



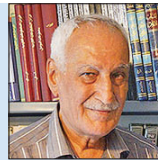
Iran says investigating possibility of coronavirus as biological warfare **3**



Afghanistan thanks Iran for free services to refugees during COVID-19 **10**



Can the Iranian clubs ask players to take pay cut? **11**



Top Iranian scholar Hassan Anusheh passes away at 75 **12**

Hunger on the rise in corporate America

© Tehran Times/ Illustration by Bahman Vakhshour



See page 3

Tax income up 31% in a year

TEHRAN — Iran's tax revenue has increased 31 percent in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), Omid- Ali Parsa, the head of Iran's National Tax Administration (INTA), announced.

Putting the country's tax income at 1.43 quadrillion rials (about \$34.04 billion) in the previous year, the official said, "We could collect 250 trillion rials (about \$5.9 billion)

as value added tax (VAT)", IRIB reported.

Parsa also said that the country has gained projected tax income by 102 percent in the past year, and put the average tax income growth at 21 percent during the previous five years.

The head of National Tax Administration further mentioned preventing from tax evasion as one of the prioritized programs of INTA. ➔ **4**

Discover Ozbaki hill that goes down 9,000 years in history

TEHRAN — "Nine thousand years of history." It's a phrase that may seem enough to draw the attention of every history buff across the globe.

Ozbaki hill, also called Ozbaki Tappeh or Uzbaki Teppeh, is situated near Nazarabad, some 80 km west of Tehran. The site has yielded cultural relics dating from the first half of the 7th millennium to the first half of the first millennium BC, i.e. the Medes period.

"The discovery of objects such as tablets, statuettes, and 'jagged' earthenware in

Ozbaki hill indicate some kind of commercial link between Susa in Khuzestan and this in Tehran province," according to senior Iranian archaeologist Yousef Majidzadeh who led the excavations at Ozbaki, Qabristan and Jiroft hills.

Back in 2016, the archaeological enclosure opened to the public as an open-air museum of cultural heritage. It was announced in the same year that the archaeological enclosure is in the queue for registration in the UNESCO World Heritage list. ➔ **8**

Iran to build three environment-friendly towns this year

TEHRAN — Deputy Transport Roads and Urban Development Minister Habibollah Taherkhani has said three new "environment-friendly" towns will be built in the current Iranian calendar year, which began on March 20.

Taherkhani said the new towns will have a clean transportation system, fast and cheap railways to big cities, sidewalk networks, bicycle lanes, etc., ISNA reported on Sunday.

The deputy minister added that building 7 new towns with the same facilities is also under consideration.

This is the first time that the ministry is making such an announcement.

Developing green technology and managing a green life are being given an impetus in Iran.

Taherkhani also said that development of medical, educational and cultural centers are given a priority in new cities.

Maestro Mashayekhi calls on Iranian youth to practice bricolage in home quarantine

By Manijeh Rezapoor

TEHRAN — Maestro Nader Mashayekhi, the former conductor of the Tehran Symphony Orchestra, has called on Iranian youth to practice bricolage, construction or creation from a diverse range of available things, in order to manage the anxiety of the home quarantine for the coronavirus pandemic.

"I think the Iranian youth can make the best use of their thoughts because they have the ability of bricolage," Mashayekhi told the Tehran Times in an interview on Sunday.

"I ask the Iranian youth to get up in the morning, do not talk for half an hour then listen to music for the next half an hour, and find solutions for these difficult days of coronavirus," he added.

He said that he believes in these trying days

people should try not to turn into a tool for coronavirus, but that the new virus should be turned into a tool for them.

"What I mean is this: I know that when I stand in front of a boiling kettle I automatically do not touch it, because I know my hand will be burned, or when I see the weather is cold I put on my coat. This happens automatically and I don't think about it, and I am not living with the stress of catching cold or getting burned. This should also happen about the new virus," the musician said.

"I know the situation is new and we don't have experience with it, but I also think we can manage over 70 percent of it, and we know that prevention is better than cure, so this way our minds will have more space to think," he noted.

