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580 kilometers of freeways to be inaugurated by Mar. 2021

TEHRAN— About 580 kilometers of freeways will be inaugurated throughout Iran during the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2021), Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami announced on Saturday.

Mentioning Transport and Urban Development Ministry's plans for the current Iranian year, Eslami noted that one of the major programs that his ministry is

going to pursue in this year is the National Housing Plan which aims to build 380,000 affordable housing units, ILNA reported.

Back in January, Deputy Transport and Urban Development Minister Kheirollah Khademi had announced that six prioritized freeways projects with a total length of 550 kilometers (KM) were planned to be inaugurated by the Iranian Calendar year of 1400 (starts on March 21, 2021). **→ 4**

Iran, Oman launch new container shipping line

TEHRAN — Iran, and Oman launched a new container shipping line to transit cargoes between the southern Iranian port city of Bandar Abbas and Port Sultan Qaboos in Oman, IRNA reported, quoting the head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO).

According to Hamid Zadboum, the line which officially started operation on Saturday is going to be used to transit container cargoes, mainly fruits, and vegetables, between the two countries.

Iran and Oman had signed a maritime cooperation agreement in December 2019 for boosting maritime transportation between the two countries.

Based on the agreement, Iranian traders and businessmen would be able to interact constructively with their Omani counterparts, and regular shipping lines were to be established between the two countries, while the two sides also pledged to provide facilities for using each other's ports. **→ 4**

Racism row as French doctors suggest virus vaccine test in Africa

Two French doctors have been accused of racism for suggesting that a potential vaccine for coronavirus should first be tested on people in Africa.

The comments were made on the French television channel, LCI, during a discussion on Wednesday about COVID-19 trials set to be launched in Europe and Australia to see if the BCG tuberculosis vaccine could be used to treat the virus.

"It may be provocative. Should we not do this study in Africa where there are no masks, no treatment or intensive care, a little bit like it's been done for certain AIDS studies, where among prostitutes, we try things, because we know that they are highly exposed and don't protect themselves?" said Jean-Paul Mira, head of the intensive care unit at the Cochin Hospital in Paris. **→ 10**



ARTICLE

Ebrahim Fallahi
Tehran Times journalist

Indigenizing petchem catalysts: a big step toward total independence

As the second-biggest source of revenue for Iran, the petrochemical industry is one of the most important pillars of the country's resilient economy and one of the main suppliers of foreign currency especially the euro for the country.

The industry became more significant since the re-imposition of U.S. sanctions on the country's oil industry and since then, the government has been taking serious measures to expand the industry and move toward self-sufficiency.

Cooperating with capable domestic knowledge-based companies and startups is one of the very fruitful steps that the oil ministry has taken in its efforts to reach complete independence from the foreign resources for meeting its equipment needs.

In this regard, the country's Petrochemical Research and Technology Company (PRTC) has played a very significant role in collaborating with such companies for working on innovative research projects for producing various equipment and base-products needed in the industry.

Earlier this month, the PRTC's Managing Director Ali Pajouhan announced that National Petrochemical Company (NPC), in collaboration with domestic companies, is planning to indigenize the knowledge for producing nine major catalysts used in the petrochemical industries within the next two years.

Catalyst is a substance that increases the rate of a chemical reaction in the process of creating a petrochemical product; the catalyst itself is not consumed in the catalyzed reaction and can continue to act repeatedly. Because of this, only very small amounts of catalyst are required to alter the reaction rate in most cases.

However, catalysts are very expensive substances and currently, the country is spending millions of dollars every year on importing such products into the country, producing such catalysts inside the country would make a huge difference in the profitability rate of the petrochemical plants.

Iranian petrochemical industry is currently using 40 different types of catalysts which cost the industry \$260 million annually. **→ 4**

IIDCYA gives discounts on books to enrich children's time during home quarantine

By Manijeh Rezapoor

TEHRAN — Iran's Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) has given discounts on its electronic copies of a number of its publications to help keep children busy with reading during the home quarantine amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Hundreds of books ranging from novels and historical books to audiobooks are currently available on Taaghche, a major online Iranian bookstore.

More interesting is that some of the children's books are narrated by some celebrated actors or voice actors, which can also be appealing for parents.

"The Wheel on the School", a novel by Dutch-

born American writer Meindert DeJong is one of the highlights.

The book, which has won the 1955 Newbery Medal for children's literature, has been narrated by veteran voice actor Ehteram Borumand. Bahereh Anvar is the Persian translator of the book.

Another highlight is "Paulina" by the Spanish author Ana Maria Matute.

The book has been translated into Persian by celebrated translator Mohammad Qazi and narrated by actress Gelareh Abbasi.

The audiobook is available with a 50 percent discount.

The 33rd Tehran International Book Fair (TIBF) was postponed to a time after the holy month of Ramadan due to the new virus epidemic.

Coronavirus sparks a 'war for masks' as accusations fly

As the coronavirus pandemic spreads across Europe and the United States, a global scramble for protective equipment such as masks and gloves is underway. In France they are calling it the "guerre des masques" -- the war of the masks.

Some French officials have even alleged that their consignments from China have been hijacked by Americans.

The presidents of two regions in France have claimed that American customers -- without specifying who -- have tried to pay Chinese suppliers three or four times the agreed price to get critical supplies diverted.

Renaud Muselier, president of the Sud region, alleged in several interviews that an order from one French region had been bought by the Americans for cash -- and the plane

that was due to fly to France had instead gone to the US.

Muselier was asked by CNN affiliate BFM-TV whether masks had been taken by Americans at Chinese airports. He replied: "Exactly," before adding, "There is a foreign country that paid three times the price of the cargo on the tarmac. So the masks are gone and the region that ordered them has been destitute."

Muselier later tweeted that masks for his own region were on their way and had "not been bought by a foreign power."

Contacted by CNN, Muselier referred further questions to the French Foreign Ministry, which said Thursday it was looking into the reports.

Jean Rottner, the president of another French region -- Grand Est -- echoed Muselier's remarks, telling French radio network RTL that it was a

The exact date of the fair will be specified later.

It is worth mentioning that the Tehran book fair used to welcome thousands of book fans and students for about 10 days during April.

It was a venue for family and friend gatherings, while meetings with writers and publishers were other highlights of the fair.

Now, that the country is dealing with fears of the coronavirus pandemic, it is a good opportunity to purchase the audiobooks from online bookstores to promote book reading and remember the good days of book reading in the country.

Photo: This combination photo shows a number of IIDCYA publications available on Taaghcheh.



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Firefighters disinfect Tehran streets against COVID-19

Firefighters in central parts of Tehran are using their fogging machines to disinfect streets against the novel coronavirus on Friday, April 3.

The total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran reached 55,743 on Saturday, of whom 3,452 have died and 19,736 recovered. Iran has announced social distancing measures in a bid to minimize the spread of coronavirus. **→ 10**



ARTICLE

Zahra Bahadivand Chegini
Freelance translator

COVID-19, an uninvited guest who helped us cherish our planet, family more

The widespread outbreak of the coronavirus has created a new situation in the human world. From political troubles and disputes to the humankind's potential vulnerability to confront nature, and the increasing importance of science in human life, are part of changes and hints caused by the introduction of the virus into modern human life.

So far, over 1.12 million people have been infected with the virus worldwide, and more than 60,000 died, something rare and perhaps unprecedented for at least this century, most importantly, it has involved the whole world.

In fact, most of the world's population has experienced this phenomenon, and COVID-19 may later become the only memory shared by all humans on the earth. It is better to say that this is the common pain of the world since no identification is required to understand what is going on in the world these days, it is not required to put ourselves in the shows of people around the country to understand this, because almost all people around the world breath under the white masks for an hour or a few minutes or days to stay immune against this virus.

The question is whether Corona or any other factor threatening human life in this way will produce a strange but tangible result. As slogans like "no to luxury" are becoming a reality these days, we further understand that food and water are the human's basic needs, and how foolishly humans spend the life collecting, thinking, and spending energy for things that are never a part of their needs and well-being and a factor of happiness.

The human being has sacrificed the principle of life that is to provide comfort, health, and spiritual evolution, to some sub-principles that are less felt these days.

The phenomenon showed us that the powerful hand of nature treats all human beings in the same way, regardless of color, race, wealth, power, and we may need to learn from COVID-19 that human beings are equal even in facing the disease. **→ 9**

Colombia University professor: U.S. return to nuclear deal would be best choice

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Political Science Professor at Colombia University Robert Y. Shapiro has said that a fresh start to diplomacy is the best solution to reduce tension between Iran and the United States, noting that Washington's return to the 2015 nuclear deal would be best choice.

In an interview with ILNA published on Saturday, he said that the U.S. must return to the agreement to start to deal with issues related to that. However, Shapiro said, that requires the Trump administration to change its approach or for a new president to take office.



"Trump and the U.S. government are constantly talking about negotiating, but each day they are putting more threats against Iran so Tehran reduces its obligations in response to these threats," he said.

U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from the 2015 nuclear deal that Tehran had sealed with the 5+1 nations, and imposed the most severe sanctions ever on the Islamic Republic under its maximum pressure policy.

In response to this move, on May 8, 2019, Iran announced that its "strategic patience" is over and started to gradually reduce its commitments to the JCPOA at bi-monthly intervals. At the time Iran announced if the European parties to the deal take concrete steps to shield Iran's economy from the U.S. sanctions it will reverse its decision.

However, seeing no action by the Europeans, on January 5 Iran took the last and final step by removing all limits on its nuclear activities.

Iran's moves are based on paragraph 36 of the JCPOA which "allows one side, under certain circumstances, to stop complying with the deal if the other side is out of compliance."

Despite taking the last step, Iran has reminded the Europeans to fulfill their commitments in order to keep the deal alive.

Tehran mayor says sanctions crippling Iran's fight against coronavirus

Writing an article in the Guardian on Saturday, Pirouz Hanachi, the mayor of Tehran, has warned that a refusal by the Donald Trump administration to halt "economic warfare against Iran is directly impeding" Iran's efforts to contain the deadly coronavirus "which knows no borders".

Following is the text of the article:



To many of us urban administrators in Iran, the onslaught of coronavirus has underscored an important fact of life: no town, city or nation can be indifferent to global crises, even in far-flung corners of our world.

Indeed, while the mantra of good governance over the past century has been to "think global, act local", we must today think and act both locally and globally.

Unfortunately, the small-mindedness that has dominated the politics of various countries in past years has not dissipated.

Rather, those who have aggressively advocated pursuit of narrowly defined "national interests" at any cost are doubling down. The consequences of this posturing are many.

In Iran, urban administrators are left facing an unprecedented public health crisis. Figures show that 3,160 had died from the disease by 2 April and there are more than 50,000 cases of infection. The rate of infections is not yet slowing, and many of them are in Tehran, the city of which I am mayor.

Doubtless there are things that we could do differently, like every country in the world. But we are operating against the backdrop of the most extreme sanctions regime in history. The U.S. embargo not only prohibits American companies and individuals from conducting lawful trade with Iranian counterparts, but given that the sanctions are extra-territorial, all other countries and companies are also bullied into refraining from doing legitimate business with Iranians, even the selling of medicines.

As a result, the ability of my colleagues and I to provide the health, logistical and other essential infrastructure necessary to combat the disease has been drastically reduced. We experience this loss every day, and it can be counted in people that would not have died.

This unjust treatment of Iran has come about via the policies of one country — the United States — whose ruling administration does not seem to prioritize even its own national interests, but instead the narrow interests of a governing party. The outcome of such irresponsible policies and behavior is not limited to Iran; they have also inflicted harm on the American public.

Indeed, the Donald Trump administration's refusal to halt its economic warfare against Iran is directly impeding our efforts to deal with a virus which knows no borders. Is it in the U.S.'s national interest for the coronavirus pandemic to become permanent?

In order to better confront these new global crises, there is a need for politicians to realize that the path to pursuing national interests is not separate or contrary to that of global interests and international accountability.

Of equal importance, it must be recognized that as long as the general consensus in international politics does not actively move toward reducing injustice and inequality beyond national and racial boundaries, global crises will continue to indiscriminately endanger every country in the world.

The world cannot go on like this. If global leaders fail to seize the opportunity to embrace change, we will all continue to remain highly vulnerable to communicable diseases, environmental catastrophes, global warming, terrorism, violent extremism and other shared threats.

G77, China demand end to U.S. sanctions amid coronavirus pandemic

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Group of 77 (G-77) and China, in a statement on Friday, called for an end to unilateral sanctions against developing countries amid the coronavirus crisis, warning the sanctions could slow down efforts to tackle the pandemic.

The Group of 77 at the United Nations is a coalition of 135 developing countries, designed to promote its members' collective economic interests and create an enhanced joint negotiating capacity in the United Nations.

The statement implicitly aimed at the United States, which has imposed tough sanctions against Iran and Venezuela.

The coalition of developing nations was quoted by the AFP as saying that the application of "unilateral coercive economic measures will have a negative impact on the capacity of states to respond efficiently."

It warned that such measures would affect targeted countries "acquisition of medical equipment and supplies" to adequately treat their populations in the face of this pandemic.

"We therefore call upon the international community to adopt urgent and effective measures to eliminate the use of unilateral coercive economic measures against developing countries," the statement said.

The Group of 77 was established on 15 June 1964 by seventy-seven developing countries.



On Monday, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said U.S. sanctions have made it "impossible" for Iranians to have access to essential drugs during the Covid-19 pandemic, warning that the bans were leading to a "humanitarian catastrophe".

"The illegal blockade of Iran's financial resources by the sweeping U.S. sanctions makes access to drugs and medical equipment impossible," Zarif wrote in an op-ed

titled "Fight the Virus, Not Us" published in Russian business newspaper Kommersant.

"This is leading to a humanitarian catastrophe," the top diplomat warned, noting that Washington's campaign of 'maximum pressure' on Tehran undermines the country's efforts in treating Covid-19 patients and slowing down the spread of the deadly virus.

Zarif stressed that the threat of U.S. sanctions forces banks to avoid dealing with Iran

Defense Ministry resolved to defeat coronavirus outbreak: official

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Defense Ministry's health, treatment and rescue department said on Saturday that it is determined to continue fight against the COVID-19 disease till rooting the virus out.

Reza Allah-Varn, the department chief, said the military has been defending the country via reinvigorating deterrence power. He added, "The same policy is followed by the ministry in countering the virus."

The ministry official expressed the hope to overcome the outbreak in the shortest time possible.

Reza Allah-Varn went on to say that coronavirus diagnostic kit was produced by the ministry 40 days ago and later went under test by the Pasteur Institute.

He added, "Mass production of the kits has been started in Imam Reza (AS) Healthcare Base."

On Monday, the Iranian Defense Ministry unveiled a new generation of test kits that can detect the Covid-19 in three hours with 98 percent accuracy.

Second Brigadier General Amirir from the Defense Ministry said the homegrown test kit is being endorsed by the Health Ministry.

Amirir said this is the second generation of test kits produced by the ministry's Industries Organization.

The Defense Ministry started mass production of face

masks, disinfectants, and protective clothes from the early days that the coronavirus disease was detected in Iran. It also unveiled advanced thermal cameras used as a screening tool in crowded places.

The Army and the IRGC have been building field hospital in certain cities across Iran. For example, the Army has converted the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds into a field hospital with 2,000 beds to prepare for a probable surge of COVID-19 patients. Built on March 25, the hospital has the capacity to add 1,000 more beds. It was built just in 24 hours.

On March 13, top commanders of the IRGC, Army and police gathered together on how to contain the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

In a decree on March 12, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ordered the establishment of a "health and treatment headquarters" to prevent further spread of the coronavirus in the country.

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



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

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

Diplomat says U.S. sanctions will lead to humanitarian catastrophe



POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iran's Ambassador to Russia, Kazem Jalali, said on Friday that the United States' sanctions will lead to a "humanitarian catastrophe" in the world.

His remarks came after the U.S. and certain allies vetoed Russia's proposed resolution to lift sanctions imposed on the countries fighting the highly transmissible coronavirus.

In a tweet in Russian language, Jalali added that today, the global community stood on one side and the U.S. on the other, according to IRNA.

U.S. foreign policy has even mocked role of the United Nations in solving global problems, Iran's top diplomat to Russia added.

In a tweet on March 29, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif urged the international community to stop supporting U.S. "war crimes" against Iran, urging the world to "stop obeying immoral and illegal sanctions" against Iranians.

He said that the U.S. "economic terrorism" on Iran has been expanding to the new level of "medical terrorism" which is not even permissible on the battlefield.

"This even 'exceeds what would be permissible on the battlefield,'" he noted.

The Trump administration has slapped the harshest ever sanctions in history against Iran. It has introduced a total ban on Iran's oil export with the aim

of strangulating the Iranian economy.

The Academy of Medical Sciences of Iran has written to the UN to complain about the world's body failure to push for the lifting of cruel U.S. sanctions at a critical time when Iran is fighting a deadly coronavirus pandemic. Press TV reported on Thursday.

In the letter addressed to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, the academy's President Alireza Marandi criticized the UN and its affiliated organizations for taking "no effective measures" to ease the restrictive U.S. measures, which are hampering Iran's fight against the fast-spreading disease.

"Following correspondence about the U.S. government's illegal sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran and its direct impact on the health of the Iranian people, unfortunately, so far, the United Nations and other relevant organizations including the World Health Organization, which claim to defend the rights of humanity, have taken no effective measures to lift the cruel sanctions against our dear children, women, men and patients," Marandi wrote.

Marandi, a former health minister, also lashed out at the Donald Trump administration for turning a deaf ear to international calls demanding sanctions relief and instead imposing even more anti-Iran sanctions.

