



**Iran welcomes new Iraq PM-designate** **2**



**Coronavirus: National Museum of Iran hailed by online visitors** **8**



**FFIRI: ACL must continue on two-legged basis** **11**



**Iran's "Little Black Fish" among Istanbul mayor's favorite books for home quarantine** **12**

# Leader hails health professionals for sacrifices

## Iranians demonstrate brilliant performance in coronavirus battle

Okhamei.ir



See page 2



## ARTICLE

**Mahdi Azizi**  
Journalist

### Political independence, opportunities, threats of COVID-19

World is witnessing independent human stances by international figures and bodies amid coronavirus outbreak defying the US Trump's unilateral and unjust sanction policy.

The current coronavirus pandemic ravaging every corner of the world and many states are desperate in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. Nations and governments are panicking and the economy has already collapsed. This crisis is expected to deepen more and more without a serious global willingness and cooperation.

Besides all the bitter developments going on in the world nowadays, the outbreak of the coronavirus has revealed a very significant reality about the existing world order and management. The outbreak showed the weaknesses and deficiencies of the existing world order.

Since the end of the Second World War, most of the countries have spent a large amount of their annual budget on developing their military power and equipment and have paid less attention to developing health section and medical infrastructures. The policies taken in this regard despite claims of the governments that they have been making efforts to save people lives have resulted in weakness of the health sectors of the countries so that now many of them are not able to fight against coronavirus efficiently and thousands of people have lost their lives.

In addition to inefficient approaches and managing policies of the world countries that have resulted in weaknesses of health sectors of the countries, unilateral sanction policies of some countries like the US have doubled the difficulties for other states in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

Although thanks to its powerful infrastructures and domestic capabilities Iran has fought the coronavirus efficiently, the US unjust sanctions on Iran's medical section and blocking the country's access to its resources and revenues have created lots of problems for Tehran in the more efficient fight against the pandemic. ➔7

## Iranian filmmakers cover selfless devotion of coronavirus frontline workers

By Samaneh Aboutalebi

**TEHRAN** — Iranian documentarians Javad Yaqmuri and Mehdi Amini have teamed up to make a feature-length documentary and a number of shorts on coronavirus in the Kamkar Hospital in the city of Qom, where the first cases of the new virus infection in two Iranian men were reported.

"When the cases of the new virus were detected in Iran, people were terrified and rumors were going around, so we decided to show the people what is really going on," Yaqmuri told the Tehran Times on Wednesday.

"We first intended to make only a feature-length documentary, but when we got to the hospital, we found out there are lots of individuals and subjects in the hospital that can be dealt with in short documentaries," he added.

Dozens of short documentaries focusing on

various persons in the hospital, including doctors, nurses and other medical staff and volunteers and even three patients, have been made and broadcast from several IRIB channels over the past few weeks.

Amini also said that when people around the world are facing a serious crisis, filmmakers have an obligation to record events, sacrifices and emotional moments for the future.

"Documentarians need to be prepared for any situation. They sometimes make documentaries about happy and harmless events and sometimes, they have to cover hazardous, difficult and tragic situations," he noted.

"When medical staff members are working every day without even a single day off, facing danger and are engaging in hard work, it isn't fair that their efforts are not acknowledged by

being recorded in films," he added.

Amini also mentioned that the documentaries show the relationship between patients and medical staff, and some rare emotional moments that occurred at the hospital rather than providing just scientific information about the disease.

"There is no place for showing off or anything like that. It is a matter of life and death. We have followed them right into the heart of danger," he said.

Some of the medical staff members haven't seen their families, their children or their parents since the coronavirus outbreak in the country.

"The sacrifices they make and hard work they do are priceless," he concluded.

Photo: Javad Yaqmuri (L) and Mehdi Amini record short documentaries on coronavirus at the Kamkar Hospital in Qom.

## Bill would remove U.S. troops from Saudi Arabia in 30 days

A Republican U.S. senator introduced legislation to remove American troops from Saudi Arabia, adding pressure on the kingdom to tighten its oil taps to reverse the crude price drop that has hurt domestic energy companies.

The legislation from Senator Bill Cassidy, of oil-producing Louisiana, would remove U.S. troops 30 days after enactment, a full month faster than similar legislation introduced by two other Republican senators in March, Reuters reported.

Cassidy introduced the bill as OPEC+, a production group including Saudi Arabia and others in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies including Russia, closed in on a deal to slash oil output by a record amount of about 15 million barrels, or 15% of global production.

The spread of the coronavirus has crushed crude demand at the same time that Saudi Arabia and Russia have pumped oil flat-out in a race for market share, pushing prices to 18-year lows.

The extra oil from Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, has made it impossible for energy companies in the United States, the world's top oil and gas producer, to compete, Cassidy said.

"Withdrawing troops placed to protect others recognizes that friendship and support is a two-way street," he said.

Cassidy's bill faces an uphill battle and would have to pass the Senate, the House of Representatives and be signed by President Donald Trump to become law. Still, it was a sign of how Congress could take action against Saudi Arabia

if it does not stick to the plan to cut oil output.

The bill would also place tariffs on imports of oil from Saudi Arabia within 10 days of enactment. The tariff would ensure that the price of oil imports from Saudi Arabia would not be less than \$40 a barrel, the bill said.

Trump has threatened tariffs on oil imports from Saudi Arabia and Russia but has not imposed them amid opposition from powerful energy interests, including the American Petroleum Institute lobbying group.

The bill would not remove U.S. Patriot missiles or THAAD defense systems, as the previous legislation would.

Congress is out until at least April 20 and possibly longer due to the coronavirus outbreak.

## TEDPIX climbs 8.5% in a week

**TEHRAN** — TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) gained 8.5 percent to 597,094 points in the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday), IRNA reported.

As reported, the indices of banks, chemical and oil products companies, insurance companies and retirement funds, foodstuff industries, non-metals, metals, and base metals industries, computer companies and cement production units mostly con-

tributed to the growth of TEDPIX in the past week.

TSE Head Ali Sahraei has announced that the value of trades at Tehran Stock Exchange, the main stock exchange of Iran, jumped 2.6 folds in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19).

The official has also put Return on Investment (ROI) at 180 percent at TSE in the previous year.

## Iran worried about health of Palestinian prisoners: Judiciary chief

**TEHRAN** — Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi has described the Gaza Strip as the biggest prison in the world and expressed concern over the health of the Palestinians in Israeli jails amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The Zionists have established the greatest prison in the world... (and) the oppressed Muslim people of Gaza are in living in a bad condition, and what make us more worried than ever is the threat of their lives by the outbreak of the wicked coronavirus," Raisi said in

a telephone conversation with Ismail Haniyeh, the chief of the Hamas political bureau.

"No Muslim or liberal-minded person can tolerate that Palestine be surrounded by occupiers," said Raisi.

"The siege of Gaza shows that the political interest of the oppressive system has priority over human right."

The top judge added, "Today, some 5,800 Palestinians, including more than 200 women and children are imprisoned by the Zionists." ➔3

## Coronavirus in Iran: more than 50% recovered

**TEHRAN** — The total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran has reached 68,192, of whom 4,232 have died and 35,465 recovered.

Meanwhile, 1,972 new patients have been identified over the past 24 hours, Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Friday.

He added that 122 more people have

died during the same period of time, ISNA reported. Iran has announced social distancing measures in a bid to minimize the spread of coronavirus.

The government has allocated 1,000 trillion rials (about \$24 billion at the official rate of 42,000 rials) to help lessen the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on the national economy.

## Saudi Army gains nothing but failure in Yemen war

After five years of aggression, the Saudi-led coalition forces have realized that they have lost the battle against the Yemeni Army and the popular forces of Ansarullah, an expert in the international security field opined.

Omar Ahmed, a master of International Security and Global Governance from University of London, wrote in his analytic article over recent developments in Yemen that after five years, in fact, it is fair to say that the Saudis and their mercenaries are on the verge of defeat in Yemen.

"Exactly five years ago, the US-backed, Saudi-led Arab coalition carried out its first air strikes on Yemen in an effort to reinstate the disgraced, exiled President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. He is a statesman in name only who I have argued previously has neither power, authority nor legitimacy. The strikes targeted the Houthi movement, which is supported by the Yemeni armed forces. The war, claimed the Saudis, was supposed to be over in a matter of weeks," Omar added.

He further said that the war's devastating effects have claimed over 112,000 lives and created the world's worst humanitarian crisis, adding, "The steadfast and resilient Yemeni people have prevented the coalition from toppling the Houthi-aligned government in the capital, Sanaa."

"After five years, in fact, it is fair to say that the Saudis and their mercenaries are on the verge of defeat. The Yemeni armed forces and "popular committees" which include Houthi forces are continuing their advances with their sights set firmly on the stronghold of Marib and the pro-Hadi, Islah militia which makes up the coalition-backed force on the ground," Ahmed went on to say.

"The province of Marib is currently facing onslaughts on several main fronts: from the Nahm district of Sanaa province to the west; much of the recently-liberated Al-Jawf in the north; and from Sirwah district — a part of Marib already under Houthi control — and from the south in the Baydah province. Saudi air strikes continue in support of its mercenary ground forces although, as the years of conflict have shown, they are strategically ineffective," he explained.

Omar Ahmed added in his article published by the Middle east Monitor that the terrain, internal divisions among the mercenary forces, local distrust of Hadi and the relative ease of establishing relations in tribal areas captured by the Houthis are also reasons for their advance. ➔7



© Mehr / Mina Noei

## Distribution of health packages on mid-Shaban celebrations

The Ghadir Corps of Tabriz, in cooperation with volunteer groups, prepare and distribute health packages, including face masks, among the people on the occasion of mid-Shaban celebrations, the date marking the birth anniversary of the 12th Shia Imam.



## Iran, EEU vow to broaden ties

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — In telephone conversation on Friday, Iranian ambassador to Russia Kazzem Jalali and Eurasian Economic Union Commerce Minister Andrey Slepnev called for boosting economic cooperation.

Slepnev said Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) supports close cooperation between Iran's chamber of commerce and the member of the union.

"The union supports the Islamic Republic of Iran's stance concerning the U.S. irrational sanctions, especially regarding the global battle against the coronavirus," he added.

Ambassador Jalali said Tehran is firm to implement the provisions of the agreement and called for tapping the capacities to develop trade between Iran and the union.

According to Fars, Iran and EEU are looking to substantially increase trade, as they signed a three-year provisional agreement in Astana, Kazakhstan, on May 17, 2018, for the bloc to welcome Iran into EEU.

The preferential trade agreement came into effect on October 27, 2019, based on which the two sides have three years to upgrade the treaty into a full-fledged free trade deal that lowers or abolishes customs duties.

The average tariff set by EEU for Iranian goods as part of their provisional preferential trade agreement stands at 3.1%, while Iran's average tariff for commodities from EEU amounts to 12.9%, according to the deputy chief for international affairs at the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agricultures.

Iran and EEU have a total of 862 types of commodities listed in their PTA. As per the deal, Iran will enjoy much easier export terms and lower customs duties on 502 items and the same go for 360 items from the EEU member states.

## Iran welcomes new Iraq PM-designate

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Foreign Ministry on Thursday congratulated Iraq on the nomination of a new prime minister-designate, calling "a right step in the right direction".

Iraqi President Barham Salih on Thursday named Mustafa al-Kadhimi, director of Iraq's National Intelligence Service, as the new prime minister-designate and tasked him to form a new government in a month, Press TV reported.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has invariably supported independence, national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political stability in Iraq, and considers formation of consensus among all of its political factions through democratic ways to be the only peaceful solution for all differences," Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said in a statement.

Mousavi said Iran wishes al-Kadhimi success in fulfilling his duty to form a new government that would meet the demands of the Iraqi people and religious scholars and stabilize and unify Iraq, which would enjoy an important status at regional and international stage.

Al-Kadhimi was tapped as the new premier after predecessor Adnan al-Zurfi announced he was withdrawing his bid.

Zurfi, the former governor of Najaf, was nominated by Salih after the previous designate, Mohammed Tawfik Allawi, a former minister of communications, failed to gain the support of parliament.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman added, "Undoubtedly, congruity and empathy between different Iraqi tribes and all political groups and outstanding Iraqi figures, including Mr. Adnan al-Zurfi, have been very influential in achieving this important goal."

The Iranian ambassador to Baghdad, Iraj Masjedi, also told IRNA in an interview on Friday that Tehran has "positive view" toward nomination of al-Kadhimi as prime minister-designate.

Iraq has been without a government since last November when Adel Abdul-Mahdi resigned as prime minister amid protests against corruption and misuse of the country's resources.

Mousavi said Tehran, as before, declares its readiness to cooperate with Baghdad in its efforts to resolve problems and realize demands of its public and religious authorities.

Abdul Mahdi still heads the government as caretaker prime minister.

## Iran says ready to help Turkey in fighting coronavirus

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Iranian President's Chief of Staff Mahmoud Vaezi, in a phone talk with Turkey's Minister of Finance and Treasury Berat Albayrak, voiced Tehran's readiness to help Ankara in fighting coronavirus.

Appreciating Turkey for sending relief aid packages to Iran, Vaezi said, "We are prepared to help Turkey and share experiences with it in the field."

The two sides also called for close consultations between the two countries' health ministers and sharing experience in containing the rapidly increasing virus.

Both officials also expressed pleasure over the effective steps taken in line with boosting mutual economic cooperation, voicing readiness for exchanging goods by the two countries' customs houses round the clock while observing health protocols.

Also, Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani and his Turkish counterpart Mustafa Sentop held a phone conversation on Wednesday discussing cooperation and joint actions in containing the coronavirus.

Sentop also wished recovery for Larijani who is recovering from the coronavirus disease.

The public relations department of the Majlis issued a statement on April 2 announcing that Larijani had tested positive for the coronavirus.

Also, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu held a phone conversation on Tuesday in this regard. Zarif said Iran is ready to cooperate with Turkey in containing the outbreak of the coronavirus, known as Covid-19.

Zarif also expressed sympathy with the Turkish people in their struggle with the deadly virus.

Turkish Health Minister Fahrettin Koca confirmed on Thursday that cases of coronavirus increased by 4,056 in the last 24 hours, and 96 people have died, taking the death toll to 908.

The total number of recovered cases stood at 2,142, with 296 recoveries in the last 24 hours, and the number of tests carried out in that time was 28,578, the highest number yet, Koca said on Twitter. Turkey's total confirmed cases stood at 42,282, he added.

The total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran has also reached 68,192, of whom 4,232 have died and 35,465 recovered.

1,972 new patients have been identified over the past 24 hours, Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Friday.

He added that 122 more people have died during the same period of time, ISNA reported.

Iran has announced social distancing measures in a bid to minimize the spread of coronavirus.

# Rouhani says IMF must fulfill its duties unbiasedly

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Thursday that the International Monetary Fund must fulfil its duties unbiasedly.

"In this difficult situation, the International Monetary Fund must not be influenced by mischievous acts of the enemies of the Iranian people and fulfil its duties," Rouhani said in a phone conversation with Iranian central banker Abdolnasser Hemmati.

Hemmati, for his part, said Iran's request was being presented to the IMF executive board, and that Tehran was intent to pursue the demand.

Iran's central bank wrote last month to the IMF to request the \$5bn from its Rapid Financing Initiative, an emergency program that gives loans to countries facing with sudden shocks such as natural disasters.

It was Tehran's first request for IMF loan since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Hemmati wrote on his Instagram page on Thursday, "We expect the IMF to immediately respond to the request of Iran which itself is a founding member of the fund."



Reportedly, Washington is trying to hamper Iran's efforts to get the emergency funding.

In a tweet on Sunday, the secretary of

Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani accused the United States of blocking Tehran's loan request from the IMF. Analysts say it is surprising that the

United States which has imposed illegal sanctions against Iran, it is also blocking Iran's efforts to get loans from the IMF as the country is struggling with the outbreak of the coronavirus.

Speaking to Rouhani, Hemmati also reported on the measures taken by the central bank to gain access to its resources that are deposited in overseas banks, so that it can meet the nation's needs, especially concerning the items that are required for the fight against the new coronavirus, Press TV reported.

According to Hemmati, the process has most recently led to the unblocking of \$1.6 billion of Iran's assets that were held by the Luxembourg-based Clearstream, a post-trade service provider.