Mashayekhi is suffering from multiple sclerosis (MS) and needs to go to the hospital if necessary, but he cannot due to the coronavirus pandemic in the city. However, he said that his life has its own principles and he has been able to have a routine life despite the difficulties.

"It is because the very first time I get up in the morning I do not talk for half an hour with any individual, I just sit down and think, then I only listen to music for the next half an hour. This one hour makes my whole day: all the problems are solved within the first half hour, and the second half gives me a new perspective on life. This is what music can do," he explained.

He next mentioned that music has the potential to help us look at life in a different way and experience a new perspective on life. ➔ **12**

Biological viruses part of future ruthless asymmetrical warfare: London Energy Club chief

TEHRAN — Stating that tomorrow's wars will no longer be fought by tanks, fighter jets, and missiles, Mehmet Ogutcu said, "The biological viruses are part of this ruthless asymmetrical warfare without causing bloodshed and physical destruction."

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.

Due to the great impact of the coronavirus on the world from different aspects, many believe that changes to existing world order and international relations are inevitable in the post-corona era.

In an effort to make the dimension of the changes to the existing world order by coronavirus clearer, we reached out to Mehmet Ogutcu, Chairman of the London Energy Club.

Here is the full text of the interview: What will be the effects of coronavirus on the current world order?

There has been no shortage of debates on the new world order, particularly during the 30 years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet we have not been able to create a viable new blueprint for the global governance in trade, finance, investment, geopolitics, and energy, boding well with all the dramatic changes and requirements.

One reason for this has been the reluctance of the US, portrayed as the "sole superpower," to open space in the international arena for other

emerging dynamic powers like China, India, Russia, Brazil, Indonesia, as well as regional heavyweights such as Turkey and Iran.

A glimmer of hope has emerged with the corona calamity given that we all recognize that the only way out is to revive the spirit of international co-operation and solidarity. Clearly, no nation alone can contain or survive such a dangerous contagion and its aftermath. It is for this reason that the US-China-EU trio, which controls the summity of our world, must embark upon an urgent collaborative program, not only for themselves but for the entire globe. This may also help us lay the foundations of a long-overdue world order to take account of new realities on the ground and heal the wounds of our common planet. ➔ **7**



ARTICLE

Masoud Hossein
Head of the Sport Desk of the TehranTimes

Iran football: us against us

Imagine you have just four lives in a video game and entering into the next stage depends on how you keep your lives. That's all. The only thing you need is to stay focused. However, it doesn't work in Iran football. Iran national football team have four must-win games ahead in the 2022 World qualifiers against Hong Kong, Cambodia, Bahrain, and Iraq.

The Persians are seeking to qualify for the prestigious competition for the third time in a row. BUT mismanagement could jeopardize the chance of winning a berth.

Team Iran, now, sit third in Group C five points behind Iraq, while they would have stayed top of the table if the football officials had not made the multiple wrong decisions in the last year.

Marc Wilmots was hired as replacement for Carlos Queiroz in May but stepped down from his job just six months in charge and the federation, it's sad to say, must pay him millions of euros.

Under stewardship of Wilmots, Iran defeated Hong Kong and Cambodia and lost to Bahrain and Iraq and in my opinion, he didn't do much while we paid dearly.

After several months, the federation opted to choose Sanat Naft coach Dragan Skocic for the four upcoming matches but the qualifiers were postponed due to coronavirus outbreak.

Iranian media reports suggest that the federation has now begun talks with former Persepolis coach Gabriel Calderon, however the federation has denied reports linking the Argentine but where there's smoke there's fire!

Based on the abovementioned, we have just four lives and the only thing we need is to stay focused. So, why the football federation distracts from the forthcoming events.

The General Assembly of football federation was due to take place on March 15 but it was deferred after FIFA ordered the federation to postpone the event until the national governing body amended its statutes.

Now, it has announced that the elections will be held in September.

While the federation must concentrate on the fast-approaching events, it's dealing with a real problem to elect its new president.

Iran football has no enough time to make more wrong decisions and one more mistake could cost time and lives.



© Mehr/ Maryam Kamyab

Biodefense drill held in Tehran against coronavirus

A biological defense drill was held in Tehran on Sunday by government organizations and entities in line with fighting the coronavirus.