EU urges suspension of U.S. sanctions on Iran



POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Foreign ministers of the European Union have urged suspension of the United States' sanctions against countries, including Iran, in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

Spanish Foreign Minister Arancha Gonzalez Laya told reporters that the issue was discussed in a meeting on Friday, according to ISNA.

She noted that the sanctions must be removed when there is human rights urgency like outbreak of the coronavirus.

A UN human rights expert called on Tuesday for lifting international sanctions against countries ranging from Iran to North Korea and Venezuela in coronavirus crisis, according to Reuters.

"The continued imposition of crippling economic sanctions on Syria, Venezuela, Iran, Cuba, and, to a lesser degree, Zimbabwe, to name the most prominent instances, severely undermines the ordinary citizens' fundamental right to sufficient and adequate food," Hilal Elver, UN special rapporteur on the right to food, said in a statement.

Elver, an independent expert, said that it was a matter of "humanitarian and practical urgency to lift unilateral economic sanctions immediately".

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres wrote in a letter to the G-20 economic powers, calling for rolling back international sanctions regimes around the world, saying they are

and prompts European medical companies to refuse to sell vital equipment to Tehran.

"The world community must come to its senses and help Iran against economic, medical and drug terrorism," Zarif wrote.

In his op-ed, Zarif argued that Tehran has a "strong" healthcare system, but severe sanctions by Washington are draining its finances. "The American policy of maximum pressure hampers Iranian exports, while Iran has fewer and fewer sources of investment."

The United States has refused to lift sanctions on Iran and even tightened them several times in recent weeks, making it almost impossible for the Islamic Republic to access life-saving medications and medical equipment.

As of Saturday, April 4, about 56,000 Iranian had tested positive for the coronavirus and about 35,000 had lost their lives.

The United States has refused to lift sanctions on Iran and even tightened them several times in recent weeks, making it almost impossible for the Islamic Republic to access life-saving medications and medical equipment.

Meanwhile, the UN General Assembly on Thursday approved a resolution for the first time on the coronavirus pandemic, calling for "multilateralism" in the fight against the virus, but failed to condemn unilateral U.S. sanctions against countries.

As of Saturday, April 4, 3,452 Iranian lost their lives to the deadly coronavirus. Also until Saturday, 55,743 were confirmed contracted the virus.

Health minister praises Basij for contribution to coronavirus battle

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iranian Health Minister Saeed Namaki has lauded the Basij forces for helping the medical society in the country's fight against the coronavirus outbreak.

In a letter to Basij Chief Gholamreza Soleimani, Namaki voiced his gratitude to the volunteer forces of the Basij for their close cooperation with the medical staff and for their contribution to the national mobilization plan to contain the deadly virus, Tasnim reported.

He also pointed to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's recommendation that the intensity of the battle with the coronavirus should not decrease, predicting a difficult road ahead for the full containment of the disease.

Namaki asked the Basij Force to stand with the medical society on the path fraught with difficulties, saying the Islamic Republic has so far achieved great results in the fight against the coronavirus despite the pressure of sanctions in comparison to countries with strong economies.



On Thursday, the health minister predicted that Iran's situation in fight against the pandemic will improve noticeably in coming days.

In a meeting held through videoconference with WHO officials in the Eastern Mediterranean region in attendance, experts praised Iran for implementing

the national coronavirus fight plan and called for Iran to share its experience throughout the Eastern Mediterranean.

To date, we have been able to cover more than 90 percent of the target population through the national plan, Namaki stated.

Among the public and experts, a question was raised that "when we say that we could manage the first heavy wave of the disease in the country, how have the identified cases increased," he responded that "with achievements in the screening of the disease, we have been able to identify more new cases of COVID-19, and in the coming days, the healing of those identified will become more apparent and will change Iran's situation globally."

People should know that we are in the disease management phase and are still operating to control and the disease, he said, adding, "However, in some provinces, due to proper disease management, the detection rate of new cases has dropped."

MP says coronavirus laid bare true face of U.S.

POLITICAL TEHRAN — A member of the parliament says the coronavirus pandemic has laid bare the true face of the United States, which pursues anti-human rights policies.

"On the one hand, the American [rulers] shout out humanitarian slogans, but on the other hand, they prevent aid to Iran to fight coronavirus," said Hassan Bahramnia, ISNA reported on Saturday.

"This conduct clearly shows their anti-human rights policies," Bahramnia added.

Iran has on various occasions denounced Washington's unilateral sanctions for worsening Iran's fight against the deadly virus.

In a letter to Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO) Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Friday, Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN office in Geneva Esmaeil Baqaei Hamaneh said medical sanctions by the United States government against the Islamic Republic amount to an "unprecedented threat" to global public health.

According to Press TV, Baqaei Hamaneh said imposition of the cruel and illegal sanctions on Iran, which has resulted in the ordinary Iranian people being denied access to medicine and medical equipment and services, clearly exemplifies a crime against humanity.

He added that the sanctions have blocked Iran's banking interaction with other countries in order to buy commodities



required in the fight against the coronavirus and warned that the illegal restrictions are a serious threat to Tehran's efforts to battle and contain the virus.

The Iranian envoy stressed the importance of rolling back international sanctions regimes around the world as emphasized by United Nations Secretary General An-

tonio Guterres.

In a letter to the G-20 economic powers, Guterres said the sanctions are heightening the health risks for millions of people and weakening the global containment endeavor.

"I am encouraging the waiving of sanctions imposed on countries to ensure access to food, essential health supplies, and COVID-19 medical support. This is the time for solidarity not exclusion," the UN chief wrote.

In his remarks, Bahramnia also said the coronavirus might be part of a biological warfare imposed by bullying countries against humanity.

"This has not been proven yet, but if this is the case, it's a crime against humanity which shows the wickedness of the country that produced it," he said.

Last month, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei described the U.S. as "the most evil enemy of the Iranian nation," saying the U.S. is accused of producing the virus.

"I do not know how true this accusation is, but when such an accusation is made, which wise person will ask for your help?" he asked.

Ayatollah Khamenei also ordered Iran's military chief to establish a "health and treatment base" to prevent further spread of the virus.

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

U.S. sanctions hindering Iran's fight against coronavirus outbreak: MP

POLITICAL TEHRAN — An Iranian parliamentarian wrote on her official Twitter account on Saturday that the U.S. economic terrorism and illegal sanctions are now among the main barriers facing Iran to mitigate COVID-19 outbreak.

In her tweet, Fatemeh Hosseini appreciated sympathetic message of Gabriela Cuevas Barron, the current president of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) for her insistence on the need to lift cruel and illegal sanctions imposed on Iran by the Trump administration.

The IPU is the global organization of national parliaments.

Hosseini, who serves as the executive manager of the Iranian parliament in the IPU, underscored, "My colleague and I are resolved to do our best to cope seriously with the coronavirus consequences on the people."

In a message to Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani on April 3, Barron expressed concern over the speaker's health after he tested positive for COVID-19. She wished him immediate recovery.

She also expressed her solidarity with all members of the Iranian parliament, saying, "Together we can defeat the Coronavirus."

Formerly the speakers of Russian, Syrian parliaments, and Pakistani-Iranian parliamentary friendship group had wished immediate recovery for Larijani in separate messages.

On Friday, Iran's ambassador permanent representative to the UN office



in Geneva said in a letter to the World Health Organization (WHO) chief that the imposition and intensification of U.S. sanctions on Iran amidst the coronavirus pandemic amount to a "crime against humanity".

Ambassador Esmaeil Baghaei Hamaneh said the imposition of cruel and illegal sanctions has blocked Iran's banking transactions with other countries to buy commodities needed to contain the rapidly-spreading deadly virus.

The Iranian envoy stressed the importance of rolling back international sanctions regimes around the world as emphasized by United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who had said in a letter to the G-20 economic powers that the sanctions are heightening the health risks for millions of people and weakening the global containment endeavor.

"I am encouraging the waiving of sanctions imposed on countries to ensure access to food, essential health supplies, and COVID-19 medical support. This is the time for solidarity, not exclusion," the UN chief wrote.

150 Iranian academics write to UN chief, call for sanctions end

POLITICAL TEHRAN — In a letter addressed to United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres, 150 Iranian activists and academics called for an end to anti-Iran sanctions.

The full transcript of the letter, released on Friday, is as follows:

Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

As you are well informed, the raison d'être of the United Nations, which was founded in the aftermath of the ruinous World War II that killed tens of millions of people and made hundreds of millions of others homeless and displaced, was to lessen the human beings' pains and sufferings and to provide them with a safer and more blissful world, regardless of their nationality, religion, race, and color of skin. Today, the whole world is faced with the global disaster of Coronavirus disease and, despite human being's wonderful scientific advancements, their weakness has become more obvious than any other time, and it is evident that without solidarity, sympathy, and solidarity, they will not have a bright future. Thus, we must all take into consideration that "we are all in the same boat in a stormy sea."

In the meanwhile, Iran's great, glorious, and munificent nation, who has played a unique role in the progress of human civilization according to the attestation of the world's great thinkers, is horribly attacked by two forces: first, the Coronavirus that threatens the



lives of Iranian people, and second, the sanctions virus that, due to the shortage of possibilities and lack of access to the medical equipment, drugs, and the other necessary tools for confronting the disease outbreak, has disrupted the country's medical system and threatens severely the nation's health, and regarding Iran's geopolitical situation in the Middle East region, it might lead to the disease outbreak and death of millions of people in the whole region.

As the signers of this declaration, we request Your Excellency as the UN's Secretary-General, and its subordinate organizations, and also the whole world's intellectual community, civil society, international institutions, and the all noble people to help the Iranian state and nation in removing sanctions in order for them to be able to confront the disease outbreak.

Human beings are members of a whole,

In creation of one essence and soul, If one member is afflicted with pain, Other members uneasy will remain.

Overcoming coronavirus requires global co-op: ambassador

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iranian Ambassador to China Mohammad Keshavarz-Zadeh has said overcoming the coronavirus pandemic requires global cooperation.

In a tweet on Saturday, Keshavarz-Zadeh said "Saturday" has been declared a day of mourning across China to remember victims of coronavirus.

He pointed out that more than one million people in the world are suffering from coronavirus today.

The Iranian envoy also extended his condolences to the families of the victims of the coronavirus, especially the Iranian people. Earlier on Saturday, people across China stopped for three minutes to pay tribute to those who have died in the country's coronavirus outbreak.

In Wuhan, where the outbreak began, all traffic lights in urban areas were turned red for three minutes. The city

of 11 million was the hardest hit by the outbreak, recording 2,567 fatalities. This accounts for more than three-quarters of China's coronavirus deaths.

Earlier, the ambassador warned that the world should be vigilant against any xenophobic, racist or intolerant propaganda. "It's absolutely wrong and inappropriate to label the novel coronavirus as the 'China Virus' or 'Wuhan Virus'," he told China.org.cn, referring to the practice of tying the virus to China by U.S. President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo earlier in March.

The ambassador said this kind of propaganda is not a new type of ignorance and racism, however, such language from the top leadership of a major power is unprecedented in the 21st century.

Trump's language has also drawn domestic criticism. "It's certainly not the way the leadership of the United States, the

secretary of state, and the president of the United States, ought to be behaving in the best of times - but certainly not in a crisis," The Hill quoted former White House national security adviser Susan Rice as saying on Tuesday.

In the short term, Keshavarz Zadeh called on all countries and the United Nations to make effective arrangement to lead global efforts in sharing data about the COVID-19, coordinating international research, providing and encouraging greater funding of the World Health Organization, and humanitarian assistance.

According to the diplomat, Iran, the hardest-hit country in Middle East, has entered a dire situation at a time when the government was already under extreme pressure by U.S. unilateral sanctions. This has hampered Iran's ability to purchase and access vital medical equipment and pharmaceuticals from the international market.

Restrictions on Iran amid pandemic amounts to 'crime against humanity'

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the UN office in Geneva has said that the imposition and intensification of U.S. sanctions on Iran amidst the coronavirus pandemic amount to a "crime against humanity".

In a letter to World Health Organization (WHO) Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Friday, Esmaeil Baghaei Hamaneh said the imposition of cruel and illegal sanctions on Iran, which has impeded the ordinary's people access to medicine and medical equipment, clearly exemplifies crime against humanity.

He added that the sanctions have blocked Iran's banking transactions with other countries to buy commodities required in contain the deadly coronavirus.

The envoy stressed the importance of rolling back international sanctions regimes around the world as insisted by United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who had said in a letter to the G-20 economic powers that the sanctions are heightening the health risks for millions of people and weakening the global containment endeavor.

"I am encouraging the waiving of sanctions imposed on countries to ensure access to food, essential health supplies, and COVID-19 medical support. This is the time for solidarity, not exclusion," the UN chief wrote.

"Let us remember that we are only as strong as the weakest health system in our interconnected world," Guterres added.

Elsewhere in his letter, Baghaei Hamaneh said the intensification of U.S. economic and banking restrictions on Iran amidst the pandemic runs counter to international regulations, adding that the White House shoulders an international responsibility in this regard.

The United States has refused to lift sanctions on Iran and even tightened them several times in recent weeks. Tehran's access to life-saving medications and medical equipment have been restricted due to illegal sanctions.

Meanwhile, the UN General Assembly on Thursday approved a resolution for the first time on the coronavirus pandemic, calling for "multilateralism" in the fight against the virus, but failed to condemn unilateral U.S. sanctions against countries.

Head of Iran's Islamic Seminars writes letter to Pope

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Head of Iran's Islamic Seminars Ayatollah Alireza Arafai has written a letter to Pope Francis, calling for cooperation amid the global fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

In his letter, Ayatollah Arafai said the unfortunate incident of the coronavirus outbreak has caused suffering for countries and nations, wishing all disasters away from the world, according to the Hawzah news agency.

He thanked the Pope and all those who contribute to the fight against coronavirus, saying addressing this challenge and other contemporary crises such as injustice, discrimination, inhumane sanctions, environmental crises, war, terrorism, production and maintenance of WMDs, require international consultation, cooperation, and comprehensive policies.

"I take this opportunity to announce that the Seminary and its professors, scholars, and students are ready to exchange scientific, cultural and relief experiences, especially in the virtual field, and to open a new chapter of collaboration with international scientific centers, universities, religious centers, leaders of divine religions, official organizations of countries, and specifically the institution of Catholic Christianity in order to form a community of divine religions to serve humanity," he added.

Iran likens remarks by German health minister to April fool's joke

POLITICAL TEHRAN — The Iranian embassy in Berlin on Friday responded to the German health minister's claim that Tehran's actions against the Coronavirus are not transparent, saying that these remarks are more like an April fools' joke.

German Health Minister Jens Spahn recently claimed that Iran Air flights had been canceled due to the high risk of Iran and lack of transparency in the fight against the Coronavirus.

Iran's embassy in Germany on Friday issued a statement urging the minister to specify that his position and claim were based on which well-known and reliable international official or legal source.

"The World Health Organization (WHO) is the global overseer of disease control measures, which has appreciated the actions of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the fight against COVID-19, despite the harsh conditions of the sanctions against the Iranian nation," the statement read.

The Iranian embassy in Germany stressed the need to lift the U.S. sanctions against Iran and the need for international cooperation to overcome the global crisis.

"Certainly, the responsible and humane behavior and comments of nations and governments will be recorded in the historical memory of the people of the world," the statement added.

According to the WHO, about 70 percent of victims of the Coronavirus and 50 percent of those infected with the virus belong to EU member states, led by Italy and Spain, and the European Union at large, followed by the United States.

Worldwide, the total number of infections recorded since the beginning of the outbreak reached more than 1,098,762. Some 228,923 people have recovered globally, while nearly 59,172 have died.

Despite being under "maximum pressure" campaign introduced by the Trump administration, Iran has won the praise of the WHO for handling the Pandemic Coronavirus.

Iran, Oman launch new container shipping line

1 → Iran and Oman have already launched four direct shipping lines between the two countries' ports. The first shipping route between the two countries was put into operation in March 2015 between Iran's Bandar Abbas and Oman's Sohar.



Later in December 2016, the two neighbors inaugurated direct shipping routes from two Omani ports to the Iranian port of Shahid Bahonar. In December 2017, the two countries launched another shipping line to connect Iran's port city of Khorramshahr to the Omani port of Sohar.

Global economy set for sharpest reversal since Great Depression

The coronavirus pandemic and lockdowns imposed by governments on both sides of the Atlantic have pushed the global economy into the sharpest downturn since the Great Depression, data released on Friday signaled. The U.S. economy shed 710,000 jobs in early March, ending 113 months of continuous job growth, in official figures that were far worse than economists had been expecting. The shock U.S. employment numbers came shortly after business surveys across Europe showed the services sector to be in deep trouble with the largest drop in activity and prospects for more than 20 years. The head of the IMF has warned that the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic would be worse than the 2008 financial crisis. "This is a crisis like no other," said Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of the IMF, speaking at a conference organized by the World Health Organization on Friday. "Never in the history of the IMF have we witnessed the world economy coming to a standstill," she said. "It is way worse than the global financial crisis." Worse data was about to come in April, economists said, with many now forecasting double digit percentage declines in output in the second quarter as vast swaths of the world's two most advanced economic zones shut down.