On Wednesday, Hemmati had said that the funds were made available after the CBI won a legal battle in Europe against a U.S. attempt to have Iranian funds blocked and handed over to Washington for compensating what Washington calls "victims of terror".

## Leader hails health professionals for sacrifices amid coronavirus outbreak

Ayatollah Khamenei: Iranians demonstrate brilliant performance in coronavirus battle

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has lauded the sacrifices made by Iran's health professionals, saying in fighting the coronavirus outbreak they have placed their lives and health at the service of the people.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has praised the Iranian nation's "shining" performance in the fight against the deadly coronavirus pandemic, which he described as a "test" facing the entire world.

"By enduring the hardship of being away from their family, even during the Nowruz holidays, and by tolerating the pressures resulting from treating patients in critical condition, the health professionals of the country placed their lives and their health at the service of the people," Ayatollah Khamenei said in a televised speech on Thursday, on the occasion of the birthday anniversary of the 12th Shia Imam, Imam Mahdi [May God Hasten His Reappearance].

"This very significant matter will leave a good memory in the minds of the people of Iran," added the Leader, according to his official website.

Describing the coronavirus pandemic as a strange test for all governments and nations, the Leader said, "Enough has been said about the statistics, the very good actions that have been taken place, and the recommendations. Sada-Sima (national TV network) has also performed well in this regard, but the important point is the brilliant performance of the Iranian nation in facing this modern form of cholera."

He praised the volunteers, including the clergies, student Basij forces and ordinary people, who put their lives on the line and offered help to the health professionals, patients and the needy.

"The Armed Forces, too, truly used all their powers in construction and creativity, including equipping hospitals and infirmaries by manufacturing medical equipment. Moreover, the Armed Forces and the youth, besides those in the Armed Forces, displayed new capacities in confronting this matter."

He described the cooperation of the peo-

**"The coronavirus outbreak should not cause us to neglect the oppression and tyranny of the superpowers in the world against different nations including the Palestinian and Yemeni nations."**

ple throughout the country as beautiful and astonishing, and added, "All these valuable movements show the depth of the influence of Islamic culture on the people. In opposition to the desire of some people who have endeavored to humiliate the Islamic-Iranian culture in the course of the past two decades and to divert attention towards the Western lifestyle, these moves showed that the Islamic culture and the chain of Islamic values are very strong and firmly rooted in the people of Iran."

**■ Leader slams U.S. confiscation of masks, gloves**

Ayatollah Khamenei also pointed to the reaction of the Western world to the coronavirus pandemic, making a reference to the confiscation of masks and gloves by the American and some European governments, people overrunning stores to empty the shelves, people fighting each other for a few rolls of toilet paper, as well as lining up to buy weapons, the governments' refusal to treat the elderly and also people's suicide attempts.

He went on to say, "In this event, the Western culture and civilization have shown their true nature, which is a natural consequence of the philosophy governing the Western civilization, a philosophy that is founded on individualism, materialism and mostly atheism."

Quoting a Western politician who had said

**"In this event, the Western culture and civilization have shown their true nature, which is a natural consequence of the philosophy governing the Western civilization, a philosophy that is founded on individualism, materialism and mostly atheism."**

## Iran has 'positive view' on naming al-Kadhimi as Iraqi PM: envoy



**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Iraj Masjedi, the Iranian ambassador to Iraq, said on Friday that Iran has a "positive view" on designation of Mustafa al-Kadhimi as the new prime minister of Iraq.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran respects Iraq's law and political system and supports anyone who has been designated through the legal procedure and gaining vote of the country's parliament," he told IRNA.

He said that Iran supports the Iraqi parliament's vote, because it represents the entire Iraqi society which includes Kurds, Shias, Sunnis and even minorities such as Turks and Christians.

"Our policy is not providing support for just one political group of Iraq. We respect all ethnicities and religious groups," he noted. Iran's approach towards Iraq is supporting

the country's unity and territorial integrity, he added.

Iraqi President Barham Salih named intelligence chief Kadhimi as prime minister-designate on Thursday.

Kadhimi is the third person to be named to the post in just over two months.

Kadhimi was nominated by President Barham Salih, shortly after the previous designated prime minister, Adnan al-Zurfi, announced he was withdrawing having failed to secure enough support to pass a government.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry also issued a statement on Thursday welcoming the naming of al-Kadhimi as prime minister, calling his nomination to the post "as the right decision at the right time".

Iran has been on side of Iraq since the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003. It was the first country that recognized the first post-Saddam ruling system in Iraq.

Iran also rushed to the help of Iraq when the terrorist Daesh group suddenly captured large swathes of the Iraqi territory in north-west Iraq.

The religious and cultural affinities between Iraq and Iran are also very strong. Every year millions of citizens from each country visit holy shrines in either country.

### INTERNATIONAL TENDER NOTICE NO. 99001



Hereby Sirjan Jahan Steel Complex (SJSCO) invites reputable firms and companies to the tender No. 99001, in respect of selling and exporting 20,000 Mt of 5SP Steel Billets (Size: 150 x 150 mm) on the basis of FOB shipping point, therefore interested bidders are invited to obtain the tender documents by sending a formal letter of interest to the E-mail addresses below:

[SJSKO.SALES@gmail.com](mailto:SJSKO.SALES@gmail.com)

[DKMSJSKO@gmail.com](mailto:DKMSJSKO@gmail.com)

S No.	Description	End Date
1	Submission of Financial Bid	7 (seven) days from tender notice publication.

#### Terms & Conditions:

- The tender documents will be sent to the bidders via E-mail.
- All bids should be sent in sealed envelopes.
- Conditional bids shall not be accepted.
- LOI should be prepared on company's heading, stamped and signed by the authorized signatories.
- No financial bid shall be accepted later than above-said end date of bid submission.
- SJSKO reserves the right to reject any or all the proposals.

For more information, please contact us at:

Tel: +982186086357 - +982186085834 - +982186084633 - +983442273806



# Tehran deeply regrets expulsion of 17 students from Hungary

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson has expressed “deep regret” over a decision by Hungary to expel 17 Iranian students on bogus charges of violating health protocols concerning the coronavirus.

“What Hungarian officials call a violation of health protocols is, in fact, the students’ objection to the improper quarantine conditions at a Budapest hospital where infected and healthy individuals were kept in one place,” Abbas Mousavi said in an interview with ISNA on Thursday.

He said even Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote to his Hungarian counterpart in this regard.

“But unfortunately, authorities, without realizing these conditions, pointed the finger at the university students and first issued a directive for the expulsion of three students and then 14 others without paying attention to the fact that the health protocols had, in fact, been violated by the Budapest hospital,” the spokesman explained.

“Unfortunately, the three students mentioned above were taken to a mi-



grants’ camp in very appalling conditions before they returned to their country for fear of the coronavirus at the request of their families and through the good offices of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s

embassy,” he added, according to the English version of the Tasnim news agency.

Mousavi said the Foreign Ministry and the Iranian embassy in Hungary had made every effort to manage the

situation and prevent the expulsion of the students.

“Receiving consultation from legal counselors, the Iranian embassy helped employ lawyers and pursue the matter through legal channels with the cooperation of the students themselves and their families,” the spokesperson said, according to IFP.

Mousavi said a Hungarian court ruled that the 14 students had to be expelled, adding the students were not allowed to take their case to the court.

“There is important and admissible evidence that the Iranian students had the right to take their case to the court, but they were denied the chance,” he lamented.

“The Iranian Foreign Ministry firmly demands Hungarian officials to reconsider the verdict and prepare the conditions for the Iranian students to continue their studies.”

Mousavi said the Foreign Ministry will keep pressing ahead with diplomatic efforts to restore the students’ right.

According to the Foreign Ministry, about 2,500 Iranians are studying at Hungarian universities.

## Pakistan People’s party: U.S. must lift sanctions to avoid humanitarian disaster

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Spokesperson for Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) Nafisa Shah has said that the United States must lift sanctions against Iran amid the coronavirus pandemic to avoid a humanitarian disaster.

It is very unfortunate that despite international pressure the U.S. has not lifted sanctions it has imposed on Iran, IRNA quoted her as saying on Wednesday.

“If COVID-19 pandemic will not make us come together what will? she asked.

“It was expected that the present outbreak would lead the world community” to raise alarms and help the vulnerable countries that may face “colossal losses if help is not coming forth”, she remarked.

Nafisa Shah, now serving as a parliamentarian, added that the lifting of sanctions against countries such as Iran does not need required lobbying and they must be lifted immediately.

“But despite international pressure the U.S. has not done so... this is the time to save lives, saving lives everywhere,” noted Nafisa Shah.

Chris Murphy, U.S. senator from Connecticut, has said Iranians are dying of coronavirus partly because of U.S. sanctions.

“Innocent civilians are dying there in part because our sanctions are limiting humanitarian aid during coronavirus,” Murphy wrote on his Twitter page on Monday.

Foreign ministers of the European Union have urged suspension of the U.S. sanctions against countries, including Iran, in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

Spanish Foreign Minister Arancha Gonzalez Laya told reporters last week 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.

Dane Rowlands, a professor at Carleton University, has said it is “regrettable” that the United States is refusing to ease sanctions on Iran while the country is fighting the coronavirus pandemic.

“The United States can reduce restrictions and facilitate Iran’s access to medicine, however, the government of the United States does not prioritize this issue which is regrettable,” Rowlands told ILNA in an interview published on Monday.

He noted that innocent people are losing their lives in Iran due to lack of access to medicine resulting from U.S. sanctions.

On March 31, a UN human rights expert called

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”.

In a letter to the G-20 economic powers on March 24, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for rolling back international sanctions regimes around the world.

Guterres said sanctions are heightening the health risks for millions of people and weakening the global effort to contain the spread of the new coronavirus, Foreign Policy reported.

“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,” he said.

“Let us remember that we are only as strong as the weakest health system in our interconnected world,” the UN chief said.

Michelle Bachelet, the UN high commissioner for human rights, also said on March 24 that “in a context of global pandemic, impeding medical efforts in one country heightens the risk for all of us.”

“At this crucial time, both for global public health reasons, and to support the rights and lives of millions of people in these countries, sectoral sanctions should be eased or suspended,” she said in a statement.

## Iran worried about health of Palestinian prisoners: Judiciary chief

**1→** Pointing to the dearth of medical facilities in Palestine under the restrictions imposed by Zionists, Raisi described the Israeli regime’s behavior as “crime against humanity”.

He also criticized the silence of international bodies and organizations toward Palestine’s situation and the cruelty of the Israeli regime, in particular under the conditions that the deadly coronavirus is a big threat to the lives of Palestinians.

He, elsewhere, addressed the assassination of top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani by the direct order of U.S. President Donald Trump, saying assassination of the leaders of the Resistance Axis will only lead to further strengthening of the Resistance.

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

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

Soleimani was recognized internationally as a legendary commander in the war against



**“The siege of Gaza shows that the political interest of the oppressive system has priority over human right,” Iran’s top judge says.**

terrorist groups, especially Daesh (ISIS).

For his part, Haniyeh pointed to the re-

marks made by Raisi, saying, “Your special attention to the issue shows the extent of

your knowledge about the issue of Palestine.”

In late March, Haniyeh had expressed sympathy and solidarity with the Iranian nation in the battle with the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

He also denounced the U.S. cruel sanctions against the Iranian nation and stressed the need for the removal of illegal sanctions.

Iran is among the countries hardest hit by the coronavirus. The outbreak has infected more than 68,000 people and killed over 4,200 in Iran.

On April 6, Human Rights Watch (HRW) called on the United States to ease economic sanctions on Iran and expand the licensing of sanctions-exempt items to ensure the country has access to essential humanitarian resources during the pandemic.

President Hassan Rouhani on Monday called for an internationally coordinated fight against the new coronavirus.

“The U.S. administration has not only violated international regulations by imposing illegal sanctions on Iran, but is also breaching health regulations ratified by the World Health Organization in 2005 through its measures under the current circumstances,” Rouhani stated.

## Defense Ministry launches advanced anti-viral face mask production line

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Defense Ministry inaugurated on Thursday a production line for manufacturing ionized face masks which offer better protection against the coronavirus and can be used for up to 50 hours.

The technology used in the production of face masks is home-grown and there are no foreign rivals for the product, Defense Minister Amir Hatami said on the sidelines of the inauguration ceremony.



According to the IRIB, Hatami said the masks come at comparatively low prices and the ministry presently has the capacity to produce 100,000 masks per day, which will be increased up to 500,000 after a month.

On Friday, the Iranian Health Ministry announced that during the past 24 hours, 1,972 COVID-19 cases have been detected across the country. According to the ministry’s spokesperson Kianoush Jahanpour, the total confirmed infections have so far hit 68,192.

Armed Forces, including the Army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, have rushed to the help of government by producing test kits, establishing field hospitals and producing disinfectants.

## Should Iran make a direct plea for sanctions relief?

By Ambassador Gholam-Hossein Dehghani

Against the backdrop of overwhelming international calls for the easing of sanctions that have obstructed Iran’s humanitarian trade, some U.S. officials have claimed that Iran never asked for sanctions relief.

By this, they probably mean a direct plea to the U.S. government to obtain the relief. They even went so far as to blame the entire international campaign as “Iran’s sanctions relief scam.” Is the U.S. government stalling such relief only pending a “direct” request from the Iranian side? Or, could it be a matter of the U.S. administration’s policy within the broader maximum pressure campaign?

To set the context right, my arguments are along the following lines: first and foremost, as a matter of principle, Iran does not recognize the unilateral sanctions of the United States and deems these unilateral coercive measures illegal and a violation of international law.

Consequently, Iran does not adopt a line of action, the underlying logic for which it does not recognize as valid. Further, it appears the maximum pressure campaign set a maximum expectation for the Trump administration too. The Secretary of State’s remarks to the effect that Iran had to listen to the United States, “if they want[ed] their people to eat” is a stark reminder of such expectation. Also, President Trump’s adamant insistence that Iran call them is as telling an example of this mentality. In this light, they will accept nothing short of Iran’s surrender.

Under such circumstances, even the slightest hint would be interpreted in a maximalist light as Iran’s submission. This maximum expectation will no doubt breed disappointment for the U.S. administration. Smart diplomacy is the sum of the many small steps towards confidence-building; the course of action the U.S. has adopted since 8 May 2018 suggests otherwise.

Secondly, Iran is not alone in rejecting the legitimacy of U.S. sanctions. The European Union, for its part, does not recognise the extraterritorial effects of third-party legislation, and forbade the compliance by EU citizens with the extraterritorial effects of certain sanctions that serve the foreign policy objectives of a third country at the expense of the sovereignty of EU member states. Quite recently, the EU “stress[ed] that sanctions should not impede the delivery of essential equipment and supplies necessary to fight the coronavirus and limit its spread worldwide.” In this regard, the EU stands in a good position to prove that it can put its economic interests second to a principled defense of international law.

Last but not the least, COVID-19 is not a national issue; it is not confined to a certain geography, region, nation, culture and so on. It has created a unique moment of global solidarity. The United Nations Secretary-General has called for a global truce in all corners of the world and high-ranking officials of the United Nations have made pleas warning against the ruinous impact of such sanctions on the health systems of the countries that have been stricken by COVID-19, to name but a few. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has warned against the collapse of the health system in countries that have been stricken by the virus and are the target of sanctions. Moreover, the UN Special Rapporteur on the negative impacts of Unilateral Coercive Measures, “urged the international community to take immediate measures to lift, or at least suspend, until our common threat is eliminated.” She expressly called upon sanctioning states to immediately withdraw all the measures that erect barriers to trade “including those which prevent financing the purchase of medicine, medical equipment, food, other essential goods.”

In conclusion, Iran’s strong conviction as to the illegality of the unilateral sanctions, the global rejection of these unilateral coercive measures as against international law and as a tool in furtherance of a third country’s foreign policy agenda at the expense of others’ sovereignty, and the international outcry over the humanitarian impact of sanctions on Iran’s ongoing fight against the virus, beg this question: has the deluge of international demands that U.S. sanctions be lifted fallen on deaf ears only so that they could hear it directly from Iran? Or, is it due to the actual tendency among some of the top U.S. officials to make Iran buckle under the mounting pressure that is at play?

(Source: euronews)

## Amir-Abdollahian urges U.S. to leave banditry, lift sanctions

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Parliament Speaker’s Special Aide for International Affairs Hossein Amir-Abdollahian called on the United States to leave its hawkish policies against the country amid the fight against COVID-19.