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-backed militants, UAE-sponsored separatists clash in Yemen's Socotra

Saudi-backed militants and UAE-sponsored separatists clashed in Yemen's strategic island of Socotra, local sources said, according to Tasnim.

The two sides exchanged heavy fire and the Saudi-backed militants managed to inflict losses on the Emirati mercenaries, the sources said on Sunday.

The militants also seized a military camp on the island after the separatists of the so-called Southern Transitional Council (STC) fled the camp before Saudi-backed forces launched their major offensive.

Southern separatists seized the military camp in February. Both the UAE-sponsored separatists and militants loyal to fugitive former president Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi serve the Riyadh-led coalition and have been engaged, since 2015, in a bloody military campaign in Yemen.

The separatists have long sought southern Yemen to secede.

Encouraged by the UAE, though, they had agreed to fight under the Saudi-led military coalition's command in their war on Yemen.

Recently and after a decision by the UAE to effectively withdraw its forces from Yemen, the group has turned its weapons on rival militants loyal to Hadi.

The infighting has highlighted deepening divisions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the two countries that are leading the war on Yemen.

The island was part of Yemen's eastern province of Hadhramaut but it was introduced as an independent province in a 2013 presidential decree.

Home to some 60,000 people, Socotra sits at the entrance to the Gulf of Aden. The island has a unique ecosystem and been listed by UNESCO as a world natural heritage site.

Amid more than five years of war on the impoverished Yemen which has also devastated the country's health systems, aid agencies have expressed alarm after the first virus case was confirmed in the country.

On April 10, Oxfam said it was a "devastating blow" and the International Rescue Committee called it a "nightmare scenario". Yemen is suffering the world's worst humanitarian crisis and millions are reliant on food aid.

Zarif highlights necessity of unity among Afghan groups

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has highlighted the necessity of unity among various Afghan groups.



In a phone conversation with Mohammad Haneef Atmar, the acting foreign minister of Afghanistan, on Sunday, Zarif also attached great importance to stability in Afghanistan.

Also, in separate phone conversations with Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah on April 7, Zarif expressed Tehran's support for the peace process in Afghanistan.

Zarif emphasized that the political structure based on the constitution has provided the pivots for peace and national reconciliation in Afghanistan,

and reaffirmed Iran's support for the peace process with the participation of all Afghan political groups within the framework of the constitution, the Foreign Ministry reported.

The Iranian and Afghan officials discussed issues of mutual interest, the latest political conditions in Afghanistan, the disputes that have arisen after the recent presidential election in the country, the peace negotiations, the intra-Afghan talks, and bilateral cooperation in the fight against coronavirus.

Ghani and Abdullah expressed gratitude to Iran for its support, and welcomed Tehran's expression of readiness to contribute to the settlement of Afghanistan's political problems.

Bushehr nuclear plant to stop activity for annual maintenance

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The deputy chief of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) said on Sunday that the Bushehr nuclear power plant will temporarily stop its electricity production based on annual plans for changing fuels, doing inspections, and performing periodical repairs, Fars reported.



"One of the goals of the current refueling program is that the plant would hopefully produce the required energy during the country's peak electricity consumption in the summer," Mahmoud Jafari explained.

"After the refueling is done, the production of electricity will be resumed in the first unit of the nuclear power plant according to the timetable," he added.

Bushehr is Iran's first nuclear power plant built by Russia. Plans are underway to add new phases to the plant.

Since its inauguration, the plant has provided 43 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity to the country's electrical grid, the official said, noting that from the last refueling in May 2019 till now, the plant has produced 7.2 billion kilowatt-hours of energy.

The Bushehr facility sits 17 kilometers southeast of the city of Bushehr along the Persian Gulf coast in southwestern Iran.

It started operating in 2011 and reached its full capacity the following year.

AEOI chief Ali Akbar Salehi said last week that the construction of the second phase of Bushehr plant would be launched in August in cooperation with the Russian contractor.

"Based on the plans, the second phase of the power plant will become operational in six years, and the third phase will come on stream within the next two years," Fars quoted him as saying.

