Portugal?

My dream and my plan were to play in Europe, no matter what it took and I was prepared for the journey to be unpredictable. I had an amazing experience in England, the US, and Iran. However, during my time in Iran, I knew I had to go to Europe. I didn't know how I was going to get there and I didn't know that I would start in Portugal.

However, looking back at it, I remember one training session while playing at Persepolis, I was talking to a fellow goalkeeper, Nilson Junior (former Vitória Guimarães, Moreirense and União de Madeira goalkeeper). I told him I would love to play in Portugal and I would ask him questions about the talent level, quality, and what life was like there. Ironically enough, a few years later, I came to Portugal through a friend who was playing in the second league and he connected me with his agent. That is how I started my journey in Portugal and I always knew I would come to a top-level league, it was an opportunity for me to start somewhere with great competition and talent.

■ Did you know much about Portugal, Madeira or Portuguese football before arriving at Marítimo?

Marítimo was actually the first team I saw playing in-person when they played in Lisbon. I knew the team and I had knowledge that I was going to a really great team with an amazing history behind it. But, I didn't know anything about Madeira. Truthfully, I didn't know this island existed and was amazed by how beautiful and remarkable it is. Once I landed, I told myself that moving forward there wasn't any reason for excuses and I have an opportunity to prove that I'm able to play at the highest level in one of the top leagues in Europe. Since then, all I'm focused on is putting in the work every day and trying to improve myself while I chase my dreams.

■ How have you adapted to life in general in Portugal: the language, the food, the people, and life in Madeira?

Well, since it isn't my first time living alone and away from my family, I haven't felt any struggles, to be honest. I love the adventure. The people are incredibly friendly and helpful, the food is delicious, making it an easy transition. But, the language has always been the hardest part. I think Portuguese is one of the hardest languages to learn, very easy to understand, but very difficult to speak with the proper grammar and accent. My teammates and colleagues tell me that my Portuguese is really good and I've had a few interviews in Portuguese, but I expect more from myself since I've been living here for three years. Overall, this is an amazing country and Madeira is an amazing place to live. Also, it is a place I consider living after my career is finished.



■ In three seasons you have been competing with Brazilian Charles Silva, another excellent goalkeeper, for the starting spot at Marítimo. What is your relationship like with Charles?

First and foremost, I respect all my teammates and I believe everyone wants one thing: Marítimo's success. I love the competition and I love to compete. It is a primary factor in a player's desire to improve and pushes them to do better. This results in the team doing better, so I'm grateful for all the opportunities to compete during my career.

I'm always trying to learn from all keepers. I watch game film, highlights, and use Wyscout to see what I can learn from other keepers. I believe this way of thinking can help anyone. My goal is to be better than who I was yesterday and eventually become the best version of myself.

■ Results picked up when José Gomes was appointed new Marítimo manager in November, but recent results have seen Marítimo fall down the table. How do you explain the inconsistency?

We are all very grateful to be working with a top-quality coach. I really believe that Marítimo is playing the best football since I joined the club. We are playing with more joy and we can sense the same feeling from our fans in the stadium. Personally, I've learned a lot from him since the first day he arrived. I know we have experienced ups and downs, but sometimes football can be like that. This has happened to the top teams of the league, as well. We lost points with individual mistakes and sometimes unjust endings to games with decisions that were beyond our control. However, we need to all take responsibility and learn from those mistakes in order to improve. We are all committed to go back to our good form and collect points to make our supporters happy by overcoming this phase of inconsistency.

■ Marítimo have had an up and down

season, but personally you have been in excellent form this year and have been the undisputed number one since September. Do you feel you have improved your game during your time in Portugal?

Definitely, I believe there is no staying in one place; you're either improving or regressing. I've learned a lot from my mistakes and turned my weaknesses to strengths by adding more aspects to my game, physically and mentally. I'm looking forward to doing way more than I've done to this point and help my team as best as I can.

■ You are one of just a few players who have gone to a World Cup. Describe the experience of Russia 2018.

It was an amazing experience. The atmosphere, the vibe, the attention — it was remarkable. More importantly, it was a great honor to represent my country and very proud to be the first player from Marítimo to be at the World Cup.