“The U.S. and some other pretenders of civilization, instead of lifting the sanctions, have maximized the sanctions and turned into the bandits of face masks and coronavirus test kits across the world,” Amir-Abdollahian wrote in a tweet on Thursday.

While the Islamic Republic is battling the fast-spreading outbreak, the Trump administration refuses to ease up its “maximum pressure” campaign against Iran, which

were reinstated in 2018 after President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the landmark nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers.

Moreover, the U.S. has been reported to hijack medical supplies in different instances, even from its global allies. Germany has accused Washington of redirecting three million Germany-bound masks for its own use, in a move condemned as “modern piracy”. France has also said while the regional leaders are struggling to secure medical supplies as American buyers outbid them.

Amir-Abdollahian also lauded China’s efforts in containing the disease and expressed gratitude to the East Asian country’s humanitarian aids to Iran.





## Monthly consumption of CNG falls 15%

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Monthly consumption of compressed natural gas (CNG) has dropped 15 percent in Iran during the last month of the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19) from its preceding month, IRNA reported.



In General, CNG consumption has increased in Iran after the implementation of the gasoline rationing scheme in mid-November 2019, when the government increased fuel prices as it plans to use the revenue for supporting underprivileged families.

Later that month, Hassan Qolipour, the head of the CNG promotion program at National Iranian Oil Product Distribution Company (NIOPODC) announced that CNG consumption in the country had increased by 10 percent only two weeks after the beginning of the program.

Mohammad Baqer Nobakht, head of the Planning and Budget Organization (PBO), said on November 12 that proceeds from the price hikes would be used to fund additional subsidies for 18 million underprivileged families, or about 60 million people.

There are currently 2,400 CNG stations across Iran and more than 2,478 compressors are installed in the country's CNG stations, Qolipour announced in February.

## Coronavirus: Worst economic crisis since 1930s depression, IMF says

The coronavirus pandemic will turn global economic growth "sharply negative" this year, the head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has warned.

Kristalina Georgieva said the world faced the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

She forecast that 2021 would only see a partial recovery.

Lockdowns imposed by governments have forced many companies to close and lay off staff.

Earlier this week, a UN study said 81% of the world's workforce of 3.3 billion people had had their place of work fully or partly closed because of the outbreak.

Ms. Georgieva, the IMF's managing director, made her bleak assessment in remarks ahead of next week's IMF and World Bank Spring Meetings.

Emerging markets and developing countries would be the hardest hit, she said, requiring hundreds of billions of dollars in foreign aid. "Just three months ago, we expected positive per capita income growth in over 160 of our member countries in 2020," she said.

"Today, that number has been turned on its head: we now project that over 170 countries will experience negative per capita income growth this year."

She added: "In fact, we anticipate the worst economic fallout since the Great Depression."

Ms. Georgieva said that if the pandemic eased in the second half of 2020, the IMF expected to see a partial recovery next year. But she cautioned that the situation could also worsen.

"I stress there is tremendous uncertainty about the outlook. It could get worse depending on many variable factors, including the duration of the pandemic," she said.

On Thursday, following marathon talks, EU leaders agreed a €500bn (£440bn; \$546bn) economic support package for members of the bloc hit hardest by the lockdown measures.

The European Commission earlier said it aimed to co-ordinate a possible "roadmap" to move away from the restrictive measures.

Earlier this week, the International Labour Organization (ILO), a UN agency, warned that the pandemic posed "the most severe crisis" since World War Two.

It said the outbreak was expected to wipe out 6.7% of working hours across the world during the second quarter of 2020 - the equivalent of 195 million full-time workers losing their jobs.

Last month, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) warned that the global economy would take years to recover.

Secretary general Angel Gurría said that economies were suffering a bigger shock than after the 9/11 terror attacks of 2001 or the 2008 financial crisis.

(Source: BBC)

## China drafts rules to assess banks' lending to smaller firms

China's banking regulator said on Friday it will start monitoring how much support lenders are extending to struggling smaller firms, the latest push to guide more funding into the country's most vulnerable business sector.

Regulators have been trying for years to direct more financing to smaller and private companies at affordable rates, and the severe economic blow from the coronavirus outbreak has added urgency to the efforts.

Banks' lending to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) will be included in an annual assessment to be overseen by the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission (CBIRC), according to a draft guideline released by the regulator.

The guideline requires commercial lenders to lend to SMEs at a pace no lower than the industry lending growth rate, and specified different targets to control the lending rates and bad loan ratio on SME loans based on the size of the bank.

For lenders who fall short of financing SMEs, perform poorly in building up teams or disclosing information in serving smaller firms, the regulator will tighten supervision or carry out reforms to rectify the problem, the CBIRC said. It didn't elaborate what actions it will take.

Beijing's efforts to pump more than 800 billion yuan (\$118 billion) into companies via cheap bank loans to counter the economic impact of the virus outbreak have run into some difficulties, sources told Reuters. These issues include confusing eligibility criteria and different lending standards.

"The CBIRC has publicly urged several times that SME loans be profitable but have a low margin, that means there's still room for state-owned lenders to sacrifice margins in profit to help hitting the lending target towards SMEs," said Sun Binbin, analyst at TF Securities.

(Source: Reuters)

# Gas production, distribution stable in country: NIGC managing director

**ECONOMY**

**TEHRAN**

**d e s k**

**TEHRAN** — The managing director of National Iranian Gas company (NIGC) announced that gas production, transfer and distribution is stable in the country despite coronavirus outbreak, Shana reported.

Making the remarks during a meeting of Health Headquarters of NIGC held at the place of the company, Hasan Montazer Torbati underscored that despite the severe working condition that the virus has created, gas industry's personnel are working hard

to continue this stability.

He expressed hope that through proper management the company could pass this condition successfully.

The official has also said that the country managed to have a stable gas production status despite the sanctions on its energy sector.

While elaborating on the company's performance during the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), Montazer Torbati said, "Sanctions could not impede our gas

production and we had a good condition in gas supply in the past year."

NIGC managing director further noted

that the company will make every endeavor in line with stable gas supply in the current year as well.

## Transferring shares of state-run companies should be expedited: Rouhani

**ECONOMY**

**TEHRAN**

**d e s k**

**TEHRAN** — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani instructed the country's Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejjpasand that the process of divesting state shares should be expedited, IRNA reported.

Rouhani called on Dejjpasand to lay the ground in the stock market for this target rapidly.

Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Ministry has announced that over 29.98 trillion rials (about \$713.8 million) worth of the shares of state-run companies has been transferred to the private sector during the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19, 2020).

Finance and economic affairs minister has previously announced that offering the shares of state-owned companies, which are planned to be privatized, will be sped up.

He has also said that the government should amend its policies and methods of setting the prices and transferring the shares in the process of privatization.

In Iran, implementation of a privatization plan aimed at

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden

on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on the implementation of the general policies of Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors have been hindering the privatization trend in the country, among them, the government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.



# Global oil output cuts held hostage to Mexican standoff

Oil producers in the OPEC+ group, led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, were expected to pressure Mexico on Friday to seal an accord for a collective cut in output of 10 million barrels per day, before asking other nations for a further 5 million bpd of cuts.

The United States has encouraged global cooperation to bolster an oil market that collapsed as the coronavirus pandemic accelerated in March and producers resorted to a price war after failing to agree on how to prop up prices.

Oil prices tumbled on Thursday despite OPEC+ nearing agreement as the lockdowns ordered across the world sucked life out of the global economy, and traders reckoned that even a combined reduction of 15 million bpd would be too little to stabilize the market.

Markets were closed for the Good Friday holiday in major centers. But on Thursday, Brent oil prices, which hit an 18-year low last month, were trading around \$32 a barrel, half their level at the end of 2019.

Following talks on Thursday, OPEC, Russia and other allies outlined plans to cut output by more than a fifth and said they expected the United States and other producers to join in their effort to bolster prices.

In a separate phone call after the meeting, Saudi Arabia's King Salman, U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin reviewed the importance of cooperation between oil producing countries, Saudi state news agency SPA reported.

"Desire was confirmed for coordination of



actions aimed at the stabilization of the global oil trade situation and the mitigation of the negative impact from volatile oil prices on the global economy," the Kremlin said following the call with other producers.

But the group, known as OPEC+, said a final agreement was dependent on Mexico signing up to the pact after it balked at the production cuts it was asked to make.

"I hope (Mexico) comes to see the benefit of this agreement not only for Mexico but for the whole world. This whole agreement is hinging on Mexico agreeing to it," Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told Reuters by telephone.

During the talks, Mexico proposed reducing its oil output by 100,000 barrels per day (bpd) in the next two months, and would reduce output to 1.681 million bpd from 1.781 million bpd reported in March, Energy Minister Rocio Nahle said in a tweet on Thursday. Mexico was being asked to cut by 400,000 bpd.

#### Storage near brimful

OPEC+ documents showed the group plans to collectively cut by 10 million bpd in May to June. All members would reduce output by 23%, with Saudi Arabia and Russia each cutting 2.5 million bpd and Iraq cutting over 1 million bpd.

Those reductions were based on production

levels prevailing earlier though. Saudi Arabia ramped up its output in March after earlier talks to support the oil market failed, and it will now be making a cut of 3.8 million bpd if the accord is reached.

Under the plans, OPEC+ would ease cuts to 8 million bpd from July to December and relax them further to 6 million bpd from January 2021 to April 2022, the documents showed.

The United States, whose output has surged to surpass Saudi and Russian production, was invited to Thursday's OPEC+ talks but it was unclear if it had joined the video conference. Brazil, Norway and Canada were also invited.

Saudi Arabia will expand efforts to support the global oil industry when it hosts an extraordinary meeting by video conference at 1200 GMT on Friday for energy ministers from the Group of 20 major economies.

Prince Abdulaziz said he expects that other producers will join in the global effort to reduce oil supply to stabilize oil markets, but said: "They will do it in their own way."

Goldman Sachs doubted whether the cuts being discussed would be enough to offset slumping consumption, estimating that the coronavirus would slash demand by 19 million bpd in April-May.

Analysts at the U.S. investment bank said: "Such cuts, if agreed upon tomorrow, would still be too little and too late to prevent a decline in prices in coming weeks as storage capacity becomes saturated."

(Source: Reuters)

## BP's U.S. refineries cut run rates as demand crumbles

Limited storage for refined products has forced BP to cut the refinery rates at its three largest refineries in the United States to 80-85 percent as fuel demand is crumbling amid lockdowns and stay-at-home orders, Reuters reported on Thursday, quoting sources with knowledge of the refinery operations.

Sources told Reuters last week that BP has reduced refinery run rates at its 430,000-bpd refinery in Whiting, Indiana, the 242,000-bpd Cherry Point, Washington, refinery, and the 155,000-bpd in Toledo, Ohio, refinery, due to low demand from U.S. consumers.

Oil majors began to reduce refinery run rates across the U.S. at the end of March when states began to take measures to flatten the curve for the number of coronavirus cases. U.S. oil supermajor ExxonMobil has reduced the run rates at its second-largest refinery in the United States, Baton Rouge in Louisiana, after slumping fuel demand filled storage tanks, sources with knowledge of the operations at the 502,500-bpd refinery told Reuters last month.

Despite the low gasoline prices, demand for fuel in the United States, and across the world, is taking a major hit as people are asked or ordered to stay at home as countries grapple with the spread of the



coronavirus pandemic. Oil demand in the United States is set to tumble over the following weeks, as cities are under lockdown, non-essential businesses and services are closed, and people are asked to work from home wherever possible.

Meanwhile, gasoline inventories in the United States continue to climb, along with crude oil inventory builds. During the latest reporting week, to April 3, U.S. oil inventories swelled by 15.2 million barrels, the EIA said on Wednesday, a week after reporting the largest oil inventory build since 2016. The EIA also reported gasoline inventories had increased by 10.5 million barrels and distillate fuel inventories had added 476,000 barrels. This compared with a gasoline inventory increase of 7.5 million barrels for the previous week and a distillate fuel inventory fall of 2.2 million barrels.

(Source: oilprice.com)

## Renewables reach 52 percent share in Germany's gross power consumption for Q1

Electricity from renewable energy sources met 52 percent of Germany's gross electricity demand in the first quarter of 2020 thanks to a wind generation record in February, a lot of sunshine in March and a slight decline in power consumption.

This is according to preliminary calculations by the Center for Solar Energy and Hydrogen Research Baden-Württemberg (ZSW) and the German Association of Energy and Water Industries (BDEW). These show electricity demand in the quarter stood at 148 billion kWh, down from 151 billion kWh in January-March 2019. The decline was due to a comparatively weak economy and lower industrial production in the last week of March because of the coronavirus outbreak and the efforts to contain it.

Onshore wind produced almost 43 billion kWh of power between January and March, enough to meet 29 percent of demand. When 9 billion kWh of offshore wind output are added to the calculation, wind's share reaches 35 percent.

Solar photovoltaic (PV) parks produced 7 billion kWh, biomass plants generated 11 billion kWh, and 5 billion kWh came from hydropower plants (HPPs). The total renewables generation of 77 billion kWh for the quarter also includes energy from



waste and geothermal plants.

"The record figures stand in sharp contrast to the dramatic situation in the current expansion of wind and PV systems: If the obstacles and caps are not removed quickly, the 65 percent target by 2030 will hardly be achievable," BDEW head Kerstin Andreae said.

Power generation by conventional energy sources stood at 81 billion kWh in the three months, down from 101.9 billion kWh in the same period of 2019. This drop can be attributed to the closure of some conventional capacities last year and the fact that renewable energy is fed with priority.

Gross electricity generation in Germany for the first quarter was 158 billion kWh, down by 7 percent from a year earlier. The share of renewables here is 49 percent.

(Source: renewablesnow.com)

## Occidental seeking federal lifeline for U.S. oil industry

Occidental Petroleum Corp. wants U.S. government financial aid for the oil industry even as the biggest producer of Permian Basin crude urges Texas regulators not to interfere with market forces.

In a sign of how important the appeal is to Chief Executive Officer Vicki Hollub, employees are being urged to send a pre-written wish list to Congress members. Among other things, the company wants the government to "provide liquidity to the energy industry through this period of unprecedented demand destruction and unsustainable pricing until normal economic conditions return."

The letter, linked in an internal email dated April 7 and seen by Bloomberg News, also encourages the Trump administration to negotiate with Saudi Arabia and end the kingdom's price war with Russia. Lawmakers are asked to advocate for fair access for U.S. crude to Asian markets and to support buying oil for the nation's Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

A representative for Occidental declined to comment.

The email was sent the same day that Occidental appealed to the Texas Railroad Commission to reject mandated production cuts. Occidental said output caps, which have been strongly supported by some of the company's smaller Permian rivals,



would be "extremely short-sighted" and would interfere with contractual obligations.

#### Resolve itself

"It is Occidental's position that the surge in the supply of oil coupled with the decline in oil demand will resolve itself without state regulatory interference," the company told the Railroad Commission, the state's primary oil regulator.

The commission is set to hold a meeting next week to consider what would be the first production curtailments in

almost half a century.

Occidental's stock has been hit especially hard in the wake of crude's historic meltdown as the coronavirus outbreak crushes demand and Saudi Arabia floods crude markets as part of a market-share battle with Russia.

Hollub has faced criticism over her decision last year to amass debt in order to beat Chevron Corp. in a bidding war for Anadarko Petroleum Corp. Occidental has seen its bonds fall to junk and has recently replaced its chief financial officer.

She joined other oil executives in a meeting last week with President Donald Trump. Prior to the gathering, there had been some expectation that Trump could bolster the chances of a deal between OPEC and its allies by committing the U.S. to some sort of supply curtailments. But the meeting ended without any public declaration of a plan to cut domestic output, with Trump saying it's a free market and up to Saudi Arabia and Russia to solve their dispute.

"This letter lists the steps our government needs to take immediately," Hollub said in the email to employees. "Now more than ever, we all need to inform our elected officials that inaction could result in long-lasting harm to the U.S. economy."

(Source: Bloomberg)

## Oil Could Fall Back To \$20

Oil demand is set to plunge by as much as 27 million barrels per day (mb/d) in April, a decline larger than anything that has occurred in the history of oil.