Sanctions have impeded import of essential goods, Jahangiri says

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — First Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri said on Sunday that the U.S. sanctions against Tehran have also made importation of essential goods very difficult as foreign banks refuse to deal with Iran.

"Although the U.S. sanctions seem to make no problem for Iran to purchase its essential items like wheat, banking exchanges for the imports of such items are impossible due to restrictions caused by the U.S. sanctions," Jahangiri said, Fars reported.

"While they claim the sanctions do not impose any restrictions on the imports of drugs and medical supplies, different countries say that they will be questioned by the U.S. if they export medicine to Iran," he explained.

In a commentary in early April, the National Interest said, "While proponents of sanctions continue to claim that humanitarian aid is exempt from sanctions, the evidence on the ground shows otherwise. In fact, just a few weeks ago the U.S. Treasury eased slightly the restrictions on the Central Bank of Iran to facilitate humanitarian transactions. This move by the Treasury is an implicit admission that the U.S. sanctions regime is hindering these purchases."

Underlining the significance of self-sufficiency in wheat production, the official said that the wheat production is expected to rise to 14 million tons this year.

The first vice-president also said that with the inauguration of the Persian Gulf Star refinery in southern Iran, the country is not only meeting its gasoline needs, but also exports gasoline and gas oil to other countries.

On Saturday, Jahangiri said the Iranian economy grew last year despite all the pressures on the country.

He said that the country's economic growth became positive during the third quarter of the year, so that it witnessed a 3.3% economic growth excluding oil and a 1.3% economic growth including oil revenue.

He continued that some 470,000 jobs were created in Iran over the past year, reducing the country's unemployment rate.

World Council of Churches urges Trump to remove sanctions on Iran

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The World Council of Churches has urged the U.S. President Donald Trump to remove sanctions on Iran.

"Based on humanitarian principles, we ask you to remove crippling sanctions on Iran in order to strengthen efforts in line with fighting the coronavirus," the council said in a message published on Sunday.

The message also urged Trump to remove sanctions that impede Iran to import medical equipment.

It also backed a request by Iran to get \$5 billion loan to counter the outbreak of the deadly coronavirus disease.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said the bans on Iran even exceed what would be "permissible in the battlefield" and called on the international community that it is "immoral" to succumb to illegal sanctions.

Iran's ambassador to the UN offices in Geneva has written a letter to the World Health Organization chief saying that sanctions against Iran exemplify "crimes against humanity".

Abolfazl Mousavi, an Iranian MP, has said that in a situation in which the world is fighting the coronavirus pandemic, imposing sanctions and refusing to remove them violate human rights.

"Today, the world is changing and imposition of sanctions against certain countries, especially Iran, does not make sense. Definitely, refusing to remove sanctions in the current situation violates human rights and the international community does not accept it," Mousavi told ISNA in an interview published on Saturday.

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 interna-

tional 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 then 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.

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



World Council of Churches

Despite 'sanctions virus', Iran has handled pandemic better than U.S., Europe: Rouhani

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Sunday that despite sanctions Iran has handled the coronavirus pandemic better than certain European countries and the United States.

"We had a sanctions virus, to which the coronavirus was added, but you did not have the sanctions virus. You have one virus while we have two viruses," Rouhani said, according to Press TV.

President Trump has said the U.S. has started "economic war" against Iran. He has acknowledged that his administration has enforced the "harshes ever" sanctions in history against Iran.

In line with his "maximum pressure" campaign on Tehran, Trump has introduced a total ban on Iran's oil export, the country's main source of income. The oil embargo was intended to choke off the Iranian economy.

"We did better than you in the fight against the coronavirus," Rouhani told a meeting of the National Headquarters for Managing and Fighting the Coronavirus.

In the struggle to contain the deadly disease,



the Iranian people have also resisted well and assisted each other, the president remarked.

"This is an honor for all, for all our loved ones and people. Yes, our situation is relatively good in the fight against the disease and the dangerous virus, and our situation is better in

comparison with some countries."

Iran has been among the countries hardest hit by the highly contagious virus.

Illegal U.S. sanctions have hampered an efficient struggle to suppress the virus in Iran. The number of people infected with the novel

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.

coronavirus in Iran has surpassed 71,000, of whom nearly 44,000 have fully recovered, the Health Ministry spokesperson said on Sunday.