Indices of activity by purchasing managers in the Eurozone, UK and Swedish purchasing managers' indices all fell around 20 points, from levels indicating a majority of companies were seeing business activity improving to levels below those seen at the worst point of the 2008-09 financial crisis. Italy, which went into lockdown first, had the weakest PMI index on record with a figure of 17.4, compared with a figure of 50 which represents the point at which an equal number of companies reported rising and falling activity. "It's clear that the economy is contracting more quickly than ever before during peacetime," said Jack Allen-Reynolds, an economist at Capital Economics. The terrible data have led economists to slash forecasts for global growth, which were around 3 percent at the start of March for 2020. Economists at Bank of America have cut their estimates repeatedly and now expect a contraction of 2.7 percent, "considerably worse than the 2008-09 recession". With 10m initial claims for unemployment insurance reported in March in the U.S., economists expected weak payroll figures — but the reality was much worse than forecast. David Riley, chief investment strategist at asset manager BlueBay, said: "Today's report confirms, if this were needed, that the U.S. and global economy is experiencing the most severe drop in output and income in modern history." Governments and central banks on both sides of the Atlantic have responded with stimulus programs designed to offer insurance to those who have lost regular work or companies who have seen revenues dry up much faster than in a normal recession. But they cannot prevent the shutdowns having a devastating effect on current business conditions, which will continue until the spread of Covid-19 is brought under control and restrictions can slowly be lifted. As the U.S. and Europe prepare for an even more difficult month for their economies in April, all eyes will be on China to see whether its economy rebounds after lockdown restrictions begin to be relaxed. Even though some of China's business surveys have bounced, the service sector in the world's largest economy remains under severe strain with smaller private sector companies on Friday reporting activity still worse than in February, according to the Caixin survey. Miguel Chanco, senior Asia economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, said that despite the easing of restrictions there was still "no post-lockdown bounce" to be seen. (Source: Financial Times)

580 kilometers of freeways to be inaugurated by Mar. 2021

1 → "With these new freeways going operational, the length of the country's freeways will increase by nearly 25 percent," Khademi, who is also the managing director of Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company (CDTIC), said in a press conference. According to the official, CDTIC has it on the agenda to build 3500 km of new freeways and highways across the country, nearly 1200 of which is currently under construction. Khademi further noted that of the country's total 38,000 kilometers of arterial roads, about 18,000 kilometers are highways and about 2400 kilometers are freeways. According to the official, in the long run, the government plans to construct 18,000 kilometers of highways and freeways in the country.



"So, considering the 3500 km of new freeways which are being constructed, still 15,000 km of new freeways and highways are expected to be built across the country," Khademi added. In mid-December 2019, Khademi announced that over 3,000 kilometers of railways and 1,200 kilometers of freeways were under construction in the country. Roads account for 90 percent while railway accounts for 10 percent of transportation in Iran, according to the official.

Indigenizing petchem catalysts: a big step toward total independence

1 → "Currently, the knowledge for producing 16 of the mentioned 40 types has been indigenized which would save the country \$105 million every year," Ali Pajouhan said, adding that "We plan to produce over \$100m worth of petrochemical catalysts annually, by the end of the Iranian calendar year of 1400 (March 20, 2022)." Mass production of petrochemical catalysts would also mean that Iran could become an exporter of such products and besides the significant increase in the revenues from the industry, further cement its role as one of the world's and region's major petrochemical producers. According to NPC officials, the company has already signed 20 contracts with knowledge-based companies for mass production of catalysts and 70 research projects are also underway in this regard. In early January, NPC held a seminar on the indigenization of petrochemical industry catalysts in Kish Island.



According to the seminar's Executive Secretary Mohammad-Amin Ebrahimi, the mentioned seminar was

aimed to create a common language and synergy between catalyst producers and consumers and also to provide a platform to discuss and evaluate the performance of the native catalysts. As I mentioned before, petrochemical is Iran's most important industry after oil and gas, and the National Petrochemical Company hopes to lift output capacity to 120 million tons per annum by 2022. The petrochemical industry has played a key role in domestic economic growth as it creates value-added and reduces the sale of oil and gas on which the economy has been dependent for decades. With abundant hydrocarbon reserves and new private sector investments, Iran is working hard to broaden the scope of its petrochemical industry, and indigenizing the catalysts needed in this industry would be a huge step toward a brighter future for the country.

Drinking water supplied to 859 villages in 6 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Drinking water was supplied to 859 villages with the population of 504,000 people throughout the country in the second half of the past Iranian calendar year (September 22, 2019-March 19, 2020), IRNA reported. The mentioned villages received drinking water through 24 water-supply projects implemented under the A-B Iran Scheme. Energy Ministry launched a scheme named A-B-Iran [the acronyms A and B stand for water, electricity in Persian] during the second half of the past Iranian calendar year, based on which the ministry inaugurated some water, electricity projects across the country every week. As reported, 227 projects were put into operation in the country under this scheme, many of which were completing semi-finished projects and are considered some new movement in this regard. Last month, when speaking on



the occasion of finishing the A-B-Iran program, Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said during this program 227 major projects with a total investment of 335.6 trillion rials (about \$7.99 billion) have gone operational in the country. The minister said that during the 20 weeks of the mentioned program he made 31 trips to various provinces for inaugurating energy projects.

Iran's annual vegetable production reaches 30m tons

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian farmers managed to produce up to 30 million tons of vegetable products in the previous Iranian calendar year of 1398 (ended on March 19), according to a senior official with the Agriculture Ministry. "In addition to meeting the needs of the domestic markets, over \$1.4 billion worth of vegetable products were also exported to other countries during the last year," ILNA quoted Hossein Asqari as saying. According to the official, considering the potentials of the country's agricultural sector, it is possible to increase the capacity of vegetable production by more than 10 billion tons within three years. "Using modern production methods like systematic irrigation, seedling cultivation and mulching (creating a cover to prevent water evaporation), we can achieve this increase in production without increasing the water consumption," he said. The increase in the production will ultimately lead to an increase in the volume

of exports, so appropriate measures should be taken in order to prepare the grounds for such increase. Iran exported 3.27 million tons of vegetables worth \$935 million during the first ten months of the previous Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019 - January 20, 2020), Asqari added. He said neighboring countries especially Russia were the major export destinations of the Iranian vegetables during the mentioned period. He noted that 65-70 percent of the country's seed requirement is domestically met and put the annual need for seed at about 4,000-4,500 tons. According to the country's Horticultural Science Research Institute, Iran has nearly 900,000 hectares of land under vegetable cultivation and produces over 28 million tons of different kinds of vegetables per year, making it the seventh and fifth in the world in terms of land under cultivation and volume of production respectively.

COVID-19 brought to the fore neoliberalism's emptiness

By Mohammad Ahmadzadeh

It might be too soon to evaluate the consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak on global politics and economy. But it appears the pandemic has brought to the fore some often-neglected aspects of the neoliberal world order. Critics of neoliberalism see COVID-19 as a perfect example showing how the capitalistic economic system fails to serve nations. The crisis has once again put on display the flaws in the neoliberal ideology, this time though highlighting blows to public health systems. Many governments were reluctant to impose quarantine measures or a lockdown when confronted with the outbreak. Some governments even hesitated about asking people to stay home to bring things under control. The first international alert on COVID-19 was issued by the World Health Organization on December 5, 2019, but the lockdown of the epicenter of the outbreak in China, city of Wuhan, began on January 23. It's easy to guess what could have caused such a delay: The Chinese government felt inclined to prevent a plunge in the country's production. In the current neoliberal economy, any restriction that slows down the movement of goods and capital is undesirable for governments. That explains why both the UK and the U.S. have been slow to impose lockdowns to contain the virus. Such a lockdown would also bring responsibilities for the government. But the public healthcare system in both countries is so weak that the government cannot place even more pressure on it.



This has left both countries vulnerable to the outbreak, shattering their reputation as developed economies. **■ Corporate interests vs. public interests** A public health crisis of this size can hardly be managed under the U.S. or UK model of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism assumes that the government's main task is to pave the way for private corporations to compete to provide any kind of services, from healthcare to education. According to the neoliberal worldview, there is no such thing as a society and hence there are no need for a powerful public sector. The government has cut funding to public health agencies in recent years, and even dissolved the National Security Council Directorate for Global Health Security

and Biodefense. And the U.S. people are now paying for these cuts. Under this profit-driven system, emergency situations such as the COVID-19 outbreak bring forward a conflict of interests between the public and corporations. This is most glaring in the U.S. response. The U.S. government first downplayed the outbreak for weeks before announcing a state of emergency in mid-March. But the decision only came as historic plunges in the stock market were reported and the U.S. Federal Reserve moved to assist banks with \$1.5 trillion in loans to prevent a financial crisis. The governments appeared to be protecting corporate interests while abandoning the rest of the society. And the government's initiatives to fight the virus were in partnerships with corpo-

rations like Google, Amazon and Walmart, indicating that the government is unable to help people without these partnerships. Interestingly, state governments acted much quicker than the federal government to fight the outbreak, ordering school closures and social distancing measures. **■ Greater democratic participation** It's no exaggeration to say this amounts to a historic moment for the neoliberal system. It has never been seen so fragile and flawed. This pandemic teaches people the free market will not save them. It shows that people's wellbeing hinges on robust public services and not on multinational corporations. This is best described in the words of the 91-year-old public intellectual Noam Chomsky, who in a recent interview noted the "irony" of recent reports that Cuba is sending doctors to help European countries fight the coronavirus. "I mean this is so shocking that you don't know how to describe it. Germany can't help Greece: but Cuba can help European countries," he said. "The coronavirus could have terrifying consequences, but there will be recovery. The others there won't be: it's finished. If we don't deal with them, we're done." Chomsky said the only hope is more democratic participation: "If we're leaving our fate to sociopathic buffoons, we're finished," he said. "An informed, engaged, involved public taking control of their fate — if that doesn't happen, we're doomed." This chaos is the moment for the American people and the wider world to wake up to the perils of living in a fully privatized economy. Isn't this time for humans to stop buying into the neoliberal program?

OPEC+ emergency meeting likely to be postponed to April 8 or 9: OPEC sources

OPEC and its allies will not hold their emergency virtual meeting on Monday and will likely postpone it until April 8 or 9 to allow more time for negotiations among oil producers on crude supply cuts, two OPEC sources said on Saturday.

OPEC and its allies are working on a deal for an unprecedented oil production cut equivalent to around 10 percent of worldwide supply in what they expect will be a global effort including the United States, but the White House did not make such a commitment after a Friday meeting with oil companies.

While U.S. President Donald Trump pledged help for the industry at the meeting, he made no commitment to take the extraordinary step of persuading U.S. companies to cut output.

In a subsequent phone conference, U.S. Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette told industry executives that the White House is not negotiating with Saudi Arabia or Russia, but it is encouraging them to come together to reach an agreement to cut production, a source who listened to the call said.

The oil market has crashed, with prices falling to \$34 a barrel from \$65 at the beginning of the year, as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Fuel demand has dropped by roughly a third, or 30 million barrels per day, as billions of people worldwide restrict their movements.

A global deal to reduce production by as much as 10 million to 15 million barrels per day would require participation from nations that do not exert state control over output, including the United States, now the world's largest producer of crude.

Trump said on Thursday he did not make any concessions to Saudi Arabia and Russia, such as agreeing to a U.S. domestic production cut, a move forbidden by U.S. antitrust laws. Some U.S. officials have suggested U.S.



production was set for a steep decline anyway because of low prices.

A meeting of OPEC and allies such as Russia has been scheduled for April 6, but details were thin on the exact distribution of production cuts. No time has yet been set for the meeting, OPEC sources said.

OPEC producers were waiting to see if the United States commits to any efforts to stabilize the markets, two OPEC sources said. They said a deal must include producers from outside OPEC+, an alliance which includes OPEC members, Russia and other producers, but excludes oil nations such as the United States, Canada, Norway and Brazil.

"The U.S. needs to contribute from shale oil," an OPEC source said. Russia has long expressed frustration that its joint cuts with OPEC were only lending support to higher-cost

U.S. shale producers.

Russia

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Friday that his country was ready to cut production along with OPEC and the United States, while still blaming Saudi Arabia for the market's collapse. Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman responded, telling state media that it was not Saudi Arabia that refused to extend a production-cut deal that would have reined in output in early March.

Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak told Russian state media that he understands the United States has legal restrictions on output cuts, but it should still be flexible.

Brouillette, in his call with the industry, did not mention the possibility of U.S. industry production cuts, the source who listened to the call said.

Natural gas glut moves offshore

Liquefied natural gas traders are following the latest trend in the oil market by storing huge amounts of the commodity on tankers, hoping prices will rise before the ship docks.

But while crude can sit for months or even years in a tank, super-chilled LNG tends to evaporate even in the specialized vessels that handle it. That limits the amount of time "floating storage" is feasible.

"Keeping gas frozen is extremely expensive because of the energy cost to maintain the ultra-low minus-265-degree Fahrenheit temperature," said Francisco Blanch, head of global commodities and derivative research for Bank of America Corp. in New York.

The number of vessels used for floating storage was at 17 late last month, but has now eased to 13 after some unloaded their cargoes in India, according to data intelligence company Kpler. Three vessels have been idle for more than 10 days, Kyriakos Mezopoulos, director for LNG at Affinity, said in a note.

More ships acting like storage tanks might also be a sign the LNG industry is poised to cut production. They're reacting to a crash in prices as demand slowed, the result of two warm winters in a row and the coronavirus, which has shut huge parts of the global economy.

U.S. LNG producer Cheniere Energy Inc. is already sourcing cargoes in Europe, with some traders and analysts speculating that this could be ahead of temporary production cuts.

Spot LNG in Asia, the biggest consuming region, slumped to a record this week, and prices in Europe are also testing all-time lows. And unlike in oil, where markets indicate a rebound in prices in the months ahead, a surge in forward rates for LNG is too far off to matter.

"We clearly see floating storage as a safety valve in the next couple of weeks and even in the next couple of months," Jefferson Clarke, managing director for LNG at shipbroker Poten & Partners Inc, said at the webinar.

In the crude oil market, plunging prices triggered a huge contango, where traders anticipate gains in future months and have an incentive to put the commodity into storage for months or years. They've hired tankers because storage sites on land



are almost full.

The dynamics are different in the gas industry, where gas storage sites on land that should be near empty still have fuel from last year. Also, the "boil-off" rate is a factor for LNG. Between 0.07 percent and 0.15 percent on average evaporates from LNG tankers per day for the majority of the global fleet. That means over a 75 day voyage, about 5 percent to 11 percent of the original cargo could be lost.

Last fall, some traders loaded cargoes at low prices in August and discharged in early November when rates were rising. A typical journey from Qatar to the UK via Suez Canal, for example, takes about two weeks.

While new vessels have better technology that limits the evaporation rate — Flex LNG Ltd. has three ships for delivery later this year with a boil-off of about 0.035 percent— the difficulty containing the gas over long periods means using tankers as storage has a physical limit.

"Floating storage is less about stockpiling, but more about slow-steaming until hopefully the rates pick up," Iain Ross, chief executive officer of shipowner Golar LNG Ltd., said at the webinar organized by Capital Link Inc. and Citigroup Inc.

While benchmark Asian LNG has lost about half its value this year, the storage trade is a bright spot for vessel owners. They can

charge more than 40 percent more per day for a typical tanker in the Atlantic than at the same time a year ago, according to data from shipbroker Fearnleys A/S.

***Unusual trend

The latest trend is unusual for this time of year, said Oystein Kalleklev, chief executive officer of Flex LNG. The company now has six vessels that it rents out. Unlike oil, LNG demand is largely seasonal, with a peak in winter when heating is in demand and another smaller lift in the summer for cooling.

More floating storage may appear in September and October, when tanks on land are full and winter chills have yet to arrive, while price bottom out right before seasonal advances. Demand for vessels later this year is already rising, said Mark Kremin, CEO of shipowner Teekay Gas Group Ltd.

Vessels with a very low boil-off make them "perfect" for floating storage play in the second half of the year, and Flex has fixed one of its upcoming vessels with trading house Gunvor Group Ltd., Kalleklev said on Friday.

In part, floating storage in LNG now is a result of quarantines, Kalleklev and his peer from Hoegh LNG Holdings Ltd., Sveinung Stohle, said in interviews. Other reasons are cargo deferrals and diversions, as the virus hit demand and delayed unloading, the shipping executives said at the webinar.

Loadings at plants have also slowed because global inventories are so full, Kalleklev said. Also, as the covid-19 situation eased in China and South Korea, ships are sailing from Europe to Asia, naturally extending voyages and shrinking availability of vessels in the Atlantic, he said.

Indian buyers calling force majeure on cargoes last week has meant volumes needed to find other homes in an oversupplied market, so this involuntary floating storage came amid what looks like distressed cargoes, said Trevor Sikorski, an analyst at Energy Aspects Ltd.

"We will see increased inefficiencies with regards to discharge and possible ships having to wait 14 days from loading to discharge," Kalleklev said in an emailed response to questions.

(Source: Bloomberg)

The OPEC meeting could send oil prices crashing below \$10

The current optimism of analysts and the media that an end to the ongoing OPEC+ oil price spat is near is entirely unjustified. The ongoing oil market volatility, the battle between leading producers for market share, the logistical impossibility of enforcing U.S. production cuts, and the continued demand destruction caused by COVID-19 are not issues that can be solved by an OPEC meeting. Immediately after Trump's latest OPEC twitter offensive, Saudi Arabia and Russia came out with critical statements about the impact and influence of the U.S. president on the matter. While Putin and Mohammed bin Salman are reluctant to bash Trump, the real power when it comes to the oil market does not lie with the U.S. President. The tweet by Trump claiming that MBS and Putin would agree to a 10+ million bpd production cut shows not only his overestimation of his own power over the two countries, but also shows a lack of knowledge about the underlying market fundamentals and the current demand destruction worldwide.

As former U.S. president George W. Bush stated during his election campaign, which did not end well as we know, "it's the economy stupid" that matters in the end. Trump's tweets and general approach to this matter suggests he and his administration are out of touch with reality. Even if a Saudi-Russian combination would cut 10 million bpd, the oil price reaction would be minimal and very short-lived. At present, leading oil market experts such as Vitol, Trafigura and

Goldman Sachs are warning of a total demand destruction of 20 million bpd or more. When looking at the cuts in global refinery runs, we have already hit levels of -17 million bpd or more. Downstream companies are cutting back on all production as demand from industry and consumers worldwide collapses. Lockdowns in more than half the world are having a major impact, hurting demand for oil, gas and other kinds of energy. Cutting 10+ million bpd of production is not a real solution and it could even cause markets to react negatively. When production cuts fail to send oil prices up, the fear in the market could hit historical highs, causing oil prices to fall to levels below \$10 per barrel in the coming weeks.