The decline in demand could cause inventories to fill up, enforcing substantial curtailments by refineries and shut ins at oil wells, according to a new report from Rystad Energy. The hit to demand will "last longer" than previously expected, as more countries impose lockdown orders while "the spread of the virus will resist restrictions more than we first expected," the firm said. Rystad sees a demand hit of around 20 million barrels per day (mb/d) in May and more than 15 mb/d in June. Demand growth remains negative for the duration of 2020.

New data from India shows that oil demand

has plunged by 70 percent as the country has gone into lockdown.

Meanwhile, in the U.S., gasoline demand fell to 5 mb/d in the U.S. for the week ending on April 3, down from 9.6 mb/d three weeks earlier.

The collapse of demand and prices has quickly translated into supply cuts. Refining runs fell to 13.63 mb/d on April 3, down 2.2 mb/d in two weeks. Crude oil inventories jumped. Despite the sharp cuts at refineries, gasoline stocks also spiked by more than 10 million barrels. Staggering figures all around.

The sudden stop of demand filters back to the wellhead. EIA data shows that U.S. oil production fell 600,000 bpd for the week ending on April 3, "potentially heralding a faster-than-expected price response," as JBC Energy interpreted

the data in a note.

Prices that oil drillers are getting behind the pipeline – that is, not the broader WTI benchmark, but what they may receive in West Texas or North Dakota – have fallen much more sharply than WTI or Brent. Midland discounts have widened to around \$6 per barrel below WTI, according to Morgan Stanley. Bakken oil is now fetching prices as low as \$14 per barrel.

Pipelines are clogged with oil, so drillers have nowhere to sell. "In response to low prices and potential loss of flow assurance, we expect producers will begin to shut-in currently producing wells over the coming weeks," Morgan Stanley wrote in a note. "Legacy production from older wells appears most at risk, where we expect costs are higher than these basin

averages."

A lot of hope from the U.S. industry has been pinned on OPEC+ cuts. At the time of this writing, an OPEC+ deal was coming together, with reports suggesting somewhere around 10 mb/d, although the exact duration and terms of the cuts remains unclear.

Regardless, output declines – top-down mandated or not – are in the offing. Several analysts say that even a historic OPEC+ cut won't be enough. "At best, the production cuts that are being considered could somewhat soften the blow of this slump in demand," Commerzbank wrote on Thursday. "Thus the oil price faces considerable downside risks following today's video conference."

(Source: oilprice.com)

## Asian buyers see some support from OPEC+ cut; poor demand to shape broader trend

Major Asian crude oil buyers expect OPEC's latest move to slash supply to help put a floor on oil prices, but tepid Asian demand fundamentals amid the coronavirus outbreak will likely continue dictating the broader market trend as oil product margins remain poor.

OPEC and its allies announced a conditional agreement to claw back 10 million bpd of crude production under political and financial pressure, to try and stem a bruising rout in oil prices caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Under the proposed deal, which is subject to Mexico's consent, the 10 million bpd OPEC+ cut would cover May and June. The cuts would then be rolled back to 8 million bpd for the rest of 2020, and then down to 6 million bpd for all of 2021 through April 2022.

Leaders of the coalition Saudi Arabia and Russia will pick up the pieces Friday at a G20 energy ministerial meeting, as they hope to convince Mexico to rejoin the OPEC+ flock in what would be the largest coordinated production cut in history.

#### Insufficient cut

"In the short run, a 10 million bpd cut is not sufficient to balance the market," said Alex Yap, senior analyst with S&P Global Platts Analytics. "This means we will run very close to maxing out storage capacity and further cuts from other non OPEC+ producers will be necessary."



In Asia, market participants said that a 10 million bpd production cut would not be sufficient to balance the regional market amid the ongoing demand destruction from COVID-19.

A trader with a Chinese independent refinery said the current crude price level reflects an expectation of a cut of 10 million bpd.

Similarly, a Japanese refiner said that the coordinated production cut of 10 million bpd is not enough to balance the oil market in the face of sharp declines in demand.

NYMEX May WTI settled down \$2.33 at \$22.76/b Thursday while ICE June Brent slipped \$1.36 to \$31.48/b, furthering the spread between the two crude grades.

#### Demand destruction

Industry officials and refinery sources across major Asian consumers said the broader market will likely remain highly sensitive to demand destruction rather than supply fundamentals, at least over the short- and medium-term horizon.

"The OPEC+ move would help support outright prices to some extent but demand destruction would continue to dictate the broader market trend. Big Asian consumers are buying much less with economic activities slowing down ever so rapidly due to the pandemic," a Seoul-based Korea Petroleum Association official said.

A Singapore-based Chinese trader with a state-owned oil company said "the problem is demand, which cannot be solved by cutting supply. Fundamental is bad, a cut can only avoid it getting worse."

South Korea's crude imports tumbled to 86.3 million barrels in February, down 12 percent on the year, latest data from state-run Korea National Oil Corp. showed.

Japan imported 2.87 million bpd of crude in February, down 7.1 percent on the year, according to latest data from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

China's refined oil product consumption over January-February slumped year on year amid the coronavirus outbreak. According to the latest National Development and Reform Commission data, oil product demand in Asia's biggest energy consumer over the first two months of 2020 dropped 14.1 percent year on year to 41.94 million metric tons (mt).

With the number of fresh COVID-19 cases plateauing in China, the country's economic activity has started to resume to support fragile domestic demand.

In a sign of demand recovery, China's planned crude run in April recovered to about 12.5 million bpd, taking nearly two months to reach about 90 percent of the level in January after falling by about 3.3 million bpd in February, a Platts survey showed.

#### Middle East OSPs

Asia's lackluster crude oil and fuel demand will likely encourage major Middle Eastern producers to keep their official selling prices attractive, multiple trade sources and refinery officials told Platts.

While the OPEC+ cuts could shore up prices temporarily, weak oil product cracks, record-low physical market structure and declining refinery run rates across Asia would limit any upside to benchmark prices and OSPs, said a trading desk manager at GS Caltex based in Seoul.

Crude buyers in Asia expect heavy cuts to OSPs from producers such as Saudi Aramco, Kuwait Petroleum and others for May-loading cargoes, they told Platts.

"We need to see a cut back in production as spoken about by producers and in Asia we need to see the big OSP cuts as well," a trader said Thursday ahead of the OPEC+ meeting. Asian oil product crack spreads weakened to record lows this week, a trend that will likely lead to many Middle Eastern crude producers refraining from hiking their monthly OSPs despite the production cut plans.

The FOB Singapore 92 RON gasoline crack against front-month ICE Brent crude futures was assessed at minus \$10.74/b at the 0830 GMT close of Asian trade Tuesday, marking the lowest level since S&P Global Platts began publishing crack spread data in 2007.

Amid the negative key product cracks and sluggish regional demand, refiners in Asia are increasingly cutting runs. Japan's crude throughput fell 3.3 percent week on week to 2.72 million bpd over March 29-April 4, the Petroleum Association of Japan said. The volume was the lowest in 24 weeks and was last lower at 2.68 million bpd over October 13-19 last year.

(Source: Platts)

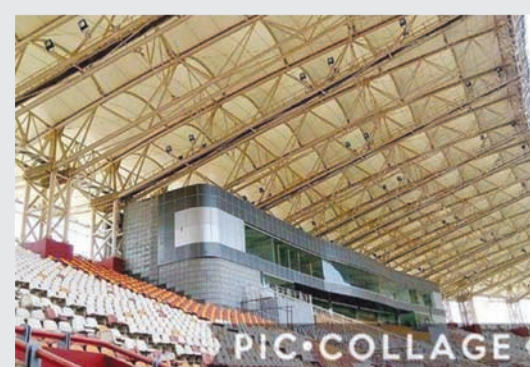


**TEHRAN TIMES**

Iran's Leading International Daily

**Advertising Dept****Tel: 021 - 430 51 450****times1979@gmail.com****tehrantimesdaily****tehrantimes79**

## Modern Stadium of Martyrs of Khuzestan Football Club (KSC)



Catch up with the latest news in Iran and beyond with

**Mehr News English**

English page of Mehr News provides you  
with great opportunity to advertise.

**Get in touch**  
**www.mehrnews.com**

**en.mehrnews.com****@Mehrnewscom**



# COVID-19 pandemic threatening Rohingya Muslims in crowded refugee camps

Confirmed coronavirus cases in Cox's Bazaar, a city in southeastern Bangladesh, have disclosed that how weak healthcare measures in refugee camps have failed to protect Rohingya Muslims.

It should be noted that for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, their lives have already been in limbo for years let alone nowadays that the novel coronavirus has infected over one million people and killed over 70,000 worldwide.

An analysis by the FNA has reviewed different aspects of the COVID-19 impacts on the Muslim community in the camps.

The analysis reads that the virus has hit the US the hardest, killing thousands. US stockpiles of emergency medical gear are almost depleted as hospitals need millions more masks and protective equipment.

This is while Italy, Germany and many other countries in the West are prolonging their lockdowns to stop the spread of virus.

These are supposed to be modern and developed countries, and they have all failed to contain the virus with all that money and advanced equipment. Imagine those Rohingya Muslim refugees who have no country and no place to seek treatment.

There are at least one million Rohingya refugees, half of whom are children. They have been sheltering in camps in Cox's Bazar since August 2017, when they were forced to flee their homes in the face of horrific violence.

For almost three years, Rohingya refugees have tried to go home and resume normal life. They want their children to go to school and for families separated by the conflict to be reunited. So far, international attempts to hold Myanmar accountable for crimes against the Rohingya and improve conditions in Rakhine state have failed. In short, it will be years until the Rohingya see justice, if at all.

As global life grinds to a halt in a bid to contain the coronavirus, the world must remember that for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, their lives have already been in limbo for years; it is their status quo, and it will not end with the containment of coronavirus.

If there is one lesson for refugees that the



world must take away from this crisis - it must be that refugee camps, and a life in limbo, should never be considered an acceptable long-term solution. The United Nations must challenge perceptions that because the Rohingya escaped Myanmar with their lives, they are safe.

The coronavirus is a warning that there is not endless time to resolve the issues in Myanmar that would finally allow the Rohingya to return home. While the people and government of Bangladesh have generously continued to shelter the Rohingya for years, life in the camps is not safe.

The world is now witnessing the impact that coronavirus is having in communities that can exercise social distancing, wash hands and have access to strong healthcare systems, yet this virus has still brought them to their knees. In the densely packed camps of Cox's Bazar, options of social distancing or self-isolation are remote, with many refugees living in cramped conditions in makeshift shelters.

The government of Bangladesh and humanitarian agencies have sprung into action. Rohingya refugees are included in

the national plan to respond to COVID-19, food distribution agencies are developing new ways to distribute food that minimizes close person to person contact. Rohingya volunteers are mobilizing throughout the camps to spread hygiene that will protect their families and loved ones.

This is a necessary step to ensure they are reducing the chances of transmission and minimizing the impact of this disease on the Rohingya community, but this is not enough.

The United Nations and aid agencies should work with Bangladesh and Rohingya refugees to protect them from COVID-19. The fact remains, Rohingya children should not be living in these camps. They should not have to fight a global pandemic with the bare minimum needed to survive. They should be at home.

At a time when there are more displaced people around the world than ever before - the coronavirus has exposed how global systems fail the most vulnerable. The global mechanisms for accountability and the protection of human rights have failed the Rohingya so far - it is absolutely essential that the world does not fail them again.

This is a global pandemic and the virus

is now hitting the most vulnerable communities. The world must come together. Only a global response will stop the spread of the virus in the camps.

This means the international community must step up to offer medical support, testing kits, share data and provide much needed funding to support the response. The world community should also end the Rohingya refugee crisis. These desperate people shouldn't end up paying the heaviest price, the FNA article concluded.

In the meantime, in a report published in The Daily Star, the World Health Organization (WHO) spokesperson in Bangladesh warned that refugees were more at risk of infection from communicable diseases because they live in overcrowded camps and settlements.

This risk is evident in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar, which hosts around 1.1 million Rohingya refugees. In fact, Kutupalong alone is home to over 630,000 people and is considered to be the world's largest refugee camp.

This population density, which is often coupled with unsanitary conditions, should not be taken lightly now that we are faced with a global pandemic.

While the steps taken so far to protect the Rohingya population are commendable - such as restricting entry into the camps and mobilizing Rohingya community leaders to spread awareness on basic hygiene - there is still more that can be done.

According to the authorities, aid workers (especially foreigners) are being discouraged to go to the camps, but given that coronavirus has most certainly infected Bangladeshis and we are still unaware of how far it has spread, it is imperative that law enforcement officials and locals working with camp authorities, who are constantly coming and going from the camps, be monitored as well.

These restrictions must be implemented in a balanced manner, especially to ensure that camp in-habitants are able to receive crucial healthcare related services.

The UNHCR has also said that coronavirus suspects at the refugee camps would be kept in temporary isolated areas until they are referred to pre-identified isolation units.

## Why Blacks' death toll is higher than Whites' in face of COVID-19 outbreak in U.S.?

High possibility of discrimination in rendering healthcare services, especially testing, as well as a reality that much more Blacks live hand-to-mouth than Whites, can be the main reasons behind high death toll of Black Americans and other communities of color infected by coronavirus in the U.S., a scientific issues editor claimed.

Liz Cooney, who serves as an editor of STAT Plus and science writer at Harvard Medical School and the Broad Institute of Harvard, wrote in her analytic article published by 'Black Agenda Report' that the feds don't keep racial data on the coronavirus, but local reports show Blacks are dying at multiple the rates of whites in some cities.

"African Americans in many large cities began to practice social distancing behavior much later than whites, largely due to the fact [whites] could stay at home to work," she quoted a medicine physician as saying.

Stark statistics are coming to light only now and only in piecemeal fashion showing that African Americans are disproportionately affected by Covid-19. The racial divide in who gets infected, who gets tested, and who dies from Covid-19 is emerging from the few cities and states whose data are public.

African Americans in Illinois, for example, accounted for 29% of confirmed cases and 41% of deaths as of April 6, yet they make up only 15% of the state's population, according to the Illinois Department of Public Health, one of just a handful of government agencies sharing information on who is hardest hit by the virus. Michigan mirrors Illinois, with 34% of Covid-19 cases and 40% of deaths striking African Americans, even though only 14% of Michigan's population is African American.

The story is similar in Wisconsin, where ProPublica first reported that African Americans number nearly half of the 941 cases in Milwaukee County and 81% of its 27 deaths while the population is 26% African American. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention distributes data on age, gender, and location of Covid-19 patients but not their race or ethnicity. The CDC did not respond to a request for comment made on April 6, but on April 7 CDC spokesman Scott Pauley pointed to information sent to the agency from public health departments around the country.

"Unfortunately, case report forms are often missing important data, including race and ethnicity. To address this and other data gaps, supplementary surveillance systems are being stood up to better capture ethnicity and race data, as well as other key demographic or clinical information."

"African Americans in Illinois, accounted for 29% of confirmed cases and 41% of deaths, yet they make up only 15% of the state's population."

CDC's current posture has set off challenges from legal and medical professionals to release that data so



resources can be better allocated to the people who need them the most.

The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and nearly 400 medical professionals have demanded that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services release daily racial and ethnic demographic data on Covid-19 tests, cases, and outcomes. They cited both the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Affordable Care Act, which prohibit discrimination in health care services. The absence of data amounts to denial of appropriate care, the group argues.

"We are deeply concerned that African American communities are being hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, and that racial bias may be impacting the access they receive to testing and healthcare," Kristen Clarke, president and executive director of the committee, said in a conference call with reporters on April 6.

The grim reality reflected in those limited statistics fits with longstanding research on the social determinants of health as well as the very specific risk factors that come into play for the spread of the coronavirus.

"Racial bias may be impacting the access Blacks receive to testing and healthcare.

Lisa Cooper, an internal medicine physician and a professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, said she'd have to speculate, given the dearth of data, but she listed multiple reasons why as a group African Americans of lower income are more likely to become ill: People working for an hourly wage don't have the luxury of being able to shelter at home or the means to buy two weeks' worth of healthy food. They may work in jobs deemed essential, such as in public transportation, public safety, or health care. If they quit, they would lose their health insurance, if they have it, and access to health care. If they continue working, they risk exposure to the coronavirus. And they are more likely to have diabetes,

high blood pressure, or asthma, chronic conditions that put them at higher risk for more serious Covid-19 illness.