Kianoosh Jahanpoor also said 117 coronavirus patients have died across the country since Saturday, bringing the death toll to 4,474.

■ Restrictions will apply on gatherings in fasting month of Ramadan

Like all other countries Iran has introduced some restrictions to prevent a further outbreak of the disease.

Rouhani said religious gatherings would probably be cancelled during the holy fasting month of Ramadan due to the outbreak, noting that the national committee tasked to fight the coronavirus would decide on the issue in its upcoming meeting.

"During the month of Ramadan, people usually hold various events at mosques ... reciting the Quran and praying. The final decision on this issue will be made in the next meeting," he said.

Ramadan will begin in late this month and last through most of May, with Muslims fasting from dawn until sunset.

'Iran supports designation of al-Kadhimi as Iraqi PM'

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iraj Masjedi, the Iranian ambassador to Iraq, has said that Iran supports 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 any figure who has been designated through legal procedure and after gaining the parliament's vote of confidence," he tweeted, ISNA reported on Sunday.

Iraqi President Barham Salih named intelligence chief Mustafa al-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 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.

Masjedi said on Friday that Iran has a "positive view" on designation of 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.

The ambassador 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 Turkmen and Christians.

"Our policy is not providing support for just one political group in Iraq. We respect all ethnicities and religious groups," he remarked.

Iran's approach towards Iraq is supporting the country's unity and territorial integrity, he added.

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 northwest 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.

Pope urges removal of international sanctions amid pandemic

(Press TV) — Pope Francis has urged world powers to lift the crippling economic sanctions imposed against a number of countries amid the new coronavirus pandemic.

The leader of the Catholic Church made the remarks on Sunday while delivering his Easter address from Saint Paul's Cathedral in Vatican.

The pope also stressed that the removal of international sanctions will facilitate the efforts aimed at curbing the spread of the deadly disease and safeguarding the human health.

"In light of the present circumstances, may international sanctions be relaxed, since these make it difficult for countries on which they have been imposed to provide adequate support to their citizens," Francis said.

The new coronavirus, known as COVID-19,

first emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in Hubei Province late last year.

The virus has so far infected 1,795,747 people worldwide, and over 110,005 have died, according to a running count by worldometers.info.

Pope's Sunday remarks come as in recent months calls have been growing inside the U.S. and abroad for Washington to lift its unilateral sanctions, which are throwing a wrench into global efforts to rein in COVID-19.

The UN, the European Union and human rights organizations besides several American lawmakers and political figures have been pressing the U.S. administration to ease the bans on Iran, Venezuela, Syria, Cuba, North Korea, among others on the sanctions list.

The United States reinstated its sanctions against Iran in May 2018 after leaving a UN-en-

dorsed nuclear agreement with the Islamic Republic and five other countries.

Over the past few weeks, Washington has issued new rounds of sanctions targeting companies doing business with Tehran.

Iran has been among the countries hardest hit by the novel coronavirus, recording 71,686 infections and 4,473 deaths so far.

The anti-Iran measures have blocked the country's access to global markets and lifesaving medical supplies.

Meanwhile, U.S. President Donald Trump has escalated the anti-Cuba sanctions ever since taking office in 2017, making it even more difficult for other countries to ship supplies there.

Cuba has blasted the United States for its "cruel" blockade against the small island nation,

joining other countries to slam US sanctions amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Other nations currently being harmed by U.S. sanction despite the highly contagious virus pandemic -- notably Iran, Venezuela, Syria and North Korea -- have also condemned Washington's inhumane measures.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the pope urged the world's leaders to put aside their political fights and call back their armies during a global health emergency of a magnitude not seen in 100 years.

"This is not a time for division," Francis said.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has already called for a global ceasefire, urging all parties in conflict to lay down arms and allow war-torn nations to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

IRGC commanders donate 20% of their salaries to coronavirus relief

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Top commanders of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) have donated 20 percent of their monthly salary to coronavirus relief efforts, according to IRGC spokesman Ramezan Sharif.

In a statement on Sunday, Sharif said the IRGC commanders have taken part in a countrywide exercise launched by Basij, called "Devout Help", following a call by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to help the needy ahead of the holy month of Ramadan.