At this moment, my focus is on the next World Cup and I'm doing my absolute best to be able to help my team in 2022 when the competition is in Qatar.

■ How do you assess the work of Carlos Queiroz as Iran coach? What was it like working with him?

He is a true gentleman with a high volume of knowledge and a calmness about him. He maintained different energy and will be missed by all Iranians after eight years of leading the National Team. He left a big impact on Iranian football. Carlos Queiroz created a new image and raised the expectations, as you saw his successor wasn't able to continue his consistency. Personally, I'm very grateful to have had a chance to be his student. Without question, I learned a lot from him.

■ In the past there were no Iranian footballers in Portugal, but now, as well as yourself, we have Mehdi Taremi at Rio Ave and Mehrdad Mohammadi at Desportivo das Aves (all three of whom have had excellent seasons at individual level). Why

do you think this has happened? Do you speak with Mehdi and Mehrdad?

I'm proud that after three seasons of being the only Iranian player in a top league, that we have more Iranians present. Both Mehdi and Mehrdad have been my teammates, both of them are great individuals who are doing their best for their teams. Ultimately, we are all trying our best to be good representatives of our country in this league.

■ Rio Ave coach Carlos Carvalhal said earlier in the season: "with all due respect to Rio Ave and Portuguese football, Taremi is too good for this league and will soon be on a bigger stage." Do you agree with Carvalhal? How far can Taremi go?

I believe to reach the top or the next level, a player must maintain a strong self-belief. I want the best for all my teammates from the Iranian National Team and Marítimo. I enjoy seeing my peers achieve great things, as it continues to motivate me to continue accomplishing more on my path.

Also, it gives me another example of what is possible. I believe no matter what anyone says or thinks of any player, it all comes down to what is within that person. I pray with all my heart for all my teammates to make it to the top.

■ What are your ambitions in Portugal and in the game?

I have big goals and dreams that I visualize every day. I believe I can reach them. My focus is always on how I can improve myself daily. Sooner or later, I know that my mindset will put me in a position to achieve my goals. In the past, I would discuss my goals in detail. Specifically, I would mention what they are and how I'm going to get there. However, I believe now is more about executing and doing. As my focus is locked on improving, I know that maintaining the right beliefs and patience will put me in a position to enjoy the journey, as I work hard towards those goals.

(Source: PortuGOAL)

Jahanbakhsh offers aid to his hometown to fight COVID-19

MNA — Brighton's and Team Melli winger Alireza Jahanbakhsh has offered a 1 billion Rials (near \$7,000) aid to contain the coronavirus outbreak in his hometown, Qazvin.

He also posted a video, asking people to stay at home and follow the required guidelines to get through this pandemic.

Major football leagues and sports events around the world have been put on a halt as a precautionary measure against the outbreak.

Based on the latest reports, as many as 80,881 coronavirus cases, with 3,226 deaths have been reported from China and over 100,000 infections and 3,948 deaths from other countries.

Italy reported no new deaths in the past day while the number of confirmed cases stands at 27,980.

Iran stands next with 16,169 infections and 988 deaths as of Monday.

Tehran says its fight against the outbreak is being severely hampered by US sanctions, calling on the United Nations to help lift the sanctions and end the US "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran.

A pneumonia outbreak caused by the COVID-19 virus (previously known as 2019-nCoV) was reported in China's city of Wuhan, a large trade and industrial center with a population of 12 million, in late December 2019.

Staying at home to be symbolic model to combat disease: Izadyar

IRNA — Iranian well-known para-swimmer Shahin Izadyar termed staying at home as a citizenship behavior that could be a helpful pattern in fight against the coronavirus (COVID-19).

We are all responsible for preventing the spread of the disease; he said adding overcoming the situation requires taking collective action.

Apart from various accomplishments, Izadyar has also won six gold medals at the 2018 Asian Para Games in Jakarta, Indonesia.

The head of the Public Relations and Information Center of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education said on Monday that 14,991 Iranians have been infected with the coronavirus (COVID-19) in Iran and 853 of them have succumbed to death.