"African Americans in many large cities began to practice social distancing behavior much later than whites, largely due to the fact [whites] could stay at home to work," Cooper told STAT.

Like dominoes, one risk factor topples into another, said Brian Williams, a trauma surgeon, intensive care doctor, and associate professor at University of Chicago Medicine. He was shocked when he learned that in his city, 70% of the people who died from the virus were African American, according to data analyzed by WBEZ.

"I'm disheartened because the disparity is so great and I wish I could do more, although I'm a doctor with a certain skill set that is useful right now," he said in an interview. "I wish I could do a lot more."

If there were more complete information, more could be done to help people who are sick and stanch the spread of disease, he said.

"People working for an hourly wage don't have the luxury of being able to shelter at home or the means to buy two weeks' worth of healthy food."

"We need to have a demographic breakdown of who will be impacted and how we as a health care system can deploy all our resources and personnel in the most efficient and effective manner to ensure the safety and well-being of the entire American public," Williams said. "Now we're flying blind because we don't know."

That racial and ethnic demographic data are being collected — it's just not being reported out to the public, said Uché Blackstock, an emergency physician in Brooklyn, N.Y. "I think it speaks to just how broken our system is," she said. "We actually have the data in our city. All of the electronic medical records systems collect racial and ethnic demographic data. It's a matter of getting our Department of Health to disclose what that data shows."

Williams is looking beyond the current crisis, beyond the surge of patients he fears is still coming.

"This affects all of us, either directly or indirectly," he said before returning to the ICU. "And when the pandemic is over, our recovery plan should be one of unity in order to rebuild a better society that recognizes the shared humanity of everyone living within our borders."

As of April 9, number of people infected with the novel coronavirus around the world reached 1,533,897, according to the data released by coronavirus research centers.

Death toll was over 89,000.

More than 337,000 patients had recovered.

The U.S. was leading in the world in terms of the largest number of infected people (435,160 confirmed cases). 14,797 deaths were reported as of April 9.

unjust measures that don't comply with international norms and rules show that such figures and entities act independently based on human principles.

The independent moves by the prominent figures, organizations and countries condemning the unacceptable nature of the Trump administration's approach is hailed not only by world public opinion and freedom seekers but also by Iranian nation struggling to fight the pandemic.

## How long will coronavirus lockdowns, travel bans last?

By Zaheena Rasheed

At the stroke of midnight on Wednesday, the skies above China's Wuhan brightened as towers along both sides of the Yangtze River lit up in tribute to the health workers who helped the city of 11 million curb a deadly outbreak of the new coronavirus.

Cheers of "My Wuhan is back" and "Wuhan, let's go" rang out on the embankments as bridges and highways opened up for the first time in 76 days, allowing people to leave the industrial hub and epicentre of China's coronavirus epidemic.

Beijing sealed off Wuhan on January 23, confining millions to their homes in an unprecedented bid to contain the virus, officially known as SARS-CoV-2 and first detected among workers at a seafood market in the city.

At the time, many saw the quarantine as an extreme and draconian measure. But as the virus spread across the globe - infecting more than 1.6 million people, killing more than 95,000 and overwhelming healthcare systems in some of the world's most developed nations - other governments also followed suit, imposing extraordinary curbs on movement and social contact.

Now Wuhan's reopening is offering hope to billions of people chafing under lockdowns, wondering when life will return to a semblance of normality.

Officials and experts are urging caution, however.

"China has brought the situation under control. But that may be just for now," said Yanzhong Huang, senior fellow for global health at the US-based Council on Foreign Relations. "There is a real risk of resurgence of cases. For two reasons - the prevalence of asymptomatic people who might spread the disease without knowing they are sick, and the threat from imported cases."

"Chinese scientists and decision-makers have no idea of the size of asymptomatic carriers and to what extent they pose a danger to the population in the country. The threat of imported cases is also a concern given that most people in China have not been exposed to the virus and therefore, are yet to build immunity to it."

With a vaccine at least a year away, the world faces an "uphill battle", said Huang, explaining that any one country or region's success in containing the disease was shaky so long as the pathogen continues to sicken people elsewhere.

In just three months, SARS-CoV-2 has reached 184 countries and territories and, although the virus emerged in mainland China, Beijing now ranks fifth among countries with confirmed cases, reporting more than 82,000 cases, including more than 1,000 asymptomatic cases and 3,000 deaths. Italy has the highest number of fatalities among affected countries, recording more than 18,000 deaths, while the US has the most number of infections with more than 460,000 cases and 16,000 deaths.

"You cannot claim the pandemic is over until all countries can say they are virus-free," Huang said.

That portends a long period of intermittent lockdowns for the world, with governments tightening and easing controls as infections surge and fall, as well as continued restrictions on international travel, until a vaccine is found or enough of the world's population develop immunity through infection, a concept known as herd immunity. This all presumes that SARS-CoV-2 remains stable without significant mutations that may make it more virulent.

Scientists say the public health threat the virus represents is the most serious seen in a respiratory virus since the 1918 influenza pandemic, in which as many as 100 million people died across the world.

Known as the Spanish Flu, the disease hit in three waves said John M Barry, a historian who studied the 1918 pandemic.

## Saudi Army gains nothing but failure in Yemen war

**1 →** He continued that developments in missile defense systems which, according to the Yemeni armed forces, have been effective against some Saudi air strikes, coupled with more pre-emptive cross-border operations targeting Saudi military and economic interests are likely to change the direction of the war.

"The Saudis know that the stakes are high in Marib, and losing it would be the end of the Saudi ground war against the Houthi-Yemeni army forces, which is why there have been fierce counterattacks, especially in Al-Jawf, which until recently had been in the hands of pro-Hadi fighters for the past five years. The province not only shares a border with Saudi Arabia, but the region is also rich in natural resources. Decades of Saudi policy, though, have ensured that Yemen has remained poor and unable to exploit its own oil reserves fully," he pointed out.

"It is clear that the so-called Riyadh Agreement has failed to prompt a concerted effort among Saudi and UAE proxies to set aside their political differences and refocus their attention on the Houthis in the north. Clashes between the Saudi-backed Islah militia forces and those aligned with the UAE-supported separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) are now routine, and have intensified in recent days in the southern port city of Aden," Ahmed underscored.

The Sanaa-based government has made it clear that it will confront the coalition and its mercenaries in the country's south and east..

Having control of most of the population and the capital Sanaa; having a lot of the Yemeni military, including the Republican Guards, on their side; and with potential access and control of Yemen's resources, the Houthi-aligned National Salvation Government (NSG) may finally get international recognition.

In light of the Houthi forces' strategic advances and superior political resolve, it is thus possible that we will see a political agreement to end the war, if not this year then next. In a promising sign, a leading member of the Supreme Political Council, Mohammed Ali Al-Houthi, tweeted that he welcomed Saudi Arabia's decision to support a ceasefire at the behest of the UN Secretary-General due to the coronavirus pandemic.

It remains to be seen, therefore, how much longer the Saudis will continue their disastrous and illegal intervention in Yemen, especially with the oil war and looming bankruptcy as oil prices fall, not to mention domestic political crises between de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman and his rivals. The Saudis will soon find that they have neither the will nor the wealth to carry on.

## Political independence, opportunities, threats of COVID-19

**1 →** It is obvious that lifting the US sanctions on Iran will result in fewer fatalities in Iran and due to this fact many countries and prominent figures across the world have asked the US administration to lift its sanctions on Tehran amid the coronavirus outbreak.

On April 6, 2020, a bipartisan group of two dozen American and European national security leaders issued a joint statement - organized by the European Leadership Net-

work and the Iran Project, urging the US administration to ease humanitarian trade with Iran in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"As the world grapples with COVID-19 - the disease caused by the novel coronavirus - we must remember that an outbreak anywhere impacts people everywhere. In turn, reaching across borders to save lives is imperative for our own security and must override political differences among governments" the authors wrote including former

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini; four former NATO Secretaries-General; a range of former US officials spanning five Democratic and Republican presidential administrations, and British, French, German, and other European Prime Ministers, Foreign, and Defense Secretaries, Ministers, and Ambassadors.

Such humanitarian moves calling on the US administration to stop its unilateral and



## Tehran exports \$73m of handicrafts in year

**HERITAGE d e s k** **TEHRAN** – Handicrafts exports from Tehran province reached some \$73 million during the previous Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended March 19), ILNA reported.

“In addition to Persian Gulf littoral states, Tehran’s handicrafts were exported to other countries such as Turkey,” said Parham Janfeshan, the provincial tourism chief.



Traditional glassware, kilim carpets, zilou floor coverings, semi-precious stones, and traditional personal ornamentations composed the major share of exports, the official added.

Handicrafts exports from Iran reached some \$146 million during the first nine months of the past Iranian calendar year, while exports amounted to \$289 million in the year 1397 (March 2018-March 2019), according to data announced by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

Dozens of Iranian handicrafts have gained the UNESCO Seal of Excellence during the past couple of years. Some 75 percent of Iranian handicrafts are produced by females, Masoumeh Ebtekar, vice president for women’s and family affairs, said in April 2018.

## Eco-lodge units rise fourfold in South Khorasan within year

**HERITAGE d e s k** **TEHRAN** – The number of eco-lodge units has increased by fourfold in South Khorasan province, eastern Iran, within a year.

“Some 25 eco-lodge [units] existed across the province at the end of the [Iranian year] 1397 (ended March 2019) while the figure has reached 100, eighty of which are operational,” provincial tourism chief Hassan Ramezani said on Wednesday, CHTN reported.



Last December, tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan inaugurated eleven eco-lodges during his visit to the province.

The tourism ministry has set a target to help build 2,000 eco-lodges by 2021, believing such guest houses could cater to sustainable development and job creation in the countryside and rural areas.

“Each eco-lodge unit averagely generates jobs for seven to eight people so that the scheme could create 160,000 jobs,” Mounesan said.

The culturally-diverse country never disappoints visitors when it comes to eco-tourism, sightseeing and even tribal tourism as it is home to many regional people including ones with Turk and Arab elements in addition to the Kurds, Baloch, Bakhtyari, Lurs, and other smaller minorities such as Armenians, Assyrians, Jews, and others.

## Zenithal photography in Iran – 2019

By Franco Zampetti

(part 1/2)

I have been interested in zenithal photography of architectural subjects for many years, in parallel with the activity of architect that I have been exercising since 1980 in Florence, the city where I chose to live for the love of art and architecture of the past.

The idea and the contemporary hope of a trip to Iran was born when I verified the first results of the zenith photo camera that I made twelve years ago; in fact, the zenithal technique allows to synthesize both the planimetric and the perspective view of the space from a single central point.

It is a one-of-a-kind device that allows you to produce photographs free of geometric distortions and with a wider overall view than you could observe with the naked eye; the circular format on a square base is its original feature; all the photos accompanying these short travel notes were taken with this camera.

I knew briefly the most important and prestigious examples of Persian architecture and the desire to be able to reproduce them through the zenithal vision has grown over the years until, by virtue of a series of knowledge and circumstances, I have decided to organize a trip specifically for this purpose.

Not having had the opportunity to visit Iran previously, I started to find out about the access modalities, the logistics necessary to travel and stay, the general and detailed economic conditions, the climate, the usable languages, the accessibility to web services and so on.

Then I compiled a list of places to photograph and assumed information for their accessibility and any particular conditions to be respected; subsequently I identified the best period in terms of climate, temperature and logistics in the second half of April 2019.

Basically I “planned” a trip in total autonomy, discarding the hypothesis of a group trip organized by an agency, given the specific needs of the photographic purpose that I had set myself and that being part of a group I could not satisfy tourists.

This was only possible thanks to Iranian friends and fellow architects, with the support of which it was easy to plan and implement what I had in mind.

*This travelogue has been posted to the Cultural Institute of Iran, which is active for over half a century as a representative of Iranian cultural institutions in Italy.*

# Coronavirus: National Museum of Iran hailed by online visitors

**HERITAGE d e s k** **TEHRAN** – Art-and-history lovers welcomed an initiative launched by the National Museum of Iran to facilitate online visits during the Persian New Year (Noruz) holidays.

The initiative sought to make the best use of the museum during the coronavirus pandemic, which has forced authorities to shut doors of all museums and historical sites across the country.

Some 10,000 people explored centuries-old objects at the National Museum of Iran online IRNA quoted the director of the museum Jebrael Nokandeh as saying on Friday. The museums are arranging to launch virtual tours of its joint exhibitions showcasing loaned objects, he added.

“In today’s world which is moving towards the use of new technologies, many museums around the world have been arranging virtual tours and online visits,” he noted.

“This year, before the start of the [Iranian] new year (on March 20), the National Museum, along with other museums in Tehran, decided to launch new programs: for example, the National Museum welcomed online visitors through “Aparat” [which is an Iranian video sharing service] on the 2nd day of Farvardin (March 21), and this trend continued until the 13th of Farvardin and was welcomed by the visitors.”

Tourism Minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan announced in March that no official celebrations or public gatherings, even the pre-scheduled ones, would be held during the two-week Noruz holidays (started March 20) in a bid to combat the coronavirus outbreak, adding all museums (and historical sites that are affiliated with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts) should be closed during the holidays.

The National Museum of Iran is somewhat chockfull of priceless relics that represent various eras of the country’s rich history. Its structure was completed in 1928 based on the design by French architect André Godard who was also an archaeologist and historian of French and Middle Eastern Art.



An undated photo depicts a man visiting historical objects at the National Museum of Iran in downtown Tehran.

## Tehran virtual tours to become hearing-impaired-friendly

**TOURISM d e s k** **TEHRAN** – The previously-established virtual tours of Tehran will be updated to allow hearing-impaired people better know destinations of the Iranian capital.

“Virtual tours will be produced in such a way that all people could make the best use of them while at home,” Tehran’s deputy tourism chief said on Wednesday, CHTN reported.

“Urban tourism for all should be planned in such a way that people with disabilities could join it, and this trend should be properly observed, both in terms of actual tours and virtual tours,” Morteza Adibzadeh added.

The official noted that hearing-impaired-friendly tours will be available as of the International Day for Monuments and Sites online (May 18).

By illuminating stop-and-go traffic that most of the year dominates downtown Tehran, virtual visitors have at their dis-



posal tours to a rich, matchless patchwork of Iranian history and architecture such as Golestan Palace, Grand Bazaar, Treasury of National Jewels, National Museum of Iran, Glass & Ceramic Museum, Masoudieh Palace, Sarkis Cathedral, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Carpet Museum of Iran, just to name a few.

According to many — and especially the people who are making, facilitating and witnessing people use tours — virtual tours will help ramp up tourism.

Last year, Tehran’s tourism department started a pilot project to make a downtown street more accessible for people with disabilities. The historical stone-paved Si-e Tir street, which is a gateway to several major museums and centuries-old monuments, was subject to the plan introduced by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), aiming to make sure destinations can be enjoyed by all tourists, regardless of their physical, sensory or cognitive abilities.

## Off the beaten track: Iran’s best-kept secrets

By Claire Beyer, Lonely Planet writer

Despite its rich history stretching back thousands of years, Iran still lies off the beaten track for most travelers. The joy of traveling in one of the friendliest nations on the planet is the feeling of its yet-to-be-discovered uniqueness.

Although tourism here is slowly building, for now you may find you have many of Iran’s great wonders all to yourself. Here are a few places to visit before the secret is out.

### ■ Contemplate opulent Armenian art

It’s hard to tire of the tiled magnificence of Iran’s mosques. Just when you think there couldn’t possibly be yet another striking shade of blue, Iran’s talented artists come up with the goods. Without a doubt, visiting the country’s mosques is one of the most alluring aspects for most travelers, but many forget that other cultures have flourished in this region and brought with them equally beautiful artistry.

For some contrast and a lesson in how differing cultural styles can merge beautifully, the Vank Cathedral set within Isfahan’s Armenian quarter is a sumptuous alternative. Although the exterior may not seem too noteworthy, within is a golden world of colorful Persian tiles juxtaposed with Christian iconography. The sometimes gruesome frescos shine vibrantly under the subdued light of hanging chandeliers, and it’s hard not to be affected by the history that created this masterpiece.