The upcoming "OPEC+ and Friends" meeting is going to be a very tricky one. There is the very real possibility of the meeting failing as the targets that have been set are totally unclear. Saudi Arabia, probably supported by Abu Dhabi, called an emergency meeting, not only of OPEC+ members but of all oil-producing nations. That means that, at least according to Western media, the U.S. is invited and will likely attend. In inviting the U.S., it seems that Saudi Arabia has called Trump's bluff because by attending the meeting Washington will be implicitly stating that a possible production cut agreement would include the U.S. When looking at the U.S. upstream oil and gas sector there is one thing you can state without any analysis... Washington and

U.S. oil and gas operators are not on the same page. Suggestions of Washington being able to control or even force U.S. oil to cut production, even via legislation, are ludicrous and would end in a mammoth legal battle. Even if only Texas representatives attend, oil companies will be unlikely to comply, it is simply not in the U.S. oil and gas DNA to work together on an international level. Free market economics is a cornerstone of U.S. society and business.

The second major threat at the Monday meeting is that Saudi Arabia not appear to be at all convinced that it needs to change its current tactics. Its targeted goals of regaining market share, forcing Russia to come to the table and bringing non-OPEC producers such as U.S. shale to their knees are working well. Several Saudi officials have stated that they are willing to discuss a new agreement but only under the conditions that potential production cuts will be on the shoulders of all, not only Saudi Arabia, Russia, and UAE. In this light - Trump's demand for a more than 10 million bpd cut from Russia and Saudi Arabia is unrealistic, to say the least.

Russia's position has, until now, remained unclear. While Putin is still acting as though he has nothing to worry about, Russian oligarchs and the Russian leader are happy to debate any options that are on the table. For Russia, the current position taken by Trump is being seen as an opportunity to get some gifts from the U.S. very

Jason Kenney, the premier of Alberta, Canada's primary oil-producing province, said on Friday that the province would join the Monday OPEC call.

The Norwegian oil and energy ministry declined to comment on Friday on whether Western Europe's largest producer could cut output to support prices.

The International Energy Agency warned on Friday that a cut of 10 million barrels per day would not be enough to counter the huge fall in oil demand. Even with such a cut, inventories would increase by 15 million barrels per day in the second quarter, said Fatih Birol, the head of the agency.

Oil prices recover, for now

Oil prices recovered from the lows of \$20 per barrel this week with Brent settling at \$34.11 per barrel on Friday, but far below the \$66 closing level at the end of 2019.

Prices plunged in early March after Russia and Saudi Arabia could not come to an agreement to curb output. The Saudis shocked the oil industry with an aggressive series of steps to take back market share that included cutting export prices, pumping at maximum production and trying to sell cheaper oil to refiners that buy Russian crude.

The oil market was dealt a heavy blow by the freefall in demand due to the coronavirus pandemic, which sent crude prices to their lowest levels since 2002.

The oil-price crash spurred regulators in the U.S. state of Texas, the heart of the country's oil production, to consider regulating output for the first time in nearly 50 years.

Major global producers have already scaled back production, as fuel demand has dropped precipitously and storage is rapidly filling. This past week, U.S. drillers idled more rigs in one week than at any time in the last five years.

(Source: Reuters)

Has Russia reached its limit in the oil price war?

When Vladimir Putin was given a dire forecast of the economy under the cloud of a crippling coronavirus pandemic and a sharp fall in global demand for petroleum, the Russian president was much less bullish about his country's prospects in a price war with oil-producing rival Saudi Arabia.

"For our economy, yes definitely, this is a very serious challenge," Putin told Audit Chamber head Aleksei Kudrin on April 1, adding that the United States, which recently surpassed Russia and Saudi Arabia to become the world's largest oil producer, would also suffer.

It was a big step back from the line being floated just two weeks ago when, despite Russia's economic dependence on natural resources, Moscow engaged in a bit of chest-thumping about its chances in a price war, arguing that Russia was in a stronger position than its main competitors to ride it out.

But that was before the true impact of the coronavirus on the global economy was understood, and before Kudrin -- a former finance minister and trusted ally -- told Putin in a government meeting held by video that the Russian economy could decline this year by between 3 and 5 percent.

And that was a moderate outlook, according to Kudrin, who went on to warn that the situation could be as bad as the nearly 8 percent decline the country suffered in 2009 during the financial crisis.

When faced with slumping oil demand as the global economy suffered from the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, Riyadh's demands for output cuts were refused by fellow OPEC+ member Moscow. After walking away from the table, the Saudis instead took the surprising route of increasing oil output, causing the largest one-day drop in prices in nearly three decades.

Putin's comment is one sign that Russia, which always expressed openness to continue negotiations with Riyadh, may be keen on coming to an agreement. "Today's acknowledgment by Putin shows Russia is interested in the dialogue process and wants to go ahead with it," Rauf Mammadov, an energy analyst at the Middle East Institute in Washington, told RFE/RL on April 1.

High-stakes game

From the beginning, the price war has raised questions about who would cave first: Moscow, Riyadh, or U.S. production, which depends on shale-oil producers that have gained market share at the expense of Russia and Saudi Arabia but require higher oil prices to stay in business.

Russia is now preparing to ramp up spending to support millions of citizens and thousands of companies affected by quarantines and shutdowns. The Kremlin has thus far announced an increase of spending by \$17.5 billion to counter the outbreak.

But according to Kudrin, the country may need to spend 5 percent of gross domestic product -- or about \$70 billion -- to combat the impact of the coronavirus, which Russia has officially said has infected more than 3,500 people, but which skeptics suggest is a low-ball figure.

Those costs will be difficult to cover if oil prices are low -- but on April 2, the price of Russia's Urals crude blend fell below \$11 a barrel, the lowest since Putin came to power two decades ago. The international benchmark Brent crude, meanwhile, was going for just over \$26 a barrel on April 2, whereas Russia depends on a price of about \$40 a barrel to balance its budget.

Russia as of March 20 had \$551 billion in foreign-currency reserves at its disposal, although economists suggested that Putin would prefer not to tap into them. In just one week, however, those reserves had already fallen by \$30 billion.

Even before Putin's government meeting, there were signs that Russia was having second thoughts about engaging in a price war with Riyadh, with Energy Minister Aleksandr Novak saying earlier on April 1 that Russia would not increase oil production in April, a reversal of earlier comments by officials.

Analysts have said that Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman's surprise decision to increase oil production was intended to get Putin back to the negotiating table.

And there is reason to believe that the Saudis might not want to keep the price war going either. Like Russia, the sharp decline in the price and volume of oil threatens Saudi Arabia's aggressive spending programs aimed at lifting living standards and diversifying its economy.

But Riyadh needs a much higher Brent crude price to balance its budget, nearly \$80 per barrel, analysts have said. And while Saudi Arabia has \$480 billion in foreign-currency reserves to lean on, it has already announced \$13 billion in spending to deal with the lower budget revenue.

"Despite the bravado that we have been hearing on both sides, this is not about who has the lowest cost of production and higher profitability. This is about funding budgets, and for both Russia and Saudi budget expansion has been significant in recent years," Chris Weafer, the co-founder of Macro Advisory in Moscow, told RFE/RL on March 28. "The reality is that both of them need a deal to put a better price support in place."

Trump wants a deal

The other oil-producing elephant in the room is the United States, which has seen its shale-oil producers suffer as a result of the price dispute.

U.S. President Donald Trump, who has called the price war "crazy," has been trying to accelerate talks between Russia and Saudi Arabia while members of Congress have been calling for sanctions and tariffs if they don't find an agreement.

Trump has said he recently spoke with the leaders of both countries and that Moscow and Riyadh were "going to get together" but he gave no further details. He expressed optimism on April 1 that an agreement was near.

"I think that Russia and Saudi Arabia, at some point, are going to make a deal in the not-too-distant future because it's very bad for Russia. It's very bad for Saudi Arabia," Trump said.

The U.S. president reiterated that hope on April 2, saying in a tweet that he expected Russia and Saudi Arabia to cut 10 million barrels a day, though it was unclear if he was referring just to the two countries or to OPEC+, the alliance of two dozen oil-producing states that Moscow and Riyadh lead. It was also unclear if U.S. companies would be involved in the output cut.

Just minutes after Trump's tweet, Saudi Arabia called for an emergency meeting of OPEC+ members.

Macro Advisory co-founder Weafer said he expected Moscow and Riyadh to find a short-term solution to their dispute that would get them through the crisis period.

The Middle East Institute's Mammadov suggested that Russia and Saudi Arabia could reach an agreement with other countries through the Group of 20 (G20) format, as it would offer both Putin and Prince Salman a way to claim victory. "It would eliminate the face-saving confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Russia because it's not about the old OPEC+ deal" that they fought over, he said.

Trump will meet with U.S. oil executives on April 3 to discuss measures to support the domestic market, including possible tariffs on oil imports from Russia and Saudi Arabia as well as American production cuts.

Analysts have said that Riyadh and Moscow will want to see U.S. producers share the burden of stabilizing the market by cutting supply.

(Source: oilprice.com)

(Source: oilprice.com)

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

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

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“America first” is a dangerous fantasy in a pandemic

Foreign aid and global leadership will be integral to any solution

By Philip H. Gordon

It should come as no surprise that the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump, whose foreign policy doctrine is called “America first,” vastly underestimated the importance to U.S. security of defeating the novel coronavirus pandemic abroad. Trump was slow to recognize that the United States could not seal itself off from the virus: on February 26, the president predicted that the number of infected Americans would soon go down “close to zero,” while the White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow insisted that the United States had “contained” the threat because its borders were “pretty close to airtight.” Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross even assessed that the troubles in China “will help accelerate the return of jobs to North America.” But of course American borders were not airtight at all, and the United States is now home to the highest number of reported cases of COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, in the world, with more than 7,000 deaths, a number almost certain to increase exponentially in the coming weeks.

With the domestic toll rising, the administration and many governors have belatedly implemented aggressive containment measures, and Congress has stepped in with a \$2.2 trillion stimulus package to provide temporary economic relief to American workers and businesses. But Washington is still not doing nearly enough to prevent and mitigate the spread of the disease beyond U.S. borders—in some cases, the administration has even cut foreign assistance and rejected diplomacy where more of both were needed. The health and safety of the American people are the rightful priorities of the U.S. government, but concentrating narrowly on fighting the virus at home while

U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Washington Post columnist Josh Rogin has pointed out that the bill provides almost as much to Amtrak as it does to fighting the virus abroad.

Some of the Trump administration’s most recent proposed cuts in foreign assistance could prove particularly counterproductive. On March 23, for example, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced plans to reduce assistance to Afghanistan by \$1 billion in 2020 and threatened to cut another \$1 billion in 2021. But the Afghan government is already strapped for cash and gets some 75 percent of its revenues from international donors. Its public health infrastructure is poor. If Kabul has to adopt austerity measures as COVID-19 spreads, the already fragile government could collapse. Afghanistan’s Minister of Public Health said on March 24 that without social-distancing measures, up to 16 million Afghans could ultimately be infected. The problem would not be limited to Afghanistan: according to the EU border agency Frontex, some 17,000 Afghans crossed the Aegean Sea into Europe in 2019, and as many as double that number are expected to do so in 2020.

Yemen, too, faces cuts in aid from Washington. Seeking to press the Houthi leadership to ease restrictions on aid delivery to areas under its control, the Trump administration suspended around \$70 in assistance to those areas. The cuts—which provide some exceptions for certain “crucial, lifesaving activities” but not for basic health

Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross even assessed that the troubles in China “will help accelerate the return of jobs to North America.”



allowing it to spread abroad would be as shortsighted as focusing on fighting a fire only in one’s own home when one’s whole neighborhood was engulfed in flames.

Trump insists that he is “the President of the United States . . . not the President of other countries” and that “we have to focus on this country” while “they’re working on their countries.” His approach overlooks the fact that failing to defeat the pandemic abroad undermines our ability to get it under control—and restore our way of life—at home.

■ The cost of “America first”

Well before the current crisis, the Trump administration repeatedly proposed drastic reductions to foreign aid and funding for global health. In February of this year, even as the novel coronavirus was spreading in China and beyond, the administration proposed to cut U.S. foreign aid programs for fiscal year 2021 by 21 percent. The cuts included 35 percent of funding for global health programs, amounting to around \$3 billion and encompassing a reduction of 50 percent in U.S. support for the World Health Organization (WHO). In pursuit of other immigration and foreign policy goals, the administration slashed assistance to Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Syria, and the Palestinian territories, all of whose budgets and health-care systems were already under great strain. At the United Nations in 2018, Trump announced that “moving forward, we are only going to give foreign aid to those who respect us and, frankly, are our friends.”

Trump hasn’t completely ignored the rest of the world. Since the start of the pandemic, the administration has announced an additional \$274 million in international aid. But that is a drop in the bucket at a time when more than a million people around the world are already infected with the deadly virus, national budgets everywhere are stretched thin, and the global economy is heading into a severe recession. Nor does the \$2.2 trillion stimulus package, which Congress passed and Trump signed on March 27, adequately address the global dimension of the crisis. That entire bill allocates only \$1.5 billion—less than one-tenth of one percent of its total—to support the international activities of the State Department, the

The coronavirus pandemic is a threat to U.S. national security.



cut funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency, which is the primary provider of health-care and basic services to millions of Palestinian refugees. One consequence of these measures is that COVID-19 could soon overwhelm Gaza’s anemic health system. According to the WHO, Gaza has only 15 available ventilators for its entire population of nearly two million, in one of the most densely populated areas of the world.

Megan Doherty, the senior director of

Plan for AIDS Relief, which marshaled medical, diplomatic, and foreign aid resources to save millions of lives worldwide. Similarly, in response to the devastating Ebola outbreak in 2014, President Barack Obama worked closely with the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and foreign governments to contain and treat the deadly disease, including by sending teams of U.S. experts to assist other countries.

In the current crisis, however, the United States has exercised no such leadership. On March 26, the G-7 partners failed to agree to a joint statement on the pandemic because Secretary of State Mike Pompeo insisted on branding the pathogen the “Wuhan virus.” Trump enjoys a close relationship with Saudi Arabia, which is the current chair of the G-20, but little evidence suggests that the administration is using that organization to guide a coordinated international response. Indeed, Trump’s failure to lead a coordinated global response, together with his practice of berating, belittling, and bullying the United States’ closest and wealthiest allies, has, remarkably, allowed many to view China as a more responsible global leader than the United States. On March 31, the leaders of Ecuador, Ethiopia, Germany, Jordan, and Singapore proposed the sort of global alliance to fight the pandemic that once would have been led by the United States.

Much time has been lost and many opportunities missed, but the administration and Congress can still act. The administration should abandon the illusion that an infectious disease can be stopped at American borders, and Secretary of State Pompeo should start to build a coalition to combat the pandemic through existing organizations such as the WHO, G-7, and G-20, or new ones if necessary.

At the same time, Washington should rethink the assistance cuts that will condemn many to death and doom domestic containment efforts. Instead the United States should provide financial lifelines, independently and through the International Monetary Fund, to countries whose fragile economies have left them without the resources to cope with the crisis. It should put aside costly trade wars—essentially taxes on American businesses and workers who are already suffering—and set an example of what leadership looks like for our European and Asian allies, who should join the United States in a closely coordinated global campaign.

The coronavirus pandemic is a threat to U.S. national security. Further legislation and supplemental funding should reflect that reality by including more resources for international scientific collaboration, more U.S. support for vulnerable populations, and flexible emergency funding for a global response. That response would include shoring up critical health-care infrastructure and public education, facilitating the global development and distribution of therapies and vaccines, aiding refugees and displaced people in overcrowded camps, and providing support to American humanitarian organizations on the frontlines.

We know from past pandemics that progress is possible. But first we must recognize that Americans will really be safe only when the rest of the world is safe as well. In September 2019, Trump proudly proclaimed to the United Nations that “the future does not belong to globalists. . . . The future belongs to sovereign and independent nations who protect their citizens, respect their neighbors, and honor the differences that make each country special and unique.” Six months later, with Americans dying in horrifying numbers, such a worldview is only the latest victim of a deadly pathogen that respects no borders and can be defeated only with a truly global response.

(Source: Foreign Affairs)

Skeptical Bolsonaro clashes with governors as coronavirus spreads in Brazil

Brazil leads Latin America in confirmed cases of the new coronavirus disease, COVID-19, yet President Jair Bolsonaro has resisted lockdown measures, which he says would have unacceptably high economic costs. Many of Brazil’s state governors have spurned the president’s calls to reopen businesses, setting the stage for a power struggle between federal and local officials and casting uncertainty on Bolsonaro’s political future.

On February 26, Brazil confirmed the first coronavirus case in Latin America. The virus has since spread rapidly in the country, infecting thousands of people and killing dozens.

Compounding the problem is Brazil’s stark inequality, which has given rise to a two-pronged health system. More than half of the country’s intensive care unit (ICU) beds are in private hospitals, but only one-quarter of Brazilians have private health insurance. Moreover, public health infrastructure is fragile, and experts warn that the virus could soon overtake Brazil’s densely packed urban slums.

Bolsonaro has downplayed the pandemic, calling the virus “a little flu” and accusing the media of fearmongering. On March 15, after traveling with officials who tested positive for the virus, Bolsonaro ignored medical advice and touched hundreds of supporters at a protest. Some news outlets reported that the president himself tested positive, but he has contested this.