According to Sharif, the donation will be granted to people who have lost their jobs because of the coronavirus outbreak, Tasnim reported.

He said the donation will continue until the coronavirus crisis is over in Iran.

The government announced last week that it will allocate 50,000 billion rials (\$305 million) to Unemployment Insurance Fund to support those who have lost their jobs amid the outbreak of coronavirus.

"To prevent the spread of the virus, applicants are urged to fill out online forms for unemployment benefits at the newly-designed website 'bimebikari.mcls.gov.ir' within 30 days, rather than going personally to the ministry's bureaus," an official stated.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has also agreed with a request by the government to withdraw 1 billion euro from the National Development Fund to contain the highly transmissible coronavirus, the government announced last Monday.

President Hassan Rouhani thanked the Leader for his consent and ordered the money to be spent mostly on purchasing the equipment and goods necessary for the Health Ministry from local producers, especially those run by knowledge-based companies.

The president also said the details of the necessary aid to the Unemployment Insurance Fund will be discussed in a session of the government's economic headquarters in future weeks.

The total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran has reached 71,686, of whom 4,474 have died and 43,894 recovered.

In remarks on Thursday, Ayatollah Khamenei lauded



the Armed Forces for truly using all their capacity to deal with the virus, including equipping hospitals and infirmaries by manufacturing medical equipment.

He said the Armed Forces and the youth displayed new capacities in confronting this matter.

On Sunday, Rouhani said Iran has handled the novel coronavirus outbreak better than Europe and the United States, assuring that the country's stocks of basic commodities are replenished better than ever.

"We had a sanctions virus, to which the coronavirus

was added, but you did not have the sanctions virus. You have one virus while we have two viruses," he said, addressing Europe and the United States.

"We did better than you in the fight against the coronavirus," he reiterated.

"This is an honor for all, for all our loved ones and people. Yes, our situation is relatively good in the fight against the disease and the dangerous virus, and our situation is better in comparison with some countries," the president added.

Iran says investigating possibility of coronavirus as biological warfare

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Head of the Health Department of the General Staff of the Armed Forces has said Iran is investigating whether the spread of coronavirus in the country was part of a biological warfare.

"Every country is considering this matter to see the likelihood of any biological warfare behind the issue," General Hassan Araghizadeh said in an interview with Mehr published on Sunday.

"The Iranian scientific centers are also conducting researches in this regard, however, a definite decision needs more time and effort," Araghizadeh said.

General Araghizadeh pointed out that the armed forces are equipped with necessary skills and facilities to identify any biological threat in time and carry out treatment procedures, adding that special health sectors are dedicated to carrying out extensive research and taking the necessary measures in countering bioterrorism.

The Iranian armed forces have been playing an active role in combatting the new pandemic.

According to General Araghizadeh, 70% of the capacities of the Iranian armed forces' hospitals are dedicated to the



treatment of coronavirus patients.

"We have also committed ourselves to provide about 10,000 beds for the patients recovering from the disease," he added.

Last month, the commander of Civil Defense Organization has said the novel coronavirus has many characteristics of a biological warfare.

"It cannot be said with certainty whether coronavirus

is a biological warfare, but it has many characteristics of a biological warfare," Brigadier General Gholam Reza Jalali said on Tuesday.

He said further experiments in labs are needed to see whether that's the case.

Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami has said Iran is currently engaged in biological warfare and will definitely win the war.

"Today, we are involved in biological warfare, but the country is resisting," Salami said on Thursday.

"The enemy is still focusing on economic pressure and psychological operation (against Iran) and uses every opportunity to toughen the conditions for our people. The enemy is seeking to shape the regional developments in its own favor," the IRGC commander further warned.

The coronavirus, also called COVID-19, initially emerged in China late last year and soon spread across the world.

In Iran, the outbreak has so far killed 4,474 people and infected 71,686 others. Some 43,894 people have also recovered.

Hunger on the rise in corporate America

It did not take so long for the novel virus, or COVID-19, to send the entire world reeling. The full-scale economic aftermaths of the deadly pandemic are yet to emerge as