### ■ Gallery crawl through Tehran’s arty side

Behind the congested streets and concrete facade of Tehran is a contemporary art scene pushing against the conservatism of much of the rest of the country. As Iran’s most liberal city, artistic expression is alive and well, and amongst the artist enclaves, you could be forgiven in thinking you were in London’s Soho or New York City’s East Village.

Iranian Artists’ House oozes hipster cool, with eight gallery spaces across two levels exhibiting everything from sculpture to painting, installations to multimedia. The Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, housed in one of Tehran’s modernist buildings, has a collection that has caused controversy and heated debate, as the government and clerics argue over art’s moral influence on the community. It has an impressive collection of modernist artists, including works



Gorgeous artwork covers every inch of Vank Cathedral in Isfahan’s Armenian neighborhood (Photo: Izzet Keribar / Getty)

by Jackson Pollock, van Gogh and Matisse.

Outside of the galleries, stories-high street art is starting to appear throughout Tehran’s center. Provocative anti-American graffiti still lines the walls of the long-shuttered U.S. embassy (now open as a museum called the U.S. Den of Espionage), and it’s a surreal and eye-opening experience, though not to everyone’s taste.

### ■ Discover rock-carved tombs of ancient Persian kings

Persepolis tops travelers’ Iran itineraries, and for good reason, but the lesser-known Naqsh-e Rostam rock tombs are just as impressive in their own gargantuan right. Only a short distance from Persepolis, the four royal tombs sit mightily high up rock cliffs with well-preserved reliefs carved into the stone at their base. Sassanian kings march across the rock on horseback showing their strength and engaging candidly with the gods. The feat of chiseling and sculpting these tombs is as astonishing as anything at the site of Persepolis. How the kings were entombed in their sarcophagi high above the ground is still a mystery, with only one tomb displaying a formal inscription, that of Darius the Great, the father of Persepolis’ design and grandeur.

### ■ Walk the closed bazaars of Isfahan

The vast labyrinth of Isfahan’s historic Bazar-e Bozorg is brimming with colorful chaos and will lure even the most resistant of shoppers. There are fabulous handicrafts to be had, but walking its historic lanes and passageways after the stall holders have shut up shop is a wonderfully atmospheric way to experience one of Iran’s greatest attractions.

Most visitors come to bargain and haggle for that perfect Persian rug, but when the shoppers have gone, the arched passageways become a peaceful respite from Isfahan’s busy streets. The bazaars are not cordoned off, so anyone can explore as they please. Shafts of light filter through the ceiling, creating a procession of luminous circular dots that lead you past padlocked grates and metal shutters of closed stalls. A lone caravanserai might greet you as you round a corner, or the quiet may be punctuated by a lone motorcyclist using the lanes as a quick shortcut, but without the din of modern commerce, you can imagine the bazaar as it may have been



Naqsh-e Rostam, a breathtaking sight away from the crowds, lies just outside of Persepolis (Photo: Claire Beyer / Lonely Planet)

centuries before.

### ■ Unearth timeworn Kharanaq

The thousand-year-old crumbling mudbrick village of Kharanaq is as close as you’ll get to a true Indiana Jones moment. Although advertised as a popular day trip from Yazd, there is little evidence that it’s on the tourism radar once there.

Forgotten in time and only an hour’s drive from Yazd, this peaceful deserted town sits serenely within a green valley, its adobe mud rooftops punctuating the skyline like little pottery building blocks. Once within its tall outer walls, the labyrinth of alleys and passageways lead into the room upon room, with Escher-esque mud staircases reaching roofs and on occasion seemingly to lead nowhere at all. Wandering and getting lost is half the fun, and exploring here is often a solitary affair that will teasingly make you believe that you’re the first to uncover its secrets.

### ■ Explore Castle ruins

Narin Castle sits on what is believed to be a 4000-year-old history of civilization, and although its past continues to be studied and remains somewhat unknown, it was used as a port of call for those traveling the Silk Road. The decaying ruin appears to have three levels of construction build progressively over its long history, including evidence of a plumbing system. Perched high on a mound above what is now the town of Meybod, the ruins are an impressive example of sophisticated Sassanian design. Not surprisingly, it’s a little crumbly around the edges and is definitely in need of a little love, but the history behind its decaying mud walls is worthy of veneration. The winding path circumnavigating its three levels teases with panoramic glimpses before you reach the top terrace with sweeping views of the low-lying town. Narin Castle’s dilapidated exterior appears as a simple, unremarkable structure, which totally belies the secrets within, and subsequently doesn’t seem to draw the crowds lured by the kaleidoscope colors of Iran’s mosques. It may or may not have been King Solomon’s abode and might have originally been built as a fire temple, but for now however, Narin Castle holds its secrets tightly within its mighty walls.



Explore the abandoned mudbrick village of Kharanaq (Photo: Claire Beyer / Lonely Planet)



# ICRC to give Iran 500,000 francs to fight coronavirus

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will allocate up to 500 thousand francs to Iran to aid the country in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Barbara Rizzoli, the head of the ICRC delegation in Tehran, made the remarks in a meeting with Karim Hemmati, the head of the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS), in Tehran on April 7, according to the ICRC website.

She added that the ICRC is making efforts to create a financial channel for Iran to receive international humanitarian aid amid its battle against the new coronavirus.

"We understand the serious concerns about the impact of sanctions on the import of medicine and medical equipment into Iran," Rizzoli noted, Press TV reported.

"Basically, the medical supplies should be exempt from sanctions, but sometimes it is difficult to transfer the cost of medicines through bank channels. In this regard, the ICRC is negotiating not only in the regional level, but also in Geneva and with related organizations. And we are looking at all options and we will not miss any solutions," she explained.

Some other organizations and countries have provided Iran with aid to help the country combat the coronavirus.

On April 2, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries Fund for International Development (OFID), provided Iran with \$500,000 to combat COVID-19, according to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance.

Also, the World Health Organization delivered a shipment of emergency medical supplies and medicine to Iran as part of COVID-19 response measures on March 24.

South Korea intends to send a shipment worth \$2 million to Iran to help the country combat the coronavirus. Besides, Russia has sent 50,000 coronavirus diagnostic kits to the Iranian Embassy in Moscow, Iran's Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali announced in March.



Barbara Rizzoli, the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross delegation in Tehran (L), meets with Karim Hemmati, the head of the Iranian Red Crescent Society, in Tehran on April 7.

## China, UNIDO to finance Covid-19 medical waste management project in Iran

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in cooperation with the government of China will jointly finance a project for medical waste management in Iran during the coronavirus outbreak in the country.

The project will cost more than one million euro

which will be totally provided by the UNIDO and China, Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's ambassador to the Vienna-based international organizations, said, Khabaronline reported on Friday.

The project will also include the procurement and supply of advanced equipment, he noted.



## Planting trees in wrong place 'could increase greenhouse gas emissions'

One of the fastest and cheapest ways to counteract the impact of greenhouse gas emissions from human activity on our planet is to plant billions of trees across the world in order to sequester the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Trees absorb carbon dioxide from the air, and forests act as huge stores of carbon.

The UK government's independent advisers, the Natural Capital Committee, recognises that forests may capture "about half of the world's carbon emissions from fossil fuels every year".

The organisation has released a new report, advising Boris Johnson's administration on how using nature based interventions can help the UK reach its target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

One of the key means of doing this will be to plant trees in Britain.

Previous studies have indicated that there are vast areas in the UK suitable for planting millions of trees – not including urban areas or arable farmland.

However, the report cautions against mass tree planting which could cause harm to other critical carbon stores, and instead urges a carefully planned tree planting process, resulting in "the right trees in the right place for the



right reason".

The authors said examples of poor previous decisions in the UK included planting trees into peatlands.

The UK's soggy peatlands store vast quantities of carbon, but planting trees in these ecosystems dries out the soil and can ultimately mean the trees are responsible for releasing more carbon than they sequester.

NCC member Professor Ian Bateman from the University of Exeter, told The Independent: "Planting trees in the right place is an amazing way of storing carbon. If you put the right trees in the right place, it can do a lot of good. But of course the flipside of that is that you can put the wrong trees in the wrong place.

"The capacity of a wetland or peatland to store carbon is limited only by its size and shape. They can store truly tremendous amounts of carbon - far more than you will ever get in a forest.

"The problem is if you take a peatland, where it might look like not an awful lot is going on there - they're fairly flat, and there's a bit of green - what's happening is because of the geology of the place, water just stays there. And if something living falls into water or grows in water then dies and falls over, it's there forever. It doesn't rot. The carbon just builds up and up. The problem with then planting trees on it, is to make them stand up, you have to virtually drain the peatland.

(The Independent)

### ENGLISH IN USE

#### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

## Iran to hold first national online project Olympiad

The first round of online project Olympiad will be held in Iran in the next Iranian calendar year (starting on March 21), Fatemeh Mohajerani, an official with the Ministry of Education has said.

The project Olympiad will focus on special subjects and is very much like Khwarizmi International Award the only difference is that the Olympiad will be carried out online, IRNA news agency quoted Mohajerani as saying on Sunday.

The participants can submit their projects online via a website and a jury will evaluate them, she added.

## اولین المپیاد مجازی برگزار می شود

فاطمه مهاجرانی رئیس مرکز ملی پرورش استعدادهای درخشان و دانش پژوهان جوان گفت: سال آینده اولین المپیاد مجازی با عنوان «المپیاد پروژه ای» برگزار می شود.

فاطمه مهاجرانی روز یکشنبه در گفت و گو با خبرنگار ایرنا اظهار داشت: این المپیاد یک موضوع خاص را به عنوان یک مساله تعریف کرده و به آن می پردازد و در واقع شبیه جشنواره خوارزمی است با این تفاوت که نیازی به حضور افراد نیست بلکه به صورت مجازی برگزار می شود.

وی افزود: شرکت کنندگان و نخبگان از طریق یک پورتال، طرح ها و موضوعات خود را ارسال می کنند تا مورد داوری قرار گیرد.

### PREFIX/SUFFIX

#### “-acy, -acies”

- **Meaning:** a word ending used to form nouns that show condition or state
- **For example:** He passes the ball with unerring accuracy.

### PHRASAL VERB

#### Think something through

- **Meaning:** to think carefully about the possible results of something
- **For example:** The policy has not been thought through properly.

### IDIOM

#### Get over something

- **Explanation:** to begin to feel better after a very upsetting experience
- **For example:** She never got over the death of her son.

## Climate change could trigger sudden losses of world's wildlife: study

**LONDON (REUTERS)** - Climate change could trigger sudden, potentially catastrophic losses of wildlife in regions around the world over the coming decades, and the first waves could already be unfolding, according to a study published on Wednesday (April 8).

With human activity from pollution to habitat destruction putting a million species at risk of extinction, according to a global research effort published a year ago, the new study homed in on the possible impact of rising temperatures.

"We found that climate change risks to biodiversity don't increase gradually," said lead author Alex Pigot of the Centre for Biodiversity & Environment Research at University College London.

"It's not a slippery slope, but a series of cliff edges, hitting different areas at different times," he said.

With governments battling to contain the coronavirus pandemic, campaigners' hopes that a series of landmark summits would turn 2020 into a pivotal "superyear" for galvanising environmental action have faded.

Plans to hold a major wildlife summit in China in October and a UN climate summit in Scotland in November have been pushed back to 2021.

Even as the novel coronavirus has eclipsed the ecological crisis, a series of studies have underscored the risk that seemingly slow-moving processes brought about by climate change could suddenly accelerate, spelling disaster for people and wildlife.

The latest paper, published in Nature, predicts when and where severe disruption to ecosystems could happen this century as the burning of fossil fuels envelops the Earth with more heat-trapping gas.

The study crossed-referenced climate data from 1850 to 2005 with the geographic ranges of 30,652 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and other animals and plants, divided into 100 by 100 kilometre grid squares across the globe.

The authors found that species can often adapt to a certain amount of warming before most members of a given ecosystem are forced out of their comfort zone at about the same threshold.

## Air pollution drops 30% in Northeast U.S. as coronavirus lockdown slows travel: NASA

Across the U.S., air and vehicle traffic has dropped dramatically over the past several weeks as people stay inside and halt their daily routines to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Air pollution has temporarily declined too. The northeastern U.S. has seen atmospheric levels of nitrogen dioxide air pollution drop by 30% in March compared with the same period last year, according to new satellite data from NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center.

It's the lowest monthly atmospheric nitrogen dioxide levels of any March during NASA's satellite data record beginning in 2005.

Nitrogen dioxide levels, which are influenced primarily by car and truck emissions and electricity production, have also declined over major polluting cities such as Seattle, Los Angeles, Atlanta, New York and Chicago.

Los Angeles, the traffic-congested city with some of the highest smog levels in the U.S., saw nitrogen levels drop significantly in the first two weeks of March, according to preliminary data from the European Space Agency's Sentinel-5P. The city's rush-hour traffic basically vanished after schools and businesses closed in March.

And researchers at Columbia University saw carbon monoxide emissions fall more than 50% below normal levels in New York City as a result of a plummet in vehicle traffic.

Nitrogen levels can fluctuate with natural variations in weather conditions, and researchers say that further analysis is needed to quantify the exact impact of the virus shutdown on air pollution levels.

However, scientists warn against celebrating any short-term benefits from the air pollution drop in the U.S. and across the world, since pollution levels will rebound once coronavirus restrictions are lifted.

Scientists also point out that longer-term exposure to air pollution has the biggest impact on people's health and a public health crisis is not a sustainable way to curb pollution.

(Source: CNBC)

## WORDS IN THE NEWS

### Tamil Tigers reject offer

(04 June 2003)

Tamil Tiger rebels have rejected the Sri Lankan government's latest attempt to bring them back to the negotiating table. The Tigers are insisting on an interim administration for the north east of the island, giving them considerable powers. The government has offered a more limited development council.

The Tigers are **adamant** now that the only way out of the current **impasse** is for the Sri Lankan government to give them control of an **interim** administration for the north east. If they're given a **draft** framework for such a body, the rebels say they are willing to resume negotiations.

But the Tigers complain the government's current proposal for a joint development body is just a new bureaucracy created within a system that's failed to deliver. Even the government **concedes rehabilitation** of the conflict areas has been **woefully** slow during the last fifteen months of this peace process and it's led to major disagreement about how best to administer development funds for the **war ravaged** north east. Mistrust now runs so deep that the Tigers have withdrawn from the pledging conference next week in Japan, as well as peace talks. But the head of the government's negotiating team, G L Peiris, said they still expected to secure three billion dollars worth of **pledges** from the international community even with the absence of the Tigers.

#### Words

**adamant:** determined

**impasse:** a difficult situation where progress is impossible

**interim:** temporary

**draft:** an early version of something

**resume:** restart

**concedes:** admits

**rehabilitation:** renewal, improvement

**woefully:** extremely, disappointingly

**war ravaged:** destroyed by the effects of war

**pledges:** promises

(Source: BBC)



## U.S. ready for arms control talks with Russia, China

The United States are ready to participate in arms control talks with Moscow and Beijing, if they meet Washington's criteria, a U.S. Department of State spokesperson told TASS.

"The President has directed us to think more broadly than New START and include both China and Russia in our next steps. We stand ready to engage with both Russia and China on arms control negotiations that meet our criteria," the U.S. Department of State spokesperson said.

"The United States remains committed to effective arms control that advances U.S., Allied, and partner security, is verifiable and enforceable, and includes partners that comply responsibly with their obligations," the spokesperson added.

"The Administration is evaluating the possibility of an extension of the New START Treaty, taking into account the threats we face today, the changing security environment, and Russia's statement that it has no preconditions to extension," the spokesperson said.

According to TASS, another U.S. Department of State spokesperson said that Washington earlier sent an official invitation to Beijing to engage in a strategic dialogue on security issues, while the latest round of consultations with Russia on the matter took place in January.

"The United States held the most recent meeting of the Strategic Security Dialogue in January 2020 with Russia. We proposed one to China, which has not yet accepted," the spokesperson said.

All those statements were made in response to a request to comment on latest remarks by Deputy Chairman of Russia's Security Council Dmitry Medvedev. In his op-ed for TASS, Dmitry Medvedev said Moscow had repeatedly called on extension of the New START treaty to 2021, but the American side "keeps coming up with new obstacles." It seems that Washington is trying "to indulge in endless back-and-forth dialogue and torpedo the prolongation of this document, which is extremely important for maintaining strategic stability in the world," Medvedev said.