Bolsonaro, like his close ally U.S. President Donald J. Trump, has denounced long-term local and state shutdowns, which he calls scorched-earth policy. He says they will harm the economy and cause social unrest, and proposes instead to limit quarantines to at-risk populations such as the elderly. He has called for reopening businesses that were closed by mayors and governors, and has suggested the antimalarial drug chloroquine could be an effective treatment for the virus.

Bolsonaro’s administration has taken some steps to combat the virus: it closed Brazil’s borders to foreigners and unveiled more than \$34 billion in stimulus measures that include deferring company taxes and increasing social welfare spending. The Health Ministry announced that it will hire five thousand additional doctors, build more ICU beds, and distribute funding and testing kits. The health minister, Luiz Henrique Mandetta, has criticized the president for not calling off public appearances, leading Bolsonaro to threaten to fire him.

Additionally, at the Bolsonaro administration’s request, Congress declared a “state of calamity,” allowing the government to spend beyond normal limits.

As the federal government delivers a mixed response to the pandemic—with Bolsonaro and Mandetta at odds over the threat—governors and mayors have taken the lead. The state of Sao Paulo, the epicenter of Brazil’s outbreak, canceled events and shuttered schools before instituting a fifteen-day quarantine last week. Many states and cities have closed nonessential businesses and transportation.

There are signs that, on the issue of shutdowns, Bolsonaro is increasingly politically isolated. After the governor of Rio de Janeiro State, Wilson Witzel, decided to close airports and interstate roads, Bolsonaro tried to block the shutdowns. Brazil’s Supreme Federal Court ruled in the governor’s favor. Separately, a federal judge ordered the administration to end a social media campaign encouraging Brazilians to carry on business as usual.

Most of Brazil’s state governors—including some allies of Bolsonaro—have affirmed their support for social distancing policies, in what some observers have called an insurrection against the central government. Many of the governors have also called for a basic minimum income and a yearlong suspension of payments on state debts. Some legislators have also condemned the president’s actions, and the vice president has defended quarantines.

Expert projections are dire. One suggests that the virus could kill more than one million Brazilians if left unchecked. Even with strategies such as nationwide social distancing, the death toll could reach 627,000. Cooler temperatures—the Southern Hemisphere’s autumn began on March 20—could exacerbate the outbreak. Authorities say the country’s health system could be just weeks from collapse, at which point even those with private insurance will be unable to access care.

Brazil’s economy only recently emerged from its worst-ever recession. Analysts now say another one is likely, especially given the coronavirus-related economic slowdown in China, Brazil’s largest trading partner.

At the same time, Bolsonaro’s political future appears uncertain. Recent polling showed nearly 48 percent of Brazilians favor impeaching him, and some experts say he’s likely to face increasing political alienation as local leaders move forward without him on strict containment measures.

(Source: www.cfr.org)

India mulling purchase of 3 refurbished submarines from Russia

India is considering a proposal by Russia to supply the Indian navy with three refurbished submarines, capable of launching cruise missiles.

The Indian Navy is considering the proposal made by a Russian shipbuilding company to provide India with three refurbished Kilo-class diesel-electric submarines, local media reported.

The company — JSC United Shipbuilding Corporation (USC) — offered a \$1.8-2 billion “three plus three” package, which also includes upgrade work on India’s existing Kilo fleet of three.

The submarines on offer are reportedly about 30 years old. An agreement was expected to be formalized at a meeting of Russian and Indian officials in Goa in March, which was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Over the past two decades, India and Russia have worked to upgrade the Indian Navy submarines — the «youngest» of which was delivered by Russia back in 2000.

The proposed upgrade work will now extend the operational life of these vessels to 35 years.

The submarines, which run on batteries under water, are the most important class of underwater vessel in the Indian Navy.

According to a naval expert, these Russian submarines “are equipped with the Russian supplied 3M-14E Club-S missile which is roughly similar to the American Tomahawk.”

The offer comes months after Russia confirmed that the Indian Air Force was planning to «urgently buy» 21 ‘mothballed’ MiG-29 fighters.

The government had granted preliminary approval for the deal, estimated to be valued at \$847 million, in February last year. The 21 MiG-29 jets are believed to be jets that were built in the Soviet era, but had not seen service.

Like the Kilo-class submarine, the MiG-29 is a numerically important weapon for the Indian Air Force, with over 60 jets in service. The Indian Air Force has been upgrading the MiG-29 with new radars, electronics, weapons and increased fuel capacity.

(Source: Press TV)



ICOM calls for urgent relief funds to tackle impact of coronavirus

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – The International Council of Museums (ICOM) has called on policy and decision-makers to urgently allocate relief funds to tackle the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on museums and their staff as an essential part of the identity of the peoples and nations.

"ICOM, representing the international museum community, calls on policy and decision-makers to urgently allocate relief funds to salvage museums and their professionals, so they can survive the lockdowns and continue their vital public service mission once it is over, for the generations to come," the council announced in an statement on April 2.



Photo depicts an Achaemenid-era capital on show at the National Museum of Iran in downtown Tehran.

"The healing process of our societies after the COVID-19 crisis will be long and complex. Museums, as incomparable places of meeting and learning for everybody, will have an important role to play in repairing and strengthening the social fabric of communities affected."

Elsewhere in the statement the council expresses its deep sorrow and its solidarity with the people affected all over the world by the COVID-19 pandemic, noting: "We mourn the loss of lives and send our deepest condolences to those who have lost loved ones to the virus. We thank the health professionals, who risk their own lives battling the pandemic in the frontline, for their unparalleled efforts, and the international scientific community, who is tirelessly working to find a cure."

"Governments all over the world have taken necessary measures to stop the virus from spreading, by closing schools and public spaces, and decreeing curfews. Two billion people have been confined to their homes, and the number keeps growing. They see not only their health but their livelihood threatened. As factories and stores are closed, and travels are banned, the global economy finds itself at the edge of a profound recession. The cultural sector, fiercely affected by the lockdown of museums, libraries, cinemas, theatres and others, will face losses that can permanently ruin the cultural landscape of entire communities and countries," part of the statement reads.

"Understanding that the priority is to ensure the health and economic safety of the populations affected, we express our concern regarding the future of museums and the invaluable cultural heritage they hold – an essential part of the identity of the peoples and nations and a vital element for the communities they serve. As repositories of scientific knowledge accumulated for centuries, their role is key in the future of humanity, especially in times of uncertainty such as the ones we live today."

ICOM also says that it will closely pursue the request to re-assure the fate of cultural heritage museums.

"We will collaborate with national and regional governments, as well as with our partner institutions and other international organizations to ensure the future of museums."

ICOM is tasked to the conservation, continuation and communication to society of the world's natural and cultural heritage, present and future, tangible and intangible.



ROUND THE GLOBE

Keoladeo National Park

Keoladeo National Park, located in the State of Rajasthan, India, is an important wintering ground of Palaearctic migratory waterfowl and is renowned for its large congregation of non-migratory resident breeding birds.

A green wildlife oasis situated within a populated human-dominated landscape, some 375 bird species and a diverse array of other life forms have been recorded in this mosaic of grasslands, woodlands, woodland swamps and wetlands of just 2,873 ha.



This 'Bird Paradise' was developed in a natural depression wetland that was managed as a duck shooting reserve at the end of the 19th century. While hunting has ceased and the area declared a national park in 1982, its continued existence is dependent on a regulated water supply from a reservoir outside the park boundary.

The park's well-designed system of dykes and sluices provides areas of varying water depths which are used by various avifaunal species.

Due to its strategic location in the middle of Central Asian migratory flyway and presence of water, large congregations of ducks, geese, coots, pelicans and waders arrive in the winter.

The park was the only known wintering site of the central population of the critically endangered Siberian Crane, and also serves as a wintering area for other globally threatened species such as the Greater Spotted Eagle and Imperial Eagle.

During the breeding season the most spectacular heronry in the region is formed by 15 species of herons, ibis, cormorants, spoonbills and storks, where in a well-flooded year over 20,000 birds nest.

(Source: UNESCO)

Coronavirus crisis: travel ads, touring forbidden in Iran

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Iran's deputy tourism minister has warned that advertising about destinations or scheduling tours are prohibited in the country due to the coronavirus outbreak.

"Advertising and launching travel tours, in a situation that coronavirus is spreading, is an evident infringement [of the law]," ISNA quoted Vali Teymouri as saying on Saturday.

The warning comes after a number of travel agencies had scheduled [domestic] tours to Mashhad and some other cities mainly via air or rail routes, the report said.

"In some cases, because some travel agencies are unable to refund, they would make pledges to lunch air or rail tours. But [the point is] how they could launch such tours till destinations are refuse to accept travelers over the coronavirus," Teymouri explained.

Early in March, Teymouri announced that more than 700 billion rials (over \$16 million) have so far been paid back to people who have cancelled their tour or hotel reservations over the coronavirus fears.

The official also thanked "dear compatriots" and tourists for their cooperation with the "family of the tourism industry" in the country, who are considering the special economic conditions of the tourism activists at this time and attempt to postpone their travels to a more convenient time, if possible.

Last month, tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan asked people to postpone or reschedule tours so as to help the tourism industry deal with the virus outbreak.

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

In Mid-March, Iran started an intercity travel ban after officials have complained that many Iranians ignored appeals to stay at home and cancel travel plans for the Persian New Year (Noruz) holidays that began on March 20.

The ban asserted that those who have traveled for the



File photo depicts people visiting the Shah Cheragh shrine in Shiraz, southern Iran.

Iranian New Year holidays should immediately return to their cities without making any stops in other cities on their way back home.

Domestic travel in Iran reaches its climax from mid-March

to early April, a time corresponding to Noruz holidays. Iranians made 74 million overnight stays in their domestic trips during the Noruz holidays last year, which showed a 20 percent increase year on year.

Tourism minister proposes days off after coronavirus crisis ends

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Iranian tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan on Saturday proposed the government to announce days off after the country overcomes the coronavirus crisis in a bid to help the battered tourism sector make a rebound.

The minister also detailed on Iran's tourism, noting that the budding industry has been suffered several times over the past years from various upheavals including the U.S. sanctions aimed to cripple Iran's economy, flashfloods in March 2019, which is a high season for domestic travels, the [mistakenly] downing of a Ukrainian jetliner in January, and ultimately the coronavirus pandemic in the country.

Mounesan said that that recession has dramatically lowered foreign arrivals in the country despite its previous successes came from several visa facilitation programs

with target countries amongst other initiatives.

Some 6.7 million foreign nationals visited Iran during the first nine months of the past Iranian calendar year, ended on March 19, according to data announced by Foreign Ministry's visa and passport department. Iran welcomed some 7.8 million foreign nationals a year earlier, achieving a 52.5 percent increase year on year.

The ancient land embraces hundreds of historical sites such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which 22 being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, the country aims to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025.



Iranian tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan in a meeting with First Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri and Central Bank Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati (not pictured) in Tehran, April 4, 2020.

A glance at tourist attractions, must-see sites of Ardabil province

By Morteza Alehashem

Ardabil province is one of the thirty-one provinces of Iran. It is located in the northwest of the country, bordering the Republic of Azerbaijan, the provinces of East Azarbaijan, Zanjan, and Gilan. This province is home to many cultural and historical sites as well as tourist attractions with breathtaking views in a way it attracts huge number of tourists from both inside and outside the country every year.

Ardabil province is situated in a mountainous region whose altitude averages 3,000 meters above sea level. It is very cold in winter and mild in summer. The city of Ardabil is usually recorded as one of the coldest cities of the country in winter.

Ardabil Province attracts a large number of tourists every year due to its favorable cool weather. The northwestern province has natural wonders, historical monuments, many tourist attractions as well as scores of mineral water springs.

The province is divided into 10 counties: Ardabil, Bilasavar, Germi, Khalkhal, Kowsar, Meshginshahr, Namin, Sarein, Nir, and Parsabad. District of Arasbaran was transferred to the province of Ardabil from East Azerbaijan in 2010 and now appears on the more recent maps of Ardabil Province produced by the Iranian official organizations.

Hereunder are must-see sites in Ardabil province with breathtaking views.

■ Fandoqlou Forest

Fandoqlou Forest is located 10kms southeast of the city of Namin. It is the largest hazelnut hub of the country and annually hosts tens of thousands of visitors.

■ Neor Lake

The slopes of Baghrū Heights, which is 35kms to the southeast of Ardabil, have a beautiful lake named Neor. Neor Lake, which is located 2,500 meters above sea level, has a unique biodiversity.

■ Shorabil Lake

Shorabil Lake boasts healing minerals and a picturesque landscape. It is a sightseeing site and the main habitat for migratory birds.

■ Sabalan Heights

Sabalan, with an altitude of 4,811 meters, is the third highest peak in Iran. It is an inactive volcano. There is a small lake on top of the summit. Sabalan is also home to Alvares Ski Resort.

■ Sarein

Sarein is located 25kms from the provincial capital of Ardabil on the slopes of Sabalan Heights. It is considered one of the top ten



Sightseers cross a gigantic suspension bridge linking two hills in Meshkinshahr, Iran's Ardabil province, 2019. (Photo credit: Mehdi Rad)

tourism hubs of Iran. Most of the tourists to Ardabil Province stopover in Sarein.

■ Ardabil Village

Andebil Village is located near the city of Khalkhal. Andebil Ski Resort is located to the northeast Khalkhal. Several winter sports festivals have been held there in recent years.

■ Ardabil mausoleums

The mausoleums of Sheikh Safieddin Ardabili and Sheikh Kalkhoran are symbols of Islamic-Iranian architecture.

Sheikh Safieddin Mausoleum is located near Ardabil's Aali-Qapu Square. It also includes a mosque, library and school.

The mausoleum has an Islamic architecture. Sheikh Kalkhoran Mausoleum belongs to Aminoddin Jebreil, the father of Sheikh Safieddin Es'haq, the ancestor of Safavid kings. It is located in Kalkhoran Village in Ardabil.

■ Souvenirs

Ardabil is well known for its carpets, honey, sweets, roasted sunflower seeds, felt products, woodworks and earthenware. Its traditional food is 'Aash-e Doozh' - a sour yoghurt soup with chickpeas and vegetables.

■ Ardabil climate

Ardabil province is situated in a mountainous region whose altitude averages 3,000 meters above sea level. It is very cold in winter and mild in summer. The city of Ardabil is usually recorded as one of the coldest cities of the country in winter.

■ Ardabil, a getaway from scorching hot days

The summer has set in for a few days now and the blazing, baking sun seems to be always shining in the cloudless sky and you could no longer fight back the urge to plan a getaway to places with cool temperature.

For our family, the best destination was the northwestern province of Ardabil, which is characterized with cool climate during the hot summer months and lures a lot of tourists, who like us, try to escape the hot weather for a couple of days.

We set off on a road trip from Tehran to Ardabil, intending to take Heyran route. The route, connecting Astara, northern Gilan province, to Ardabil, is well-known for its scenic views. However, since you have to pass through Gilan province to get to Astara and Heyran route, it is best to spend a night in picturesque villages in Gilan. That's why despite the hot temperatures we decided to spend a night in a village in Talesh near Siah Daran forest park.

In case you don't want to spend a night in Gilan you can make a pit stop at Gisoom forest park where the jungle meets the Caspian Sea and has perfect tasting fish kebabs in small outdoor, sea view restaurants.

The next morning we headed to Astara to get to Heyran route. Driving along the road you could see the fenced borders between Iran and Azerbaijan. The road was surrounded with beautiful trees and emerald green paddy fields. Every now and then there were vendors selling corn on the cob kebab and ash-e doogh (a soup usually made with doogh, a yogurt-based beverage, as well as different kind of herbs and chickpea).

Our great ride throughout the road culminated with arriving at Heyran gondola lift. Getting on a cabin we travelled 1,500 meters through a beautiful landscape of the Alborz mountain range. At some point during the ride everything vanished in the thick fog and this meant we have arrived at the next station.

The cold breeze and the small drops of water on your face makes you feel alive again. You can even take a short walk up the hills and plains surrounding the region. The plains are beautifully covered in wild flowers and the everlasting fog gives it greater vibes. There are restaurants, coffee houses, and tea houses which offer traditional foods and drinks in the area as well.

It was so hard to say goodbye to Heyran and leaving it to get to our main destination, Ardabil.

Once we reached Ardabil we decided to

visit Shorabil Lake. The lake is located south of the city and offers a dazzling and peaceful atmosphere. There is no need to do anything there, you can just sit near the lake, gaze upon the view and inhale the fresh air.

However, facilities have been built around the lake for the leisure, entertainment and comfort of the coming visitors as well. There are several restaurants and coffee shops, indoor and outdoor amusement parks, a couple of international hotels and a zoo in the proximity of the lake.

There are also running track and bike lanes around the lake, so activities such as running, cycling and also sailing on small boats are also available.

This lake, with a surface area of 16 acres, is the largest lake in Iran within a city. Originally the basin was covered with mud and high concentrations of salt and other minerals so that no fish could survive. In 1998, in order to dilute the lake, rivers were linked to it and reduced the amount of salt. Now, lots of salmons are living in Lake Shorabil.

While dozens of hotels are available in the city of Ardabil to stay in we preferred to camp out in Fandoqlou forest.

Stretching over some 85,000 hectares of land, Fandoqlou (literally meaning filled with hazel trees), is very well-known for its spectacular, stunning sceneries. Dog rose, German chamomile, wild pansy, and wild strawberry are some of the plant species found in this area. It is also a habitat to brown bear, marten, pheasant, partridge, and golden eagle.

Fandoqlou is located 25 kilometers from Ardabil so it is a short drive from the city to the forest. You can either set up a camp in the forest or rent a cottage in case you don't feel like sleeping in a tent.