Iran karate secure four Olympic quotas after top-class event in Madrid canceled

MNA — Iranian karatekas of Kumite discipline secured four quotas in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics as two major ranking events have been canceled due to coronavirus.

After Karate 1-Premier League in Morocco, the top-flight event in Madrid has also been canceled as Spain is implementing strict measures to contain the outbreak. "The World Karate Federation regrets to inform that the event of Karate's first-class series of international tournaments scheduled to be held in Madrid (Spain) from April 17 to 19 had to be canceled due to the Covid-19 outbreak," reads a statement by the WKF.



Karate 1-Premier League was the major event that athletes could gain points and increase their ranking for the Olympics qualification.

According to the Iranian Karate Federation, WKF had announced that the last event held in Salzburg would be considered as the final round of ranking series for the Olympics. With this implemented, Iran has secured four quotas by Bahman Asgari (Male Kumite -75kg), Hamideh Abbasali (Female Kumite +61kg), Sajjad Ganjzadeh (Male Kumite +75kg), Sara Bahmanyar in (Female Kumite -55kg) who are in the top four of their respective categories according to points collected.

Meanwhile, the Iranian team that had stayed in Germany after the cancellation of travel to Morocco, waiting for the fate of the event in Madrid, will depart for Tehran on Saturday.

Also, Tokyo 2020 Qualification Tournament is scheduled to be held in May in France and if it is not canceled, Iranian kata practitioners can compete for two other quotas of Female -61kg and Male -67kg categories.

Karate is due to make its Olympic debut in Tokyo 2020. There will be eight karate gold medals up for grabs at Tokyo - men's kata, women's kata and three different weight classes for both men's and women's Kumite events.

Iran's Beiranvand nominated for best Asian penalty-saver

TASNIM — Iran and Persepolis goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand has been nominated for the best penalty-saver of the Asia.

Beiranvand saved a penalty from Ronaldo in the match against Portugal in the 2018 World Cup which took his name into the international spotlight.

In the 2020 AFC Champions League, he has yet to save a penalty but he has saved penalties in the 2019 AFC Champions League and Iran Professional League.

The best penalty-saver will be decided through a #ACL2020 poll. Beiranvand will compete with Ante Covic (Wellington Phoenix), Kwoun Sun-tae (Kashima Antlers) and Farizal Marlias (Johor Darul Ta'zim) to become the best Asian penalty saver.

UWW praises Iranian Olympics champions



SPORTS TEHRAN — United World Wrestling (UWW) has lauded former Iranian Olympics champions Komeil Ghasemi and Rasoul Khadem as they contribute to fight the further spread of the fatal novel coronavirus.

The 2012 Olympic champion and member of UWW athlete commission Ghasemi, is joined by the 1996 Olympic champion Khadem as they visit cities in Gilan Province to help provide doctors and nurses with new equipment for fighting COVID-19.

They have donated face masks, gowns and other personal protective equipment to government hospitals. The head of the Public Relations and Information Center of the Iran's Ministry of Health and Medical Education said that 16,169 Iranians have been infected with the coronavirus (COVID-19) in Iran and 988 of them have succumbed to death.

The COVID-19 pandemic is getting more overwhelming by the day, with increasing lockdowns, a death toll of more than 7,000 people across the world.

Nigerian forward Osaguna to leave Persepolis



SPORTS TEHRAN — Nigerian striker Christian Osaguna will reportedly leave Persepolis at the end of the current season.

He joined the Iranian giants on a half-season deal in January, holding an option to extend his deal for a further year.

The 29-year-old forward has yet to score a goal and the coaching staff are reportedly dissatisfied with his performance.

Osaguna scored four goals in 19 games for Zob Ahan in 2019 when he

experienced his first spell in Iran league. He began his professional career at Benin Premier League's club Les Buffles FC du Borgou and then served a lot of clubs such as Raja Casablanca (Morocco), Westerlo (Belgium) and Umm Salal (Qatar). After leaving Zob Ahan he went to South Korea to play for Jeju United in the 2019-2020 season.

Persepolis Irish forward Anthony Stokes, who joined the Reds in January, has also left the team for months.

INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

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Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603
www.eshtarak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.
Tel: 88911433
Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com
Printed at: Jame Jam Bartar Borna - 44197737

Tehrantimes79 Tehrantimesdaily

No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran
P.O. Box: 14155-4843
Zip Code: 1599814713



GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Our prayer that says, "We are from God" is a confession of His proprietorship, and "We return to Him" is a confession of the death of our body and spirit.

Imam Ali (AS)

New edition of children's book "Uncle Noruz" published after 42-year hiatus

CULTURE TEHRAN — The seventh edition of the memorable children's book "Uncle Noruz" has been published 42 years after the release of its sixth edition in 1978.

The book tells the story of a mythical meeting between Uncle Noruz, the herald of spring and the Iranian New Year, and Nanny Cold, the messenger of winter, in the Iranian culture.

The first edition of the book co-written by Farideh Farjam and Mahmud Moshref Azad Tehrani, who wrote under the pseudonym "M. Azad", was published by the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) in 1967, the institute announced on Monday.

The book recommended for children above age 7 has been embellished with illustrations by Farshid Mesqali, the winner of the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 1974.

Farjam's "Birds and the Sky" with illustrations by Mohammad-Ali Baniasadi was published by the IIDCYA in February.

The IIDCYA also introduced the book along with "A Careless Mouse" by Farhad Hassanzadeh, a nominee for the 2020 Hans Christian Andersen Award, during a special ceremony.

Epic love story "Tangled" published to promote native Iranian heroine

CULTURE TEHRAN — Iranian writer Amir Mahbub has recently completed his latest epic love story "Tangled" that revolves around a girl who decides to fulfill the expectations of her father who dreams of having a son.

"The idea came into my mind one night when I was telling a story to my daughter who is highly interested in Hollywood characters," Mahbub said in a press release published on Tuesday.

"However, I developed the characters in the story based on the native Iranian elements," he added.

Published by Sibe Sorkh, the book tells the story of Gilda, a long-haired girl whose father, a wealthy merchant, wishes she was a boy. One day, her father becomes the focus of bandits who take all his cash and assets. So Gilda decides to learn how to shoot with a bow and arrow to take back her father's property from the bandits.

"The story is set in the Gilan region where I was born and I tried to create a legendary heroic character for the readers particularly for girls," Mahbub stated.

"Part of the events in the story is based on historical, social and local facts and I also took religious and political beliefs into consideration in my story," he noted.

Universal Pictures will make movies available at home and in theaters on the same day

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Universal Pictures, a division of Comcast Corp.-owned NBCUniversal, will make its movies available at home on the same day they are released in theaters worldwide, beginning with the DreamWorks Animation film "Trolls World Tour" - which opens in the United States on April 10.

The decision, announced by NBCUniversal on Monday, is a response to changing consumer behavior as the coronavirus spreads. It upends the traditional practice of keeping a movie exclusively in theaters for what is typically a 90-day window before releasing it on other platforms.

NBCUniversal will "continue to evaluate the environment as conditions evolve," the company said in a statement, adding it will revisit the strategy when the current situation changes.

On Sunday night, the mayors of New York and Los Angeles ordered movie theaters in their respective cities to close in response to concerns over the coronavirus outbreak.

NBCUniversal said that by Friday, recently released films including "The Hunt", "The Invisible Man" and "Emma" will be available from sister companies Sky and Comcast and on a variety of on-demand services. The suggested price will be \$19.99 in the United States for a 48-hour rental, and the equivalent price elsewhere.

Hans Christian Andersen Award nomination stirs writer Hassanzadeh's patriotic passion

He and his family fled their homeland in 1980 when the Iran-Iraq war broke out. He started working and experiencing different jobs to earn a living. Although his life had become difficult, it gave him a variety of ideas and good material for his stories.

"After the war, when I had the peace of mind, I started telling my stories to my child, and then it came to my mind, why not write my stories down for all the children to read to share all the experiences I had and all the things I've been through," Hassanzadeh noted.

He has authored over 80 books in various genres from comedy to tragedy, including "The Backyard", "An Umbrella with White Butterflies", "Kuti Kuti Stories", "Watermelon with Love", "Hasti", "Snow and the Sun" and "Call Me Ziba".