## Israel's coronavirus cases top 10,000, with 92 fatalities

The number of identified coronavirus cases in Israel have risen to 10,095 on Friday, a single day increase of 340 infections which is the lowest figure since the beginning of April. The death toll in the country now stands at 92, with 13 people dying in the past 24 hours, the national Health Ministry reported.

According to the healthcare agency, 164 patients are said to be in critical condition with 125 of them put on ventilators, while 1,061 recovered. The number of newly confirmed cases is decreasing for the third day running, TASS reported.

On April 7, the Israeli government tightened the already strict lockdown measures for the first days of Passover (Pesach, major Jewish holiday) to curb coronavirus spread. Between 19:00 (local time) on April 7 and 06:00 on April 10, citizens were banned from leaving their cities and towns. Moreover, people were prohibited from leaving their homes even to buy food between 15:00 on April 8 and 07:00 on April 9.

The first coronavirus case in Israel was reported on February 27 in a citizen returning from Italy. On March 20, the Health Ministry announced that the first coronavirus patient died.

## Mafia buying food for Italy's poor to exert more control: expert

Criminal organizations in Italy are distributing food and ordering interest-free lending to the needy to try to extend their influence, Italian anti-mafia author Roberto Saviano has warned.

Italy's mafia groups are also poised to snatch up struggling businesses as the country -- which is in crisis over the deadly coronavirus pandemic -- awaits European funding to boost its battered economy, he said.

"If Europe doesn't intervene soon the multiplication of mafioso money that's already in Germany, France, Spain, Holland, Belgium will be unrestrained," Saviano told journalists on Thursday.

Saviano, best known for his non-fiction book «Gomorrah» about southern Italy's Camorra clan, is an expert on mafia groups and how they have successfully expanded beyond drugs and other illegal activity to worm their way into otherwise legitimate businesses and sectors across the world, AFP reported.

At the most basic level, criminal organizations are providing groceries for the poorest Italians, Saviano said.

Moreover, in Italy's southern capital Naples, moneylenders, on orders of the Camorra, have cancelled interest on debt, he said.

«For what purpose? For favors," he said.

That could be votes, or allowing someone to put their name on a contract as a front for the mafia, he added.

Saviano, who currently lives in New York, has been under police protection after receiving death threats following the release of «Gomorrah».

## Moscow, Damascus slam U.S. presence for harming sanitary, epidemiological situation in Syria

The unlawful US presence in Syria is the main obstacle to achieving good sanitary-epidemiological conditions in Syrian regions beyond Damascus' control, the coordination headquarters of Russia and Syria said in a joint statement.

"The unlawful presence of the US and their allies on the Syrian Arab Republic's soil is the main obstacle to establishing the proper sanitary-epidemiological wellbeing of Syrian civilians who live in the regions outside government control," the statement says.

The document underscores that the humanitarian issues of the Rukban refugee camp are, according to the international law, the responsibility of the U.S., who illegally occupy this region.

"Russia and Syria have repeatedly called for the prompt evacuation of everyone who chooses to leave the Rukban camp to government-controlled territory, where proper conditions have been established for these people, and where infection control measures are being taken. However, neither the relevant UN bodies, nor the US side, which controls the At-Tanf area, have fulfilled their obligations to rescue the remaining population of the camp, delaying its [the camp's] dismantling under various contrived pretexts," the statement reads.

Both headquarters consider all US demands to the Syrian government, put forth amid the unlawful US sanctions that prevent the restoration of the Syrian health system and shipment of drugs and medical equipment required to fight coronavirus, the pinnacle of hypocrisy.

(Source: TASS)

# Iraq's Saleh tasks PM-designate Kadhim with forming new government

Kadhim: Iraq's national sovereignty is my red line

By staff & agencies

Iraqi President Barham Saleh has officially tasked prime minister-designate Mustafa al-Kadhim with forming a government after the intelligence chief received the endorsement of the majority of the country's top political figures.

The announcement came shortly after predecessor Adnan al-Zurfi announced he was withdrawing his bid in a statement on Thursday after failed to secure enough support to form a government, Press TV reported.

The nomination ceremony was attended by distinguished political figures and dignitaries, indicating widespread support for the 53-year-old Kadhim, which was unprecedented as neither of the two previous prime minister-designates this year had enjoyed such backing.

"I will work tirelessly to present Iraqis with a program and cabinet that will work to serve them, protect their rights and take Iraq towards a prosperous future," Kadhim wrote on his official Twitter page.

### ■ Red line

The newly-designated prime minister has said that the success of Iraq's international relations will be based on "respect and cooperation."

"The country's national sovereignty is the top priority," Mustafa al-Kadhim said, according to a report by Al Sumaria News.

Al-Kadhim stressed that his government will never allow anyone to insult any Iraqi citizen by accusing him/her of being linked to foreigners. He also vowed that the cabinet that he is to form will be at the frontline of defending Iraqis and fighting against the novel coronavirus.

His comments come against the backdrop of the United States' recent suspicious moves in the Arab country.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) deployed new Patriot missile systems to Iraq without informing the Iraqi government, amid calls for the withdrawal of American troops from the Arab country.

In late March, Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) blew the lid off a plot by the U.S. military to carry out massive aerial operations — backed by ground troops — against bases of the elite anti-terror force, which is currently busy



CAP: A handout picture released by the media office of the Iraqi Presidency office on April 9, 2020 shows President Barham Saleh (L) swearing in intelligence chief Mustafa al-Kadhim as new prime minister-designate. (Photo via AFP)

helping the government in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

The U.S. plans to conduct heliborne operations backed up by ground troops and fighter jets against positions belonging to security agencies and positions of Iraq's resistance groups, the PMU anti-terror group Kata'ib Hezbollah said in a statement.

## Syria rejects OPCW report on chemical attacks as misleading, fabricated

Syria has roundly dismissed a recent report by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) about a series of toxic attacks in the country's western Hama region as misleading, and based on fabricated information provided by Takfiri terrorists and the so-called civil defense group, White Helmets.

"The OPCW published on April 8 a report compiled by its Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), whilst Syria and a number of countries have described the team as illegitimate and unconventional," the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates said in a statement carried by the country's official news agency SANA on Thursday.

According to Press TV, the ministry noted that the report contains fake and

fabricated conclusions, and is aimed at falsifying facts and accusing Syrian government forces of using toxic materials in Lataminah town back in March 2017.

It further highlighted that the report relied on sources prepared and fabricated by the Jabhat Fateh al-Sham Takfiri terrorist group, formerly known as the al-Nusra Front, and the so-called civil defense group, White Helmets, under the instructions of their masters in the United States, Turkey and other Western countries.

"Syria categorically denies the use of toxic materials in Lataminah or any part of the country. It reiterates that the Syrian Arab Army has never used such weapons in the course of fierce battles against terrorist groups," the ministry pointed out.

## Pakistan asks Afghanistan to hand over regional ISIL chief

Pakistan has asked the Afghan government to hand over custody of the regional chief of the ISIL (ISIS) armed group for "further investigations", less than a week after he was arrested in connection with a bombing at a Sikh temple that killed more than 25 people.

Atif Mashal, Afghanistan's ambassador to Pakistan, was summoned to the Pakistani foreign ministry to convey the request on Thursday, a Pakistani statement said.

"It was emphasised that Pakistan had been expressing its concerns over the activities of this group, which were clearly detrimental to Pakistan," said the statement.

"Pakistan's position in this regard was being regularly shared with the Government of Afghanistan and others concerned." Afghanistan is yet to officially respond

to the request.

Aslam Farooqi, also known as Abdullah Orakzai, is the chief of ISIL's "Khorasan Province" chapter, which operates in South Asia and Afghanistan, and was arrested by Afghan authorities on Saturday.

Farooqi, a Pakistani national, took over as chief of ISIL's regional chapter in July 2019. The group has claimed responsibility for several attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan that killed tens of civilians.

Pakistan's statement said the two countries "should coordinate actions against the menace of terrorism, including through established mechanisms".

It asked that Farooqi be handed over to Pakistani authorities because "[he] was involved in anti-Pakistan activities in Afghanistan".

(Source: al Jazeera)

## Coronavirus: New York ramps up mass burials amid outbreak

Images have emerged of coffins being buried in a mass grave in New York City, as the death toll from the coronavirus continues to rise.

Workers in hazmat outfits were seen stacking wooden coffins in deep trenches in Hart Island, BBC reported.

Officials say burials are being ramped up at site, which has long been used for people with no next-of-kin or families who cannot afford a funeral.

New York state now has more coronavirus cases than any single country.

The state's confirmed caseload of Covid-19 is almost 162,000, of whom 7,067 have died, according to Johns Hopkins University.

Spain has recorded 157,000 cases and Italy 143,600, while China, where the virus emerged last year, has declared 82,000 cases. The US as a whole has recorded 466,000 cases and nearly 16,700 deaths. Globally there are 1.6 million cases and 97,000 deaths.

The drone footage comes from Hart Island, off the Bronx in Long Island Sound, which has been used for more than 150 years by city officials as a mass burial site for those



with no next-of-kin, or families who cannot afford funerals.

Normally, about 25 bodies a week are interred on the island, according to the Associated Press news agency.

But burial operations have increased from one day a week to five days a week, with around 24 burials each day, said Department of Correction spokesman Jason Kersten.

Prisoners from Rikers Island, the city's main jail complex, usually do the job, but the rising workload has recently been

taken over by contractors.

It is not clear how many of the dead have no next-of-kin or could not afford a funeral. However, the city has cut the amount of time it will hold unclaimed remains amid pressure on morgue space.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio indicated earlier this week that "temporary burials" might be necessary until the crisis had passed.

"Obviously the place we have used historically is Hart Island," he said.

The daily tally of coronavirus deaths announced in New York state on Thursday was 799, a record high for a third day. But Governor Andrew Cuomo took heart from the fact that the number of Covid-19 patients admitted to New York hospitals had dropped for a second day to 200.

He said it was a sign social distancing was working. He called the outbreak a "silent explosion that ripples through society with the same randomness, the same evil that we saw on 9/11".

Another glimmer of hope was heralded on Thursday as official projections for the nationwide death toll were lowered.

## Saudi-led coalition's ceasefire in Yemen nothing but political, media maneuver: Ansarullah

The spokesman for Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement, Mohammed Abdul-Salam, has dismissed a two-week ceasefire announced by the Saudi-led coalition waging a bloody military onslaught against the impoverished country as a publicity stunt.

"The ceasefire announcement by Saudi Arabia is a ploy indeed as it is pressing ahead with raids on Yemen, and conducting operations on various fronts, including areas where there were no clashes at all," Abdul-Salam said in an exclusive interview with the Qatar-based and Arabic-language al-Jazeera television news network on Thursday night.

He added, "The Saudi ceasefire is just a political and media maneuver. It pursues more than one goal. It seeks to undercut the ongoing serious negotiations with the United Nations and burnish the blood-stained image of Saudi Arabia in this critical moment when the world is facing the coronavirus pandemic."

Abdul-Salam underlined that the sensible

decision for the Saudi-led coalition would be to stop the military aggression on Yemen, and lift the crippling blockade.

The Ansarullah spokesman went on to say that Saudi Arabia's announcement of a two-week ceasefire in Yemen is inconsistent with the plans being followed by world countries to fight the coronavirus outbreak since the period will not provide the Yemenis with the opportunity to take proper measure to avoid COVID-19 epidemic.

"Yemenis are dying of blockade and epidemics... There can be no humanitarian truce as long as the (Saudi-led) siege continues," Abdul-Salam pointed out.

Earlier on Thursday, the spokesman for Yemeni Armed Forces, Brigadier General Yahya Saree dismissed the Saudi-led alliance's claim that it had suspended hostilities in Yemen.

Saree wrote in a post published on his official Twitter page that the Saudi-led forces had stepped up their offensives and attacks

across various parts of the impoverished Arab country over the past few hours.

"Saudi and Emirati forces have carried out at least five large-scale airstrikes on Yemeni areas near the kingdom's southwestern border region of Najran since the early hours of this morning," he noted.

On Wednesday, Mohammed al-Bukhaiti, a senior member of the political bureau of the Ansarullah movement, told the Lebanon-based and Arabic-language al-Mayadeen television news network that the coalition's move to announce a ceasefire was just another ploy by the aggressors.

"Saudis have repeatedly declared ceasefire in Yemen, but have violated it every time," he noted.

Bukhaiti said Riyadh is using the outbreak of COVID-19 as an opportunity for ceasefire and a face-saving exit from the Yemen war. However, he added, with the siege of Yemen in place, the war will not end.

"If any ceasefire does not include the removal of the siege on Yemen, that

would be the continuation of the Saudi war," he noted.

Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched the devastating war on Yemen in March 2015 in order to bring the country's former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi back to power and crush Ansarullah.

The U.S.-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization, estimates that the war has claimed more than 100,000 lives over the past five years.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have purchased billions of dollars' worth of weapons from the United States, France and the United Kingdom in their war on Yemen.

Riyadh and its allies have been widely criticized for the high civilian death toll resulted from their bombing campaign in Yemen.

The UN says over 24 million Yemenis are in dire need of humanitarian aid, including 10 million suffering from extreme levels of hunger.

(Source: Press TV)



# FFIRI: ACL must continue on two-legged basis

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) has officially responded to Asian Football Confederation (AFC) on how to continue the 2020 AFC Champions League matches.

Football around the world has been suspended amid the coronavirus pandemic, and AFC were forced to halt its tournaments. The AFC Champions League, known as ACL, has four rounds of group games still to play, and there have been discussions about holding a mini tournament to finish the competition.

The AFC Competition Committee has asked for help from member associations to figure out a way to hold the remaining matches. A Qatari newspaper had reported that AFC consider playing the rest of the competition in single-legged format.

Therefore, the FFIRI, in coordination with the Iran Football League Organization, in an official letter, announced the request of the Iranian clubs to hold the remaining ACL matches in the two-legged format as before.

The AFC had said that home group-stage matches on matchday one, two, and three involving Iranian clubs would be switched to away fixtures “to allow time to reassess the security concerns in the country.”

Thus, the Iranian football federation has stated in its letter that based on the previous decision of AFC, now the Iranian clubs competing in ACL, namely Esteghlal, Sepahan, Shahrkhodro, and Persepolis, expect to be able to use their hosting rights in the completion.



## Iran unchanged in FIFA ranking



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran football team still are the second-best Asian team in the FIFA's World Ranking released on Thursday.

Iran are 33rd in the world ranking, while Japan, the best Asian team, sit on the 28th place.

The Top-10 following the podium of Belgium (1,765 points), France (1,733 points) and Brazil (1,712 points) are: 4th England (1,661 points); 5th Uruguay (1,645 points); 6th Croatia (1,642); 7th Portugal (1,639); 8th Spain (1,636); 9th Argentina (1,623) and 10th Colombia (1,622).

The ongoing measures to combat

the spread of Covid-19 have resulted in little football of late and, consequently, next-to-no movement in the latest FIFA World Ranking.

A whole raft of international fixtures, including qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup and other major tournaments, were postponed, while dates were redrawn for showpiece men's events such as the Olympic Football Tournament, CONMEBOL Copa America and UEFA EURO.

The next edition of FIFA's World Ranking list is due to be published on June 11, 2020.

## FFIRI reacts to linking Gabriel Calderon



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) has denied speculations about linking the federation to Argentine coach Gabriel Calderon.

Iranian media has reported that FFIRI is going to appoint the former Persepolis coach as replacement for Dragan Skocic.

The federation appointed Skocic as replacement of Marc Wilmots who stepped down from his role after six matches in charge in early December.

The federation was under pressure for choosing the Croat since the critics believed that the federation had to ap-

point a great name.

Newly-appointed Secretary General of the FFIRI Mehdi Mohammad Nabi said the head coach of Team Melli will continue his job.

“When the situation returns to normal after the coronavirus outbreak, Skocic will return to Iran to lead Team Melli. He will stay as Iran coach,” Nabi said.

Iran were originally scheduled to play Hong Kong and Cambodia in March and Iraq and Bahrain in June.

Iran sit third in Group C five points behind Iraq in FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 qualification.

## Iranian players' goals among stunning strikes from distance

Two goals from Andranik Teymourian (Esteghlal) and Mehdi Torabi (Persepolis) have been chosen among the AFC.com's '5 of the Best' goals.

The latest edition of '5 of the Best' showcases stunning strikes from distance, so stand by for some screamers.