However, the beautiful sky ornamented with hundreds of stars might tempt you to decide to sleep in a tent. On the first night of our stay in the forest the weather was pleasantly cool, so that we put up a tent and had a cup of tea under the blinking stars.

There are guard dogs and also a security guard at the area so that you can feel pretty safe to sleep in the tent. There are also lots of parking space available for parking your car.

In the morning, we woke up with the horses' happy neigh and dogs barking at them. In front of us was a plain surrounded with dense trees and the light wind spreading the fog. Smell of damp, freshly cut grass and the fresh earthy smell filled our lungs and again made it harder to leave the forest for visiting another resort destination.

Iran, UNDP sign MOU to revive Hamoun wetland

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** – The Department of Environment and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to carry out a joint project for the revival of Hamoun wetland, director of Iran's wetlands protection project has announced.

The project is called "improving the comprehensive management of natural resources for the rehabilitation of the wetland ecosystem and supporting alternative living in local communities in the Hamoun wetlands".

The project aims to focus on the role and connection of people's lives on Hamoun wetlands as well as Hamoun's life on people's lives and at the same time be able to work on the protection of this wetland along with improving the living standards of the people around it, IRNA quoted Ali Arvahi as saying on Saturday.

Stating that the project is set to run for five years with European Union financial support, he said that "the project might be an opportunity to pilot new ideas or living patterns in the area, and if the government succeeds, it will be able to expand these pilots on a larger scale."

The project emphasizes that the pressure on Hamoun Wetland's resources, and in particular on the water resources of these wetlands,



should be minimized and at the same time help strengthen the cross-border connection of Hamoun Wetland with Afghanistan to allocate water right of the wetland, he explained.

He went on to say that it might be an opportunity to strengthen and expand the relationship between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of our country and the neighboring country so that the issue of transnational

water allocation can be better implemented.

Focusing on climate change and ways to adapt to this change is another subject of the project, as Iran is an arid or semi-arid country with limited water resources, so it is very important to adapt to climatic conditions, he stated, adding, agriculture is considered as one of the fields of activity, which aims to adapt this sector to the climate as much as possible.

In addition to the agricultural sector, efforts have been made to consider other activities that specifically put pressure on wetland water resources, so that by implementing it, less pressure will be put on water resources, he also added.

To implement this, we will first conduct studies on climatic issues to identify and implement effective methods so that both the development of the region and the livelihood of the people will improve, while the conservation of the wetland is in fact the mission of the project, he stated.

The Hamouns are transboundary wetlands on the Iran-Afghan border made up of three lakes: Hamoun-e Helmand, which is entirely in Iran, Hamoun-e Sabari on the border, and Hamoun-e Puzak, almost entirely inside Afghanistan. The three lakes are linked and fed by water from the Helmand River which starts in the Hindu Kush Mountains in Afghanistan.

In the last two decades, once fertile wetlands have drastically dried up. The Taliban government closed the sluices to the Kajak dam on the Helmand until 2002, which aggravated the impact of the worst drought the region has experienced in many decades, brought about partially by climate change and warming temperatures.

Lake Urmia level rises by half a meter year on year

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** – Lake Urmia water level has increased by 50 centimeters compared to the same time last year, Farhad Sarkhosh, head of the Lake Urmia Restoration Program's office in West Azarbaijan province, has announced.

According to the latest monitoring, the lake's level has reached 1,271 meters and 64 centimeters, which is 50 centimeters higher than the last year's level, he stated, IRNA reported on Saturday.

The lake's water volume was estimated at more than 4.440 billion cubic meters, which indicates an increase of 1.450 billion

cubic meters compared to the last year, he highlighted.

He went on to say that Lake Urmia's surface area has now reached more than 3,055 square kilometers, adding that the figure has increased by 358 square kilometers.

The lake's level will increase by nearly one meter annually if conservation projects are exploited, he noted.

Shared between West Azarbaijan and East Azarbaijan provinces in northwestern Iran, Lake Urmia was once the largest salt-water lake in the Middle East.

However, decades of long-standing drought

spells and elevated hot summer temperatures that speed up evaporation as well as increased water demands in the agriculture sector shrank the lake drastically. In 1999 the volume of water which was at 30 billion cubic meters drastically decreased to half a billion cubic meters in 2013. Moreover, the lake's surface area of 5,000 square kilometers in 1997 shrunk to one-tenth of that to 500 square kilometers in 2013.

The lake is expected to reach its ecological level within 10 years by completing the restoration plans which started four years ago.

The sharp rise in precipitations rates over

the past crop year since now has raised hopes for total restoration of the once glorious Lake Urmia.

This is a while, deputy environment chief Masoud Tajrishi said in July 2019 that rainfall is not the only reason behind Lake Urmia coming back to life. Thus, restoration measures turned out to be effective, unlike the previous years of high rainfall poured over the lake but did not raise the lake level.

The effort put into properly dredging and clearing of weed and vegetation in river beds as a way came efficient in the lake conservation, he added.

COVID-19, an uninvited guest who helped us cherish our planet, family more

1 → The world of a person who thinks him/herself as superior and the most powerful and influential one is thoroughly destroyed at once by a virus that is nothing in weight or size.

Another point is that this phenomenon caused us to distinguish more value to our home and family. The human endeavor and concerns to the families and friends proved that though by living in the turbulent twenty-first century and having terrific jobs we are seemingly far apart from each other. We demonstrated that the greatest and most valuable asset of the human is the family.

And interestingly, healthy people have a sense of responsibility for the sick person in most diseases, however, both the infected person and the healthy person are responsible to each other these days. Perhaps most of our effort to avoid carrying the virus is based on the fact that we do not want to infect another person or hurt our loved ones.

As you know, a carrier person can make many people sick or even cause them to die. Phenomenon, accident, current, pandemic or anything that we can call this uninvited guest in the earth these days, in addition to the death of human beings, dropping of many businesses, the sudden shutdown of human lives, brought the blessings to nature and the earth. Nature, and the air have been polluted every day since at least the world's industrialization, and the tired lungs of the earth has been filled with infection by the selfish human hands every day. Now, we may perhaps better understand the earth



these days, and believe that the earth also wants to take out the mask taken for years for a few days and breathe.

Indeed, the peoples of the world must quarantine themselves so that the earth becomes refresh for a few days. It may possibly will help us be more careful about the earth, nature and the atmosphere.

The coronavirus pandemic is shutting down industrial activity and temporarily slashing air pollution levels around the world, satellite imagery from the European Space Agency shows. One expert said the sudden shift represented the "largest scale experiment ever" in terms of the reduction of industrial emissions.

Readings from ESA's Sentinel-5P satellite show that over

the past six weeks, levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO2) over cities and industrial clusters in Asia and Europe were markedly lower than in the same period last year.

In the end, dealing with this phenomenon all depends on us that be scared and think it is the end of the world and that we are all going to die by this virus or be patient and know that these days are just like the bad days we passed in life. Because this phenomenon and crisis are abundantly found in the records of human life, and the human beings passed through the crises by diligence and empathy and proper management of their lives proportionate to global management.

This is the best time to think and learn, the time when the people from the most ordinary ones to politicians and policymakers in a society must learn from their mistakes for a better living.

We all know that Corona is a major global catastrophe taking the lives of thousands of people every day based on the statistics and charts that we observe on mobile phones or in the media, the numbers each representing a man, a wish, a family, a father, a wife, a mother, an identity and a love. Nevertheless, I want to say that this can be a teacher or a university for us to learn from, to remember things we have forgotten, and to know that it will be a comfort after every hardship and know that the world and nature will be nothing without the noble human.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Shiraz University, Chinese Academy of Sciences sign MOU

Shiraz University and Chinese Research Center for Eco-Environmental Sciences (RCEES) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to expand cooperation in scientific and research projects, IRNA news agency reported on Tuesday.

Joint research activities through the Silk Road Research Program, joint publication of articles and books, study opportunities for faculty and doctoral students, use of laboratory facilities, experience exchange workshops especially in the field of natural disasters, droughts, floods, medicinal plants, biodiversity, land degradation and international joint research projects were among the mutually agreed programs. The MOU provides the opportunity of extensive scientific and research cooperation in a wide range of areas of interest to both natural and agricultural resources.

دانشگاه شیراز و موسسه تحقیقات منابع طبیعی چین تفاهم نامه امضا کردند

دانشکده کشاورزی به نمایندگی از دانشگاه شیراز با موسسه تحقیقات منابع طبیعی آکادمی علوم چین سند تفاهم نامه همکاری‌های علمی- پژوهشی مشترک امضا کرد. به گزارش ایرنا، زمینه بهره برداری عملیاتی از ظرفیت های تفاهم نامه حاضر به ویژه در زمینه فعالیت های پژوهشی مشترک از طریق برنامه پژوهشی راه ابریشم، نشر مشترک مقالات و کتب، فرصت‌های مطالعاتی اعضای هیات علمی و دانشجویان دکتری، استفاده از امکانات آزمایشگاهی، برگزاری کارگاه‌های تبادل تجربه به ویژه در حوزه حوادث غیرمترقبه طبیعی، خشکسالی، سیل، گیاهان دارویی، تنوع زیستی، تخریب سرزمین و طرح‌های پژوهشی مشترک بین‌المللی در قالب برنامه‌های مشترک مورد توافق طرفین مورد بحث و بررسی قرار گرفت.

این تفاهم‌نامه مقدمه همکاری‌های گسترده علمی و پژوهشی را در دامنه وسیعی از حوزه‌های مورد علاقه طرفین در زمینه منابع طبیعی و کشاورزی فراهم می‌کند.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“dic-”

- **Meaning:** speak, say
- **For example:** I have four letters to dictate.

PHRASAL VERB

Put something out

- **Meaning:** to produce something for sale
- **For example:** A great many people are involved in putting out a newspaper.

IDIOM

Done and dusted

- **Explanation:** When a project, task or activity is done and dusted, it is completely finished or ready
- **For example:** I've nearly finished preparing the presentation. When it's all done and dusted I'll be able to relax.

Iranian-made COVID-19 diagnostic system unveiled

SOCIETY d e s k **TEHRAN** – The first Iranian-made system for diagnosing the novel coronavirus with more than 97 percent accuracy was unveiled on Saturday, ISNA reported on Saturday.

The diagnostic system has been designed by a team of researchers at Sharif University of Technology using artificial intelligence algorithms via CT scans of chest, ISNA reported.

Hamid Reza Rabiee, director of the research institute for information and communication technology at Sharif University, said that there are currently many ways in the world to diagnose coronavirus, but what has been proven, and confirmed by the American College of Radiology, chest scan is the best way to diagnose the virus.

The system will be available to hospitals and medical centers by the next week.

The total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran has reached 55,743, of whom 3,452 have died and 19,736 recovered, Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Saturday.

Mitigating potential flood-induced human-crocodile conflicts in Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan Province

By Jamshid Parchizadeh and Jerrold L. Belant

The Vulnerable mugger crocodile (*Crocodylus palustris*) is native to southeastern Iran where about 350 individuals occur in the Bahukalat Protected Area in Sistan and Baluchestan Province.

Recent extreme flooding in Sistan and Baluchestan Province affecting lots of villages and towns has allowed muggers to leave their typical habitat and occupy these areas. The Sistan and Baluchestan Provincial Office of Iran's Department of the Environment (DOE) has issued a warning about the potential of attack by muggers throughout the province.



Mugger attacks on humans in Sistan and Baluchestan Province can lead to injury or death. Therefore, an urgent action required to mitigate potential attacks in these flood-stricken areas including trained personnel to capture crocodiles in and near villages and relocate them to the Bahukalat River (primary habitat of the crocodiles). Longer term solutions can include:

- Fencing primary habitat along the Bahukalat River, while ensuring sufficient water is available for local people to not require use of water from the nearby ponds, particularly during periods of drought

- Completing unfinished dams, which have been put to a halt for many years, to stop or restrict the flow of water. These actions will require close cooperation among the Iranian government, DoE, and non-governmental organizations with strong government support crucial to save both humans and muggers in this frequently-flooded area of Iran.

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Private Jessica Lynch

(May 19, 2003)

The rescue of Private Jessica Lynch by American special forces from a hospital in Nasariyah was one of the iconic moments of the war against Iraq. The Americans played it for all it was worth. But the doctors who treated her have told the BBC that the rescue was not all it seemed. Our report is by John Kampfner. In the early hours of April, the 2nd reporters were **summoned** to Central Command in Doha for an urgent announcement. They assumed coalition **forces** had **captured** or killed Saddam Hussein. Instead they were given the story of the dramatic rescue by US special forces of Private Jessica Lynch whose company had been ***ambushed*** by the Iraqis more than a week earlier. The official version, caught on camera by a Pentagon crew, was that **a rescue squad stormed** the building and took her away **under fire**. Private Lynch was said to have received bullet and **stab wounds**. Once in hospital, she was said to have been beaten and **stabbed**.

But doctors at the hospital in Nasariyah tell a different tale. They insist that while Saddam's Fedayeen Militia had been at the hospital, they had long since left, and that the Americans knew it. They said that far from mistreating Lynch, they gave her the best treatment they could at a time of war. They made it clear that by the time the Americans **descended on** the hospital by helicopter they were aware that they would face no resistance. We asked the Pentagon to release the full videotape of the rescue rather than its five-minute edited version **to clear up** any discrepancies. It declined. The truth may never be known. Doctors now say Jessica Lynch has no memory of the whole episode and probably never will. Still the story has gone into American **folklore**. This was a script fit for Hollywood – made by the Pentagon.

■ **Words**
summon: order (someone) to be present
forces: military, army
captured: taken prisoner
ambushed: attacked by surprise
a rescue squad: a group of people who get someone out of a dangerous situation
stormed: attacked
under fire: being attacked by guns or firearms
stab: a thrust with a knife or other pointed weapon
wounds: injuries
descended on: moved downwards
to clear up: to explain or settle a situation or problem
folklore: traditional stories and customs

(Source: BBC)

Racism row as French doctors suggest virus vaccine test in Africa

➔ **1** Camille Loch, research director at France's national health institute, Inserm, agreed: "You are right. And by the way, we are thinking of in parallel about a study in Africa using this same approach."

It did not take long for the backlash to begin on social media.

"Africa isn't a testing lab," Ivorian professional football player Didier Drogba, who used to play for Chelsea, wrote on Twitter. "I would like to vividly denounce those demeaning, false and most of all deeply racist words."

Olivier Faure, of France's Socialist Party, said the marks were hardly a provocation. "It's not provocation, it's just racism," he wrote on Twitter. "Africa is not the laboratory of Europe. Africans are not rats!"

The anti-racism group SOS Racisme called on France's media regulator, the Conseil Supérieur de L'Audiovisuel (CSA), to formally condemn the remarks.

The group issued a statement saying, "No, Africans aren't guinea pigs", adding that comparison with AIDS and prostitutes was "problematic" and "unwelcome".

Meanwhile, Le Club des avocats au Maroc, a Moroccan lawyers' collective, said it was suing Jean-Paul Mira for racial defamation.

■ 'Distorted video'

On Twitter, Inserm, Loch's employer, posted a statement accompanied by the hashtag #FakeNews, writing that the remarks were taken out of context.

"A distorted video, taken from an interview on LCI with one of our researchers about a study on the potential use of the BCG vaccine against COVID-19, is now the subject of erroneous interpretation," the statement said.

It added that Africa "shouldn't be forgotten or excluded from this research because the pandemic is global".

Mira later apologised in a statement published by his employer.

"I want to present all my apologies to those who were hurt, shocked and felt insulted by the remarks that I clumsily expressed on LCI this week," he said.

In an interview with the Huffington Post, Mira further clarified: "Africa could be even more exposed to serious forms of harm because there will be so few masks and little confinement because of societal structure."

"It seemed interesting to me that in addition to France and Australia, an African country could participate in this study which I had never heard of before hearing about it on the show," he added.

Africa is currently the continent least affected by COVID-19, with nearly 7,500 cases and about 320 deaths, though there are fears that the number of undetected cases is low due to a lack of testing.

Experts warn that poor health systems in many African countries could lead to a disaster in the event of a severe coronavirus outbreak.

(Source: al Jazeera)

Trump fires watchdog who triggered his impeachment

President Donald Trump has fired the inspector general for the intelligence community who handled the whistleblower complaint that triggered his impeachment.

Trump informed the Senate intelligence committee on Friday of his decision to fire Michael Atkinson, according to a letter obtained by The Associated Press.

Trump said in the letter that it is "vital" that he has confidence in the appointees serving as inspectors general, and "that is no longer the case with regard to this inspector general".

He did not elaborate, except to say that "it is extremely important that we promote the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of federal programs and activities," and that inspectors general are critical to those goals.

Atkinson was the first to inform Congress about an anonymous whistleblower complaint last year that described Trump's pressure on Ukraine to investigate Democrat Joe Biden and his son. That complaint prompted a House investigation that ultimately resulted in Trump's impeachment.

In letters to legislators in August and September, Atkinson said he believed the complaint was "urgent" and "credible".

But the acting Director of National Intelligence at the time, Joseph Maguire, said he did not believe it met the definition of "urgent," and tried to withhold the complaint from Congress.

(Source: USA Today)

Palestinian camps face grave threat if coronavirus spreads: UNRWA

Malka Abu Aker has seen her crowded refugee camp in the Israeli-occupied West Bank swell year upon year since fleeing there over 70 years ago, with the arrival of new generations and those escaping successive Mideast conflicts.

But with the coronavirus spreading locally, the 73-year-old worries that her congested Palestinian camp is primed for contagion, and blames the U.N.'s cash-strapped Palestinian aid agency for not doing enough to help.

"(UNRWA) is not sanitising the camp, and they are not cleaning the camp in efforts against this epidemic," Abu Aker said in Bethlehem's Deheish camp, referring to the U.N. agency which provides services to 5.6 million Palestinian refugees.