"I believe that advising children directly doesn't work anymore. Of course, they need to learn lots of things, but they can learn them indirectly through stories, even the comedy stories are better in my view," he said.

"When I'm writing, I don't think much about the moral of the story. I start writing and then the creativity finds its way," he added.

Hassanzadeh's books have been rendered into different languages, including English, Arabic, Turkish and Armenian so far.

"A lot of positive responses have come in from my readers from around the world on social media. I am content since it seems that they love my stories," he mentioned.



Farhad Hassanzadeh speaks during a ceremony the IIDCYA organized in Tehran on February 18, 2020 to introduce his latest book "A Careless Mouse". (IIDCYA/Mehran Riazi)

"There is no end for writing in my opinion. I still have lots of ideas and plots for my stories waiting to be told, and a fountain of creativity; I will be writing until the day my mind quits working," he concluded.

IRIB to air four acclaimed Iranian movies during Noruz holiday

A R T TEHRAN — Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) will air four acclaimed Iranian movies during the Noruz holiday beginning on March 20.

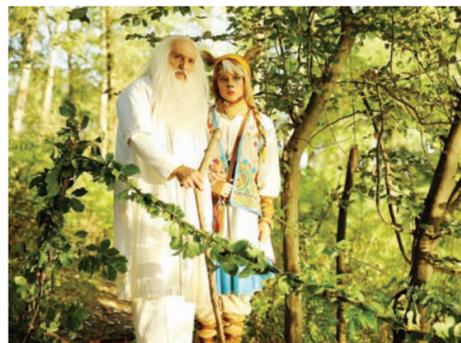
"When the Moon Was Full" by Narges Abyar will be aired on Channel 1, IRIB announced in a press release published on Tuesday.

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

The film won the Crystal Simorgh for best movie at the 37th edition of the Fajr Film Festival last year.

The film also brought Narges Abyar the Crystal Simorgh for best director. The movie also won Hutan Shakiba the award for best actor, while Elnaz Shakerdoost was crowned best actress.

Bahram Tavakkoli's "Gholamreza Takhti", a movie about



A scene from "The White Forehead 3" by Seyyed Javad Hashemi.

the life story of Iranian Olympic gold-medalist wrestler Gholamreza Takhti, will also be aired on Channel 1.

"The Warden" by Nima Javidi will be aired on Channel 3. The film won the award for best film at the 13th Celebration of Iranian Cinema Critics and Screenwriters in January.

"The Warden", which tells the story of an Iranian prison warden who is assigned to transfer prisoners to a new building during the 1960s, brought Javidi the award for best screenwriter as well.

Actor Navid Mohammadzadeh was honored with the award for creative acting for his portrayal of the prison warden in the film.

"The White Forehead 3", a musical fantasy based on Iranian folktales by Seyyed Javad Hashemi, will be aired on Channel 2.

The film begins with a gazelle that lives with its nasty father in a forest. The White Forehead decides to flee home due to its father's volatile temper in the first series of the film and the story continues in its second and third sequels.

Books by land artist Ahmad Nadalian ready for publication

CULTURE TEHRAN — Land artist Ahmad Nadalian has written several books which are ready for publication.

"Legend of Bibi Surat" is one of the books, which is about two sisters living on the Persian Gulf island Hormoz.

"Old legends say that two sisters were living on the island both of them fall in love with the same fisherman; one of them wins his heart and the other starts painting on the walls of their house in the great demise of her love," Nadalian told the Persian service of Honaronline on Monday.

Local residents believe the house still exists, he said and added, "However, the story is sort of a legend with only a few written words about them and I decided to work on

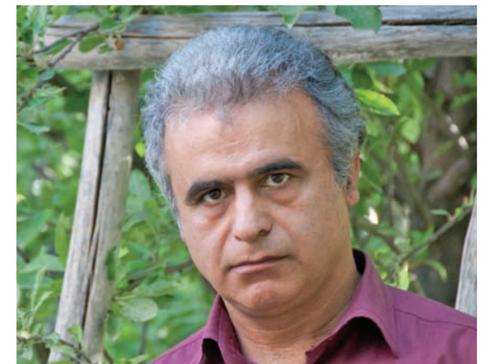
it and add several local and cultural narrations to make a story out of the legend."