Often referred to as the Thunder Castle, Buriram Stadium will have unlikely witnessed a strike more thunderous than Esteghlal's Andranik Teymourian's rocket in the 2013 quarter-finals.

With the second leg into added time and the Iranians all but assured of their place in the semi-finals, Teymourian turned his marker and unleashed an unstoppable strike that flew into the top corner to seal a 3-1 aggregate win.



Torabi also scored a stunning goal against Al Sadd of Qatar at the Azadi Stadium.

The pre-match talk of the 2019 group stage match between Persepolis and the Qatar side focused on Xavi's final game before hanging up his boots, but the crowd left talking about Torabi.

There seemed little danger when the Iranian international received the ball 35 yards from goal, but the midfielder let fly with an unstoppable shot that flew past 'keeper Saad Al Sheeb in the Al Sadd goal and surely left his retiring counterpart suitably impressed.

Ikrongjom Alibaev (Lokomotiv), Lee Chang-min (Jeju United) and Abdelkarim Hassan (Al Sadd) are also in the list. (Source: the-afc)

## FFIRI has close interaction with AFC: Nabi

Mehdi Mohammad Nabi says that the Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) has close interaction with Asian Football Confederation.

The FFIRI appointed Nabi as secretary general on Monday (April 6), with the organization stating that Executive Committee members were in attendance to confirm the decision.

Nabi has claimed the federation has abided by its statutes and that incorrect information had been given to the AFC.

“The Iranian Football Federation has always had close interaction and communication with the Asian Football Confederation, and the exchange of letters or emails about formalities and administrative mechanisms are quite normal in this regard,” Nabi said. “Unfortunately, there have been misconduct inside the country that do not take into account the interests and position of the country's football with specific purposes.

“With a history of about five years as secretary general of the federation, as well as the communications and chairs I have had in the AFC, I have witnessed many different legal disagreements and interpretations on various issues, but it is unfortunate that in such a case I see the most detailed correspondence. “This is a bitter incident that has

caused the Iranian Football Federation to face unusual and incorrect margins and behaviors in international negotiations and correspondence.

“The presence and activity of every Iranian in the various departments and committees of the AFC is a source of pride, and we have a very good relationship with the various committees of the Confederation, including the department of AFC member federations.

“In this regard, the federation has acted in accordance with the rules and regulations of the statute.”

Nabi is the former general manager of Iranian football club Gostaresh Pars Khodro.

He was also a vice-president of Persepolis and a member of the Board of Directors during his tenure there.

Heydar Baharvand, the acting President of the FFIRI, thanked Shakouri for his work since taking the role in December 2018.

It is not Nabi's first venture into the FFIRI, having previously been the secretary general, executive advisor to the President of the FFIRI, deputy secretary general and head of the Competition Committee.

The FFIRI will hold an elective General Assembly in September.

The General Assembly was due to



take place on March 15 but it was deferred after FIFA ordered the FFIRI to postpone the event until the national governing body amended its statutes.

World football's governing body had already sent a letter to the FFIRI on February 24, stressing that the General

Assembly should be delayed.

FIFA had implied that the previous version of the statutes contained several particularly problematic provisions, such as Government interference in the FFIRI elections.

(Source: Insidethegames)

## AFC Champions League to resume in August

**PLDC** — The 2020 AFC Champions League (ACL) is set to resume in August, Al-Watan reported.

The competition was postponed until the further notice in March, but the Qatari newspaper says that it will restart from August.

“Asian Football Confederation is not going to cancel the competition since it will suffer a huge loss. The competition will resume in August,” Al-Watan wrote.

AFC wants to hold the rest of the competition in single-legged format in one country. Uzbekistan, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman are four countries who have been nominated as the host.

Sports events around the world have been halted due to coronavirus pandemic.

## Iran's Daei tops 10 highest all-time goalscorers list

Former Iran forward Ali Daei topped the list of the 10 highest international football goalscorers of all time.

The Iranian set the record before retiring from international football in 2006, calling time on a 13-year career where he thrived for his country, FourFourTwo reported.

Between 1993 and 2006, Daei scored 109 goals in 149 internationals. Twice he scored four in a game, against South Korea in the 1996 Asian Cup, then Laos in a qualifier for the 2006 World Cup.

He failed to score in two World Cups but assisted the goal that beat the USA in 1998 for Iran's first victory.

Daei played for the likes of Bayern Munich and Hertha Berlin in his club career.

Portugal striker Cristiano Ronaldo is now just 10 goals off the top spot.

The 10 highest all-time goalscorers list is as follows:

10. Sunil Chhetri, India (115 caps, 72 goals)
9. Bashar Abdullah, Kuwait (133 caps, 75 goals)
8. Pele, Brazil (92 caps, 77 goals)
7. Zainal Abidin Hassan (138 caps, 78 goals)
6. Hussein Saeed, Iraq (137 caps, 78 goals)
5. Godfrey Chitalu, Zambia (108 caps, 79 goals)
4. Kunishige Kamamoto, Japan (84 caps, 80 goals)
3. Ferenc Puskas, Hungary (85 caps, 84 goals)
2. Cristiano Ronaldo, Portugal (164 caps, 99 goals)
1. Ali Daei, Iran (149 caps, 109 goals)

(Source: Four Four Two)

## Victory over Argentina among top moments at Rio 2016

Iran's win over Argentina has been regarded as one of the best moments of football 5-a-side at the 2016 Paralympic Games.

Everything seemed set for an awaited Brazil-Argentina final at Rio 2016. However, the Iranians caused arguably the biggest upset in football 5-a-side history by defeating Argentina 2-1 on penalties in the semi-finals, Paralympic.org wrote.



In the final match, Iran lost to Brazil, who had won all three Paralympic tournaments. However, this one was special as it was going to take place in front of their home crowd in Rio de Janeiro.

And Brazil did not disappoint, winning four matches, including the final against Iran, to take the coveted gold. (Source: Paralympic.org)

## Benfica eye Mehdi Taremi

Portuguese giants Benfica have reportedly set their sight on signing Iranian forward Mehdi Taremi.

The Rio Ave striker has scored 11 goals in 27 games for his team this season.

Taremi, 27, arrived at Rio Ave from Al Gharafa, Qatar at the beginning of the season. He has since imposed himself as one of the main options for coach Carlos Carvalhal.

Porto, another well-known Portuguese team, had already shown an interest in signing Taremi.

Helton Leite, goalkeeper of Boavista, is another player whom Benfica is going to sign.

(Source: A Bola)

## Esteghlal forward Diabate to Return to Iran

**Tasnim** — Esteghlal forward Cheich Diabate says he will return to Iran after the resumption of the football season.

The Malian striker left Iran after the domestic league was postponed due to the coronavirus outbreak in March.

Local media reported that Diabate is not going to return to Iran but he has denied the rumors.

“No, I am committed to Esteghlal and will return to my team after the league restarts,” Diabate said.

“I want the Iranian people to stay at home to limit the spread of the coronavirus. God will protect us,” he added.



**INTERNATIONAL DAILY**  
**www.tehrantimes.com**  
 ■ Managing Director: Mohammad Shojaeian  
 ■ Editor-in-Chief: Ali A.Jenabzadeh

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895  
 editor@tehrantimes.com  
 » Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000  
 » Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051450  
 » Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807  
 » Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603  
 » www.eshterak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.  
 Tel: 88911433  
 » Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com  
 » Printed at: Jame Jam Bartar Borna - 44197737

Tehrantimes79 Tehrantimesdaily

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




A king's friend is like one riding a lion.  
 The people envy him and wish to be in his  
 place, but he himself is well aware of his  
 dangerous position.  
*Imam Ali (AS)*

## Writers praise debut Persian novel “Roni Has Swallowed a Piano”

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — Iranian writer Teimur Aqamohammadi's debut novel “Roni Has Swallowed a Piano” has been praised by his other colleague book writers.

The book published by Sureh-Mehr Publications tells the story of the teenage girl Ronika who shares many joint concerns with girls of her own age. Roni can stand on her own and can deal with all the problems in her life all alone.



Front Cover of Teimur Aqamohammadi's debut novel “Roni Has Swallowed a Piano”.

Writer Hamidreza Shahabadi, who is also the manager of Madreseh Publications, a publisher of school books, has said that the book is one of the best he has read about the young adults.

Writer Jafar Tozandehjani said that he has hardly found any young adult book that presents a realistic image of an Iranian teenager, and called it “a different novel, which involves the readers and will never be forgotten.”

Writer Ali-Asghar Ezzatipak said he has been fascinated by the form of narration in the story and its unique domination over the mind and language of a teenager.

Writer Meysam Musavian also believes that Roni is a character who will not be forgotten and will remain as part of any one's fiction memory.

## Swiss street artist pays tribute to unsung coronavirus heroes

**GLAND, Switzerland (Reuters)** — Street artist David Perez has found his own way to pay tribute in Switzerland to the people he regards as the unsung heroes of the coronavirus crisis.



Artist David “S.I.D.” Perez poses in front of his graffiti of a cashier to pay tribute to essential workers during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak in Gland, Switzerland, April 5, 2020. (Reuters/Denis Balibouse)

Perez, 35, has adorned a pedestrian underpass in the town of Gland with a portrait of a masked cashier scanning a bottle of soap and plans to add other figures, such as construction workers or dustmen, to the mural.

“Today, I will especially pay tribute to cashiers. They are on the frontline with nurses and others,” he told Reuters.

He said his mural, adding color to a “sad-looking wall”, was “for our everyday superheroes.”

Switzerland has recommended that its citizens stay indoors during the coronavirus which has killed more than 500 people and infected over 21,100 in the country, although it has stopped short of ordering a lockdown.

# Iran’s “Little Black Fish” among Istanbul mayor’s favorite books for home quarantine

**CULTURE** **TEHRAN** — Iranian **d e s k** writer Samad Behrangi’s “Little Black Fish” (“Kucuk Kara Balik”) are among the three books Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu has wanted Turkish people to read during the home quarantine.

“Yaban” by Turkish writer Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoglu and “Onsozunu Prof. Dr. Ilber Ortayli'nin yazdigi 100. yilinda Istanbul'un ...Gunleri” by Nur Bilge Criss are the other books, an online bookstore owned by the Istanbul Municipality announced last week.

Originally published in 1968, the short story “Little Black Fish” is about a fish that lives in a small stream and wants to live a life with aspirations and purpose. He embarks on an eye-opening journey with the spirit of a dreamer experiencing an awakening, but in the process, the path leads him to wisdom, courage, awareness and the study of complex social relations.

Several translations of the book by Ilknur Ozdemir, Umut Uyurkulak and several other Turkish translators have so far been published by the Turkish publishers.



Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu holds a copy of the Turkish version of “Little Black Fish” in an undated photo.

## Writer Hassanzadeh says literature now in rightful place in light of coronavirus epidemic

on Thursday.

“We heard many messages encouraging people to read books and many families purchased electronic books for their children,” added Hassanzadeh, who was a nominee at the 2020 Hans Christian Andersen Award.

He expressed his wish that the shadow of the new virus would fade away from the world.

“I believe we should not ignore this power and it must be paid due attention even after the coronavirus days,” he stated.

“I think the interested families made the best use of this opportunity and increased their children's interest in book reading. I personally noticed the tendency towards art and literature has increased,” he explained.

“Even the interest in writing, painting and photography has also been increased, helping to entertain children and manage anxiety during the

epidemic,” the 58-year-old writer said.

He also talked about his personal activities during these days and said that he had the chance to accomplish several personal obligations.

“I also began to rewrite a novel for adults, while I rewrote two of my satire books, which were published two years ago. I also uploaded some parts of my books on my personal page to make readers more familiar with my works,” he concluded.

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

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

## Persian language scholars ask U.S. to lift sanctions on Iran in coronavirus pandemic

**CULTURE** **TEHRAN** — 400 Iranologists and **d e s k** scholars on the Persian language from Iran and across the world have signed a statement issued by Iran's Sadi Foundation asking the United States government to lift its sanctions against Iran during the days the world is fighting the COVID-19 outbreak.

In the statement named “No to Sanctions”, the signatories have noted that the lifting of the sanctions will provide the opportunity for the arrival of medicine and relief aid to Iran during the coronavirus pandemic.

“At the present time, people, doctors and medical staff are fighting against the world catastrophe. They defend the helpless people against the new virus on the one side, and on the other side they are dealing with the restrictions and the aftermath of the sanctions,” reads



People attend a protest in Washington, DC on March 19, 2020 against U.S. sanctions on Iran, which is currently battling the COVID-19 pandemic. (Reuters/Carlos Barria)

## UK costume makers turn from Downton and Star Wars to focus on scrubs

**CHIPPING CAMDEN, England (Reuters)** — Costume makers in Britain who normally dress actors in shows from Downton Abbey to Game of Thrones and Batman have joined forces to make scrubs for medics fighting the coronavirus outbreak.

Working from kitchens, sheds and attics across the country, the team is churning out uniforms for returning medics and clinicians who do not normally wear them.

Dulcie Scott, who most recently made couture dresses for Ruth Wilson in the BBC's adaptation of Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials, is helping lead the effort alongside a material buyer who once worked on a medical drama.

Now some 150 costume makers are producing the garments, including those who previously worked on such shows as Star Wars, Outlander and Doctor Who.

“It went way beyond anything I could have imagined,” Scott told Reuters. “We have the most phenomenal, world-class network of costume makers helping us.”

With Pullman's series known as HDM, the group called itself Helping Dress Medics and launched a fundraising appeal (here) for 1,500 pounds (\$1,900)

to source materials.

Two weeks on it has raised more than 44,000 pounds, and some 6,000 sets of scrubs are being made. In one case a curtain maker donated fabric, while the bosses of factories forced shut by the outbreak are working to cut the material.

“It feels brilliant and restores my faith in people and I think this is wonderful,” Scott said. “But also it's quite heartbreaking when you see what a need there is.”

Scott delivered her first set of scrubs to a woman in a nearby village, with the handover coinciding with the weekly evening clap for carers.

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus has sparked a surge in demand for everything from ventilators to scrubs, prompting the likes of Rolls-Royce and Formula One teams, soldiers and individual volunteers to try to fill the gap.

Scott and her team are being cheered by the actors and writers they once worked with.

“Encore,” tweeted Hugh Bonneville, the actor who played Robert Crawley, Earl of Grantham in the historical drama series Downton Abbey. “Great stuff!” said Pullman.



Dulcie Scott from Mickleton, Gloucestershire works from home packing and organising scrubs to be made and then distributed. Costume makers in Britain who have previously dressed actors from Downton Abbey to Batman have joined forces to make scrubs for medics on the frontline of the coronavirus battle. (Reuters/Eddie Keogh)

## Elmo, Lin-Manuel Miranda team up for “Sesame Street” coronavirus special

**LOS ANGELES (Reuters)** — Elmo and Cookie Monster are reaching out to young children confused at being stuck at home during the coronavirus epidemic with a special “Sesame Street” episode airing next week.

“Hamilton” creator Lin-Manuel Miranda and actors Anne Hathaway and Tracee Ellis Ross will be celebrity guests in the 30-minute “Sesame Street: Elmo's Playdate” that is aimed at entertaining kids and their families during uncertain times, broadcaster WarnerMedia

and Sesame Workshop said on Wednesday.

“We hope ‘Sesame Street: Elmo's Playdate’ will entertain and delight families at a moment when so many are feeling isolated and overwhelmed by current events,” said Steve Youngwood, president of Sesame Workshop.

The April 14 show, in a video conferencing style that has become familiar due to coronavirus social distancing and quarantine restrictions, will air on HBO, PBS Kids and

other WarnerMedia television channels. It will be broadcast in Australia, Canada and the U.K. at a later date.

In the show, Muppets Elmo, Grover, Cookie Monster and the magical Abby Cadabby will find new ways to play and learn together through songs, games and silly dance breaks.

Miranda will sing a few rounds of “Old McDonald Had a Farm,” Ross will play a game of “Elmo Says”, and Hathaway and Elmo get moving with “Head, Shoulders,

Knees, and Toes”.

Schools and daycare centers have been closed across much of the United States for several weeks, leaving parents and family members in the role of teachers while simultaneously working in essential industries, or from home.

The makers of Sesame Street have also launched a Caring for Each Other initiative aimed at helping parents to provide comfort and manage anxiety during the epidemic.