Nearly a third of those refugees live in 58 UNRWA-registered camps across the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

"I have lived through many troubles ... but these days are the toughest I have ever seen," said Abu Aker, who fled a village in West Jerusalem to escape fighting during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

From the packed beachfront camps of Gaza to the urban sprawl in south Beirut, Palestinian refugees fear that the already dwindling aid they receive from UNRWA could fall further as the health crisis persists, and donors shift priorities.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East - UNRWA's full name - was created by the U.N. General Assembly 70 years ago to deal with the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who were driven from their homes or fled the conflict surrounding Israel's 1948 creation.

(Source: Reuters)

Coronavirus sparks a 'war for masks' as accusations fly

Canada blasts U.S. block on 3M exports of masks



➔ **1** It's unclear which US entity -- federal, state or commercial -- might have tried to secure orders destined for France. CNN reached out to the US Department of Health and Social Services Thursday but has not heard back. The US Embassy in France, which only speaks for the federal government, said the US "has not purchased any masks intended for delivery from China to France."

In an interview with French television Thursday, French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said securing deliveries was "not always easy." The problem, he said, was "not logistical difficulties related to missing aircraft but difficulties sometimes in accessing the products from orders that are not always delivered. This is for a variety of reasons, including the huge demand that comes to China from the United States, from Europe, and indeed from the whole world."

On Friday, the German Health Minister Jens Spahn responded to media reports that a PPE consignment bought by the state of Berlin had been diverted to meet an American order. "Reports of this kind -- I don't know if it is true in this specific case -- but it is not the only report of this kind," Spahn said. "This is not a good development in general, but at the same time it is due to a very strong demand that is there."

Spanish and French officials say that logistical bottlenecks in China have compounded the problem of shipping personal protective equipment (PPE.) Spanish Health

Minister Salvador Illa told a parliamentary committee in Madrid last week that everyone was trying to buy from China -- but could not confirm when Spanish orders would be met "because the market is crazy and the logistics are hard."

■ Canada blasts U.S. block on 3M exports of masks

Canadian officials on Friday blasted a move by President Donald Trump to block 3M Co's export of N95 respirator masks for use by doctors and nurses as coronavirus cases were projected to soar in the country's

most populous region.

Ontario health officials projected 80,000 coronavirus cases and 1,600 deaths in the province by month end under current public health measures, and urged people to restrict their movements.

Ontario has reported 3,255 confirmed cases and 67 deaths.

Late Thursday, Trump slammed 3M in a tweet after earlier invoking the Defense Production Act to get the company to produce protective face masks. N95 masks, essential for protecting healthcare professionals

from breathing in the coronavirus, are in short supply.

■ Trump says will defy U.S. coronavirus mask advice

U.S. President Donald Trump has said he will not wear a mask shortly after the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) updated its guidelines to recommend that all residents take the precaution as the number of US coronavirus deaths reached more than 7,000, among over 278,400 cases.

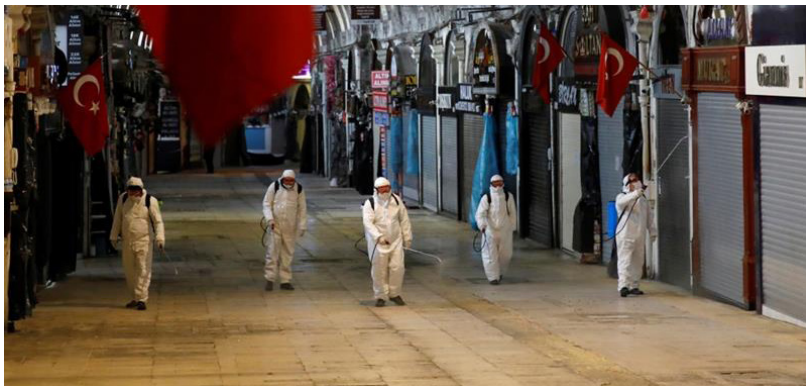
Meanwhile in China, a national day of mourning was observed on Saturday for the thousands of "martyrs" who have died in the new coronavirus outbreak, flying the national flag at half mast throughout the country and suspending all forms of entertainment.

The country, where the virus first appeared in late December, has officially recorded over 3,300 deaths in the pandemic, which has killed over 58,900 worldwide. On Saturday, the global total of infections passed 1.1 million, according to Johns Hopkins University, with over 226,800 recovering from the disease caused by the virus, COVID-19.

As China's reported deaths have dropped off significantly in recent weeks, the death toll in Europe has surged to about 40,000, according to the data compiled by Johns Hopkins University, while the number of cases have also continued to rise. Italy, Spain and Germany combined have recorded more than 300,000 cases.

(Source: agencies)

Turkey imposes curfew on youths amid COVID-19 outbreak



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has imposed a partial curfew for citizens under the age of 20 as part of measures imposed to curb the spread of the coronavirus in the country.

The mandatory confinement is due to come into effect at midnight on Friday, Erdogan said in a televised address, adding that Ankara also decided to close down borders of 31 cities for vehicles - excluding essential supplies.

Vehicles will no longer be able to leave or enter the cities, including Istanbul and Ankara, for 15 days, he said, adding that mask usage will be obligatory in crowded places.

Turkey's death toll from the outbreak rose to 425 on Friday, while the number of confirmed cases from the disease rose to over 20,000, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said.

"We have decided to bring partial curfew into effect for people under the age of 20 as of midnight Friday," Erdogan said.

"The shutdown of city borders will be in effect for 15 days initially. However, this period can be extended if necessary," Erdogan told a news conference.

Ankara has halted all international flights, limited domestic travel, closed schools, bars and cafes and suspended

mass prayers to counter the outbreak. But people are still going to work, as Erdogan seeks to sustain economic production and exports.

People above 65 years of age or those with chronic medical conditions are already subject to obligatory confinement.

■ Calls for Istanbul lockdown

Istanbul's Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu has been urging the government to impose a strict lockdown in the city, which is home to nearly 16 million people.

Unal Cevikoz, deputy chair of the Republican People's Party - the main opposition party in Turkey - told Al Jazeera on Friday there has been an increase in the number of infections "every two days".

"Istanbul seems to be the epicentre ... it is growing with a serious expedient rate," Cevikoz said

Erdogan had not imposed a total lockdown in a bid to keep the country's economy afloat, but the economy has "already slowed down" because of the recession, Cevikoz said.

"Most of the shops are still open [in Istanbul] ... we are all expecting a peak in the number of cases and deaths," he said.

(Source: al Jazeera)

'Patriot missile system deployment breach of Iraqi sovereignty'



A member of the Iraqi parliament's security and defense committee has strongly condemned the deployment of Patriot missile systems at the bases hosting US troops in Iraq as a breach of the Arab country's sovereignty, urging senior government officials to detail any agreement pertaining to the US move.

"The decision about the withdrawal of foreign forces, including US troops, is not reversible as it represents the Iraqi nation's will to respond to Washington's crimes in Iraq, its flagrant intervention in the country's domestic affairs in addition to its repeated targeting of Hashd al-Sha'abi forces (Popular Mobilization Units) and its leaders," Karim Alawi told Arabic-language al-Maalomah news agency in an exclusive interview on Thursday.

He noted, "According to the available information, the US-built Patriot missile was installed in three military bases where American forces are stationed. This runs counter to the sovereignty of Iraq."

News reports suggest the US deployed Patriot missile systems to Iraqi military bases to purportedly protect American troops against potential missile attacks. One of the Patriot batteries was reportedly deployed to the Ain al-Asad facility in

Iraq's western province of Anbar.

Last week, the New York Times reported that the Pentagon had ordered a secret directive, which called on US military commanders to prepare a campaign against Kata'ib Hezbollah, which is part of Hashd al-Sha'abi.

But the United States' top commander in Iraq has warned that such a campaign could be bloody and counterproductive.

Lieutenant General Robert P. White wrote in a blunt memo that a new military campaign would also require that thousands more American troops be sent to Iraq and divert resources from the so-called fight against the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group.

Iraqi lawmakers unanimously approved a bill on January 5, demanding the withdrawal of all foreign military forces led by the United States from the country following the assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, along with Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy head of Hashd al-Sha'abi, and their companions in a US airstrike authorized by President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport two days earlier.

(Source: Press TV)

Keir Starmer: From radical lawyer to leader of the British Labor party

Britain's new opposition Labor leader, Keir Starmer, fought the state as a young human rights lawyer before battling Brexit as an MP, and must now bring together his divided party to challenge Boris Johnson.

Serious and determined, the 57-year-old takes over from the veteran socialist Jeremy Corbyn as Labour struggles to find its way.

The Centre-left party has been out of office since 2010, and in December recorded its worst general election result since the 1930s as Johnson's Conservatives hoovered up votes in many of its former heartlands.

For the past few years, Labor has been riven by splits over Corbyn's unwavering left-wing agenda, how to approach Brexit and a row over the handling of claims of anti-Semitism in the party.

Starmer has vowed to unite the party and get it back on a path to power.

He wooed Corbyn's supporters by emphasizing his own record as a human rights lawyer, insisting he is a socialist and defending December's manifesto, which promised a massive program of investment and nationalizations.

But he also won backing from centrists



in the party, who see him as more measured and more pragmatic than his predecessor.

"We can say what we like about how we want to change the world -- if we lose elections, we won't get the opportunity to do it," Starmer told the Guardian podcast this week.

He refuses to say what existing policies he would keep -- particularly now, in the upheaval of the coronavirus outbreak -- beyond saying that "radical things are going to be needed".

Political historian Steven Fielding, from the University of Nottingham, said his pitch as "the competent bureaucrat" was designed to appeal to a broad number of Labor members.

But it has left some asking what he actually stands for.

"No one questions his intellectual

ability, but many do wonder about his capacity to inspire," commented Andrew Rawnsley, a political columnist with The Observer newspaper.

■ Defending the powerless -

Starmer was born in London, one of four siblings, to a toolmaker father and a nurse mother, both of whom were animal lovers who rescued donkeys.

"Whenever one of us left home, they replaced us with a donkey," he jokes.

At school, he had violin lessons with Norman Smith, the former Housemartins bassist who became DJ Fatboy Slim. He is also a passionate Arsenal fan -- like his predecessor Corbyn -- and still plays football every week.

He was named after the founding father of the Labour party, Keir Hardie, and when he trained as a lawyer, turned his attention to radical causes.

He defended trade unions and activists, including in a long-running "McLibel" case brought by McDonald's against two people who handed out leaflets criticizing the firm's practices.

In his leadership campaign video, he says: "I've spent my life fighting for justice,

standing up for the powerless and against the powerful."

In 2003, he began his move to the establishment with a job ensuring police in Northern Ireland fully complied with human right legislation.

Five years later, he completed the shift by becoming director of public prosecutions for England and Wales.

Between 2008 and 2013, he oversaw the prosecution of MPs for abusing the expenses system, journalists for phone-hacking, and young people caught up in the 2011 riots.

He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II for his services and in 2015, was elected as a member of parliament himself, representing the north London seat of Holborn and St Pancras.

■ Brexit battles -

In 2016, after the vote to leave the European Union, Starmer joined a rebellion by Labor MPs over Corbyn's perceived lack of leadership during the referendum campaign.

It failed, and later that year he re-joined the top team as Labor's Brexit spokesman, where he remained until this week.

(Source: AFP)

Playing in Olympics one of my main goals: Arsalan Kazemi

Arsalan Kazemi is trying to chill as much as he can, he said in a live interview on the @FIBAAsiaCup Instagram account. He's playing a little bit of FIFA and Call of Duty on PlayStation to keep himself entertained. He even bought a -1,500piece puzzle to work with as well just to tease and tickle the brain now and then.

"It's a picture of a beach in Italy," he revealed, possibly noting that it's a destination he might visit when this situation resolves. "I haven't finished it yet; I'm still working on it. But I think I can finish it today or tomorrow."

He followed through and finished the puzzle later on that day, but not after a lengthy talk covering a wide range of topics from a choice of hairstyles to some of his favorite high-flying moments playing for Iran.

■ Hair-do or Hair-don't?

Kazemi has gone through an impressive collection of hair and facial hairstyles playing for Iran, from sporting a clean look in World Cup 2010 to growing out a full beard and rocking the headband in Asia Cup 2017.

One that stands out was the almost-Handle Bar mustache he sported in his first Asia Cup almost a decade ago.

"In 2011, I was a rookie, and they kind of made me shave my beard and leave the mustache on," Kazemi recalled of the hazing, though. "But It was like something that the whole team did, Hamed [Haddadi] did it, Samad [Nikkah Bahrami] did it."

However, the look that Kazemi prefers the most throughout these years is the one he's currently seen rocking, whether it was at Asia Cup 2017 or during the World Cup Asian Qualifiers. With a full beard and a colored headband to tame his tangles, Kazemi looks rugged and tough, which is perfect for the way he plays the game.

Though he seemed pretty content about this style, for now, Kazemi hinted that there's always an opportunity for change.

"I've never done the full horseshow in a FIBA game, but I did it when I was playing in College, and that was definitely one of my favorite looks. I think the fans really loved it, too."

"We'll see. It's just like when you walk into a tournament, and you see how you feel. It just comes."

■ Not Like Mike

Kazemi has worn several jersey numbers playing for Iran over the years. One number that he is associated with, in particular, is the number 14 or a reversed version in 41. It's not a common number, but Arsalan has his reasons.

"When I was a kid playing in the youth teams, I always wanted number 9 because Michael Jordan would wear number 9," Kazemi started. "As you know, in FIBA, they just started letting you wear any number you want. But before it was only like 4 to 15, so it was always a fight around number 9 because Michael used to wear that in the Olympics."

Arsalan eventually did get to wear number 9 when he suited up for Iran at Asia Cup 2011. As a kid, however, he had to find something else.

"I just decided to pick number 14 because nobody wanted it, and I wanted to make it famous. Then, I think the time that I'm talking about, Samad was really young, and he was just starting to play on the senior national team, so he made it pretty famous, too."

"But I think I did my part, a little bit, in the US," he said, referring to his days as number 14 of the Oregon Ducks. "That was the reason I was wearing number 14."

■ The USA experience

At the age of 16, Kazemi and his family saw an opportunity and took it. He went all the way across the oceans to the United States and was determined to better himself as a basketball player.

Kazemi became the first Iranian player to play in NCAA Division I at Rice before transferring to Oregon. He then became the first Iranian player to be drafted to the NBA in the second round with the 54th pick. Arsalan set out to blaze trails and trails he blazed indeed.

Throughout his journey in the wild, wild west that is the USA, Kazemi learned how different the game was and found a niche in how he would be able to be most effective on the court.



"The speed is very different in the states, as you can see right now, the game has totally changed," he said of the difference between playing in Asia and the USA. "It's kind of the same way right now overseas as well, but I'm talking about back in -2008 2009, you had to be able to guard the perimeter as much as guard the post, so those are the main things that were different."

"The athleticism, too. You know that they jump really high, so to be able to compete with them, you had to be physical and use a different kind of strength to compete with those guys."

Kazemi found a way. He was - and still is - known for his defense and hustle, especially in Oregon, where he bagged a spot on the PAC12- All-Defensive team in 2013. He was known for his rebounding, where he was once quoted apologizing his teammates if he stole their rebounds, but he just jumps to get every single one, and that's how it works.

"When I was playing in college, I wasn't getting much playing time [at first]," Kazemi said. He was averaging only 17 minutes in his first three games at Rice, and it was bothering him.

"Then, we played against Arizona, and I got double-digit rebounds that game. My coach came to me afterward and told me I will play you 30 minutes a game if you give me double-digit rebounds every game. So it kind of took off from there."

"I was always a good rebounder; I just didn't pay attention to it."

"Since then, I always get a lot of rebounds, unless Hamed is on the team," Kazemi laughed. "I mean, I still get rebounds, but with him, it's tough. I always get rebounds. I always like to do that dirty work that no one is willing to do; it's just how my game is."

For his tenacity and top-level effort on the court, Kazemi was a fan favorite, and that earned him some pretty cool monikers.

"I have many nicknames, especially from when I was in the US."

"Beast from the Middle East," he listed. "I think anybody that goes from the Middle East to the US kind of gets that nickname. Also, they called me 'Madman from I-Ran,' that was another nickname that I got."

■ "King of Dunks"

The 2.01M 7'6" forward got another nickname to add to the list when he crossed back over from the US.

"In Asia specifically, they called me 'King of Dunks,' something like that."

It's not exactly subtle, but the name fits. He had already compiled an impressive reel of high-flying slams from his collegiate playing days and continued to do so in international play for Iran.

Fans wouldn't even have to look too far back to find some of his finest works. There was a thunderous one-handed slam against Kazakhstan at the World Cup Qualifiers in early 2018. A year before that, he was throwing down some nice jams throughout Asia Cup 2017 as well.

However, those pale in comparison to some of his favorites.

"One of my favorite ones was

when I really young, too; it happened in 2010 in China, and it was my first official game. It was a friendly game, but it was my first game that I played for the senior national team, and we played against China," He recollected. "I kind of postered Yi Jianlian and he was in the NBA, and it was a really big deal for me that dunk. I still have a picture of it, and every time I think about it, it just gives me chills."

"Another dunk that I really like was in 2011 against Korea, and, I think, I took off literally one step inside from the free-throw line, and that was a nasty dunk."

Kazemi had so many dunks that he admitted that one had slipped his mind.

He found an open runway at the Olympic Qualifying Tournament in Italy back in 2016 against Greece. Kazemi took two dribbles and detonated into the air, even with the burly Ioannis Bourousis ready to contest.

Let's just say it might not have been the best decision made by Bourousis at that moment.

What made the moment even better was that trailing right behind Bourousis was current megastar Giannis Antetokoupo, who got to be in the frame of the poster.