The other book is about Jiri Polak, a Czech documentary filmmaker and painter.

Pollock traveled to Iran through Switzerland and stayed on Hormoz during the years 1971-1978.

While living on the island, the director became an architect and a painter, and built several buildings that are still standing to this day, protected as historical landmarks.

Nadalian is famous for his land art creations in Iran and around the world. He has been living in nature for many years and searches for raw materials for his artistic creations and later displays them in natural settings.



Land artist Ahmad Nadalian in an undated photo.

Taylor Swift, Ariana Grande give thumbs up to social distancing to contain coronavirus

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Action star Arnold Schwarzenegger told Americans to "ignore the morons." Lady Gaga said she was staying at home with her dogs, and Taylor Swift said sacrifices are needed as she urged her 128 million fans to practice social distancing in a bid to contain the coronavirus.

As U.S. authorities stepped up calls for Americans to move beyond hand washing and isolate themselves as much as possible, Ariana Grande and Heidi Klum added their voices to celebrities appealing for drastically reduced social interactions.

"I'm seeing lots of get-togethers and hangs and parties still happening. This is

the time to cancel plans, actually truly isolate as much as you can," Swift posted on social media on Sunday.

"It's a really scary time, but we need to make sacrifices right now," the "Fearless" singer said.

New York and Los Angeles announced closures of bars, movie theaters and restaurants starting on Monday, as the death toll from the outbreak rose to 65 over the weekend.

Schwarzenegger, the "Terminator" star and former California governor, posted video of himself at his kitchen table hugging his two miniature horses.

"We don't go out. We don't go to

restaurants. We don't do anything like that anymore here," he said on Sunday. "Stay at home as much as possible. Listen to the experts, ignore the morons."

Pop star Grande appeared to be responding to social media postings at the weekend of people bragging about frequenting bars, restaurants and public places in spite of the coronavirus outbreak.

"It is incredibly dangerous and selfish to take this situation that lightly," the "7 Rings" singer with 177 million Instagram followers posted. "Please don't turn a blind eye."

Former Bond girl Olga Kurylenko, who appeared in "Quantum of Solace" in 2008, announced on Sunday that she was

"locked up at home" after testing positive for coronavirus, joining Tom Hanks and his wife Rita Wilson as celebrities who have been diagnosed with the disease.

Model and "America's Got Talent" judge Heidi Klum said she was keeping apart from her musician husband Tom Kaulitz after coming down with a fever a week ago. Klum said she has tested for coronavirus but has not provided an update on the result.

Singer Miley Cyrus appealed to fans to stop panic buying and hoarding and to be thoughtful while preparing for social distancing. "NO ONE needs every soup in the store," she wrote on Twitter.



Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson arrive at the 26th Screen Actors Guild Awards in Los Angeles, California, U.S., January 19, 2020. (Reuters/Monica Almeida)

Tom Hanks, wife Rita Wilson leave hospital after coronavirus treatment: People magazine

SYDNEY (Reuters) — Oscar-winning actor Tom Hanks and his wife, Rita Wilson, have left a hospital in Australia's Queensland state five days after testing positive for the coronavirus, People magazine reported on Monday.

The pair are now resting at a rented home in Australia and remain under quarantine in the house, the U.S. magazine's report said, citing a representative of the actor.

Last week, Hanks wrote on Twitter that he and Wilson had tested positive for the virus in Australia, where he is working on a film, after they felt tired

and achy with slight fevers. Both Hanks and Wilson are 63 years old.

Hanks had traveled to the Gold Coast, on Australia's east coast south of Brisbane, to begin filming a movie about Elvis Presley. He is set to play Presley's manager, Colonel Tom Parker, in the Warner Bros production. Warner Bros is owned by AT&T.

Hanks and Wilson were the first major American celebrities known to have contracted the coronavirus, which causes a disease, COVID-19, that has killed more than 70 people and infected more than 3,800 in the United States.