"Trust me, I got a picture of that, too, where I'm flexing, and I got Giannis on the picture."

■ Memories in Asia

Fans haven't seen much of Kazemi in the Asia Cup even though he's been playing internationally for Iran for a decade. He's only played in the Asia Cup twice for a total of 15 games, averaging 11.3 points and 8.6 rebounds per game.

Despite the short stint, Kazemi has some pretty fond memories playing in the competition.

"One of my favorite games was against Korea in the Semi-Finals of 2017," he said, speaking of his -19point, -10rebound performance where he made all but one of his nine shots.

"I think I had a decent game, and I really enjoyed that game. It helped us get to the Finals."

Kazemi had faced many great players throughout his basketball career, whether it was when he was playing in the US or professionally. Of course, a large number of his fiercest opponents were from here at the Asia Cup.

"Definitely the Chinese players," said Kazemi of who he enjoyed matching up with. "I mean, I played against Wang Zhizhi, he was one of the best players from China and Yi Jianlian."

"China had excellent players. Korea, they had very good players. Japan also had good players."

Among one of those foes even started as an idol for the young Arsalan, before getting to face each other on opposing sides of the hardwood.

"One player, in particular, I really enjoyed playing against was Fadi El Khatib because when I was younger, I really really liked him," Kazemi said. He even got to play against Fadi in one of his final games, knocking out his idol from the Quarter-Finals in Asia Cup 2017.

"I remember that I saw him when I was 16 years old. I went to Dubai to get a visa to go to the US for the first time, and I saw him at the Emirates mall."

"It was just it meant the world to me. I took a picture with him and everything."

Knowing that it's no surprise that Kazemi has his childhood idol listed among his All-Time Asia Starting Five. Filling out the rest of that lineup wasn't an easy task, but it's one that Kazemi says he'd enjoying coaching just because it's a group of guys that knows basketball really well.

"I'm going to name 6 [players] because it's really hard for me to leave one out," Kazemi admitted. "But I'd go with my Starting 5 to be Yao [Ming] at the 5. Hamed at the 4, and then Samad, Fadi El Khatib, and Mahdi Kamrani."

"Then the sixth man is going to be Yi Jianlian because it's hard to leave him out. He's one of the best players in Asia as well. So those are my starting five, and Yi's basically going to be my one bench player."

■ Future for the Pioneer

Arsalan Kazemi's name is tagged along with plenty of "firsts" in Iran basketball history books. Being a pioneer himself, he recognizes those that paved the way before him and knew how much they did to make it possible for Iran to be a basketball powerhouse in Asia.

"A lot," he said of the influence that the generation of Hamed, Samad, Mahdi, and others had on him.

"Not just on me, but also a lot of younger kids that were playing basketball at the time. Just seeing that it's possible to reign championship in Asia because before when we started playing basketball, it was all China Korea and Japan. Those were the powerhouses in Asia."

"Them winning the first championship, it just basically showed us that we got talent in Iran as well, and if we work hard, then it's also possible for us to win medals in Asia and go even further."

Now it's time for Arsalan to take up the torch. It's his turn to inspire the next generation ... and he knows where he wants to start.

"I mean, obviously, the Olympics is the top level for every athlete in the world," he said.

"I haven't been able to play in the Olympics, so that's been one of my main goals. If it's possible to play in the Olympics and then just to show the way for the younger generation to be able to go through what I went through, just to help them out a little bit, if I can, to maybe send them over to the NCAA. Just to show them the way, those are the things that I'm looking forward to doing."

For now, Arsalan Kazemi is just hoping for brighter days in the near future for everyone. Consider it his early birthday wish as he will be turning 30 on April 22.

"Well, [year] 2020 since the start it's been really tough all around the world on people," he said. "My wish is for things to get better for everybody because I see it's really tough, especially for the economy. I just wish that this 2020 gets better for everybody."

(Source: FIBA)

Persepolis captain Hosseini is not going to hang up his shoes

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis football team captain Jalal Hosseini has denied claims that he is going to hang up his shoes.

Local media reports suggest that Hosseini will bid farewell to football at the end of the season.



"I am not going to retire and keep going as long as possible," the -38year-old defender said.

"Now, Persepolis face so many difficulties and we should help our team to overcome this situation," Hosseini added.

Hosseini started his playing career in Malavan in 2002 and has won seven Iran Professional League with three teams.

He is the most decorated football player in Iran football.

Hosseini has earned 115 caps for Iran national football team and scored eight goals.

He represented Team Melli in the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

Fasihi among World's 50 Fastest Women

TASNIM — Farzaneh Fasihi is in the list of the 50 fastest he world of the -60meter dash during 2020 indoor track and field season.

She registered 7.25 seconds on February 2020 ,16.

Fasihi represented Iran at the Istanbul Cup and won the gold with a spectacular performance.

She is the first Iranian woman who took part at the World Athletics Indoor Championships

American sprinter Mikiah Brisco sits top of the list with a time of 7.04 seconds.

(Source: vocal.media)

Majid Hosseini to stay at Trabzonspor: report

Iranian international defender Majid Hosseini will stay at Trabzonspor next season.

The Iranian stopper, who joined the Turkish top-flight team on a two-year contract in 2018, will remain in the team next season.

As per the agreement, Hosseini will be paid 600,000 euros.

Trabzonspor is planning to extend the contract formally as soon as possible.

Hosseini was one of Iran national football team member at the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

(Source: Gazete Damga)

Stay at home and listen to doctors: Karim Ansarifard

Tasnim — Iran international forward Karim Ansarifard says that the people must stay at home and listen to doctors to defeat Covid19-.

The global death toll approaches 60,000 and there are now more than one million confirmed cases around the world.

"We are responsible to beat the virus to return to our normal life. All people must stay at home and listen to doctors," Al-Sailiya striker said.

"I train at home to keep my fitness and I think it's the best way to fight the coronavirus," Ansarifard added.

Iranian wrestler ranks 3rd in world ranking

IRNA — Meysam Delkhani, a member of Iran's national Greco Roman wrestling team, has ranked third in the world, according to the latest rankings.

In its latest updates, United World Wrestling (UWW) ranked Iran's Delkhani as the third world wrestler of the -63kg weight category.

Delkhani will compete in the Iranian national team this year in the -60kg weight category to book a ticket for 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games.

Delkhani won the gold medals of U21 World and Asian championships in 2019.

Persepolis striker Stokes loves to return to Hibs

Persepolis forward Anthony Stokes reveals he would 'love' to return to Hibernian for a fourth time.

In January he penned a six-month deal with Persian Gulf giant Persepolis but due to the coronavirus outbreak that deal will expire before he has the opportunity to join the club.

And Stokes, still only 31 years of age, has confessed that he would jump at another chance with Hibs.

"I loved Hibs and, even the last time I was there, I would have loved to stay longer," Stokes said.

"I probably could have stayed at the club but I just stand my ground sometimes and that can go against me. I wish I had stayed longer, I do," he added.

"I definitely want to come back to Scotland or the UK. Where I end up? I don't know. To be honest, I would love to have another stint at Hibs but it's unlikely that'll ever happen," Stokes stated.

(Source: Deadlinenews.co.uk)

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Envy is disgraceful; and fear is a sign of defect. Indigence makes an intelligent man dumb in argument, and a needy person a stranger in his hometown. Helplessness is a great calamity; fortitude is courage; abstemiousness is wealthiness, and devoutness is a chainmail which guards the body and soul against sins. *Imam Ali (AS)*

Estimated 120,000 entertainment industry crew jobs lost during pandemic

LOS ANGELES (The Hollywood Reporter) — More than 120,000 the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) jobs are estimated to have already been lost since the start of the coronavirus outbreak, according to individual correspondences that the International Cinematographers Guild (Local 600) and Motion Picture Editors Guild (Local 700) sent out to members.



El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood (Rich Fury/Getty Images)

“This is a devastating time for the entire IA family,” MPEG national executive director Cathy Repola wrote last Wednesday in a message, which also stated that IATSE “has been successful at securing a standardized two weeks of pay from our more responsible employers. The IA intends to address those employers who are not following suit.”

The ICG letter, signed by its officers, including newly elected president John Lindley, noted that “although some of our members are being paid for up to two weeks after their shows shut down, based upon the reality of the health care crisis we now face, it is highly unlikely that productions will resume after so short a period of time. This problem is likely to continue for months, not weeks, and our concerns about health, benefits and economic stability are shared by the entire membership.”

The guild also added that its benefit plans “currently have months of reserves and are not threatened at this moment.”

Both ICG and MPEG also pointed out that the Motion Picture and Television Fund and the Actor’s Fund are prepared to provide financial assistance. On Tuesday, IATSE announced \$2.5 million in new charitable donations to both groups, as well as to the Actors Fund of Canada.

Still, all of this may not match the need. In response, IATSE international president Matthew D. Loeb this week urged Congress to include displaced entertainment workers in a relief package and asking members to sign this online petition.

“As social distancing measures are enacted and events and projects across all sectors of the entertainment industry are cancelled, it’s become clear that the COVID-19 crisis requires decisive action from our Federal Government to support displaced entertainment workers,” he wrote. “Right now, thousands of our members across all sectors of the entertainment industry are suffering financial hardship because of government mandated cancellations. Entertainment workers shouldn’t be collateral damage in the fight against the COVID-19 virus.”

Wednesday’s MPEG letter also urged members to fill out a short IATSE survey if they have been laid off, put on hiatus or had a start dated pushed back. “We need to provide this information to the IATSE,” said Repola in the message to members.

Bill Withers, soulful singer of “Ain’t No Sunshine” dead at 81

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Bill Withers, a soulful singer best known for the 1970s hits “Lean on Me,” “Lovely Day” and “Ain’t No Sunshine,” has died at age 81 from heart complications, his family said on Friday.

Withers produced nine albums, most of them written and recorded in the 1970s, starting with “Just as I Am”, which included “Ain’t No Sunshine”, which won him the first of three Grammy Awards, according to his official website.

His musical career ebbed in the 1980s as he left “the hype and the hoopla” of the spotlight for a more private life, it said.

“A solitary man with a heart driven to connect to the world at large, with his poetry and music, he spoke honestly to people and connected them to each other,” Rolling Stone magazine quoted the family as saying a statement. “As private a life as he lived close to intimate family and friends, his music forever belongs to the world.”

Withers was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2015, among his several honors, and made a rare public appearance to accept the tribute.

His death drew a flood of tributes, including one from Democratic U.S. Senator Cory Booker of New Jersey, who said he often played Withers’ “Lovely Day” at events during his now-ended presidential campaign.

“Water Never Dies” narrator Mirza Mohammad Solgi dies at 65

CULTURE TEHRAN — Veteran **d e s k** Mirza Mohammad Solgi, whose memories of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war were published in a book named “Water Never Dies”, passed away on Thursday from the chemical injuries he suffered during the war.

Due to a heart disease, he was admitted to the hospital in Hamedan three weeks ago and he had a stent implanted to restore blood flow. He was released from the hospital shortly after.

However, he was hospitalized again for some problems in his respiratory system and kidneys, which resulted in his death. He had also lost both of his legs during the war.

Solgi’s memories of the war were compiled in “Water Never Dies” authored by Hamid Hesam who was selected as the Islamic Revolution Artist of the Year in 2018.

Several officials, including Culture Minister Seyyed Abbas Salehi and the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, have sent messages of condolences to Solgi’s family.

“The devoted mujahid continued his struggle for God with the injuries he suffered in the war, and finally he met God,” Ayatollah Khamenei wrote in his message of condolences.

Due to the coronavirus epidemic in the country, Solgi’s remains were buried without any gathering in his hometown Nahavand on Thursday.



Veteran Mirza Mohammad Solgi in an undated photo.

Iran warns movie theater owners not to dismiss employees during coronavirus shutdown

A R T TEHRAN — Cinema Organization **d e s k** of Iran director Hossein Entezami has warned the theater owners not to dismiss their employees amid the coronavirus pandemic in the country.

“The theater owners and cineplexes will enjoy the facilities and support of the organization under the auspicious of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance if they do not dismiss their employees,” Entezami said in a post published on his Tweeter account Saturday.

All movie theaters across Iran have shut down over the spread of coronavirus that is also known as



Cinema Organization of Iran director Hossein Entezami in an undated photo.

COVID-19. Iran has also canceled all art, cultural and cinematic events due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Entezami made the remarks following the publication of a report on the dismissals of a number of movie theater employees.

However, Association of Iranian Theater Owners secretary Mohammadreza Saberi announced on Saturday that no employee has been dismissed and when the theater halls reopen, all the employees will sure get back to work.

He added that some of the theater owners have introduced their employees to file for unemployment and they will return to work after the cinemas reopen.

Doc portrays Fatemiyoun’s coronavirus struggles in Iran



A scene from Iranian filmmaker Hossein Nejadmusa’s documentary “Golshahr”.

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian **d e s k** director Hossein Nejadmusa has made a documentary that depicts the struggles of a group of Fatemiyoun, an Afghan brigade that fought against Daesh, in the northeastern Iranian town of Golshahr to hold back coronavirus.

The group is directed by Seyyed Asad-

ollah Sa’adati, a Fatemiyoun member who organizes a group of his family and friends to produce face masks and other materials necessary for preventing the spread of coronavirus.

They also help Iranian medical teams in their fight with coronavirus and teach people to be safe during quarantine time.

Persian version of “Herman” republished

CULTURE TEHRAN — The third **d e s k** edition of a Persian translation of Danish-Norwegian author Lars Saabye Christensen’s 1985 book “Herman” has recently been released by the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCY) in Tehran.

Translated by Shaqayeq Qandehari, the first edition of the Persian translation was published just a couple of months ago.

The book tells the story of Herman, an 11-year-old boy who is going bald. To cope with his problem, Herman talks with his lovely grandfather almost every day. When grandfather dies, Herman understands there are things in life that are not replaceable.

“Herman”, which is the winner if the Norwegian Critics Prize for Literature, was adapted for the screen in 1992 by Norwegian film director Erik Gustavson.



Front cover of the Persian version of “Herman” by Danish-Norwegian author Lars Saabye Christensen.

Disney shuffles movie schedule due to virus, “Mulan” set for July

and Marvel’s “Black Widow” in November, the company said on Friday as it reshuffled a schedule disrupted by the global coronavirus outbreak.

Among other changes, Disney postponed the release of a new “Indiana Jones” movie by one year to July 2022, the company said in a statement.

Movie theaters around the world have been closed and film production has been put on hold to help prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Hollywood studios are optimistic that theaters will be back in business by late July. Disney set the debut of “Mulan,” which was supposed to reach theaters last month, for July 24. ViacomCBS Inc’s Paramount Pictures moved a new animated “SpongeBob” movie to July 31, and AT&T Inc’s Warner Bros said it planned to release “Wonder Woman 1984” on Aug. 14.

“Black Widow”, starring Scarlett Johansson, had

been scheduled to kick off the summer blockbuster season, traditionally Hollywood’s most lucrative period at theaters, on May 1. It will now debut Nov. 6, a date that had been reserved for Marvel’s “The Eternals.”

Disney moved “Eternals” to Feb. 12, 2021, and postponed several other Marvel movies by a few months. “Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings” was rescheduled for May 21, 2021, followed by “Doctor Strange and the Multiverse of Madness” on Nov. 5, 2021, and “Thor: Love and Thunder” on Feb. 18, 2022.

The debut of “Jungle Cruise”, a live-action adventure starring Dwayne Johnson and Emily Blunt, “was delayed from this summer to July 30, 2021.

Disney also said it would scrap a planned theatrical release of family film “Artemis Fowl” and instead distribute it on the Disney+ streaming service at an unspecified date.

Van Gogh painting stolen from Dutch museum closed by coronavirus

LAREN, Netherlands (Reuters) — Thieves stole a painting by Dutch master Vincent van Gogh early on Monday from the Netherlands’ Singer Laren Museum, which is currently closed to the public because of the coronavirus.

The painting “Lentetuin”, or “Spring Garden,” which dates back to 1884 and depicts the garden of the rectory at Nuenen, had been on loan from the Groninger Museum. “I feel incredibly angry and now I’m starting to feel sadder too,” Jan Rudolph de Lorm, director of the Singer Laren Museum, told Reuters in an interview.

He appealed to those who had taken the painting to treat it with care “so that sooner or later it can be shown to the public unharmed”.

Van Gogh, who struggled with mental illness throughout his life, was staying with his parents when he painted

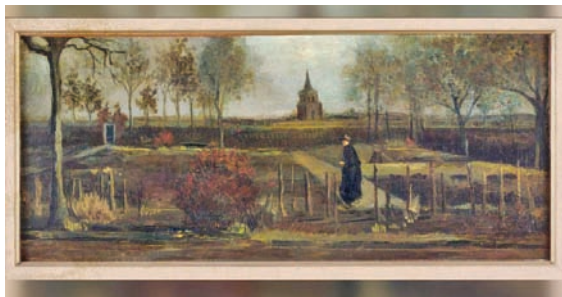
“Spring Garden”. His father worked as a minister in Nuenen.

De Lorm described the painting, which depicts a woman in a garden with red-flowered bushes and with a church in the background, as “an image of silence, of reflection and of tranquility, which undoubtedly offered him comfort and inspiration”.

“Through him, it gave us and our audience the same emotion,” de Lorm added.

The museum, located in the town of Laren to the east of Amsterdam, has appealed for the swift return of the painting, which has been added to Interpol’s list of stolen artworks.

In a statement, police said the thieves had entered the museum by breaking its glass doors at around 3.15 a.m. (0115 GMT). “The culprits were gone by the time police responded to the alarm,” the statement said.



Investigators are searching for security footage and witnesses, and are examining forensic evidence, it added.

Dutch museums have been closed because of the coronavirus outbreak since March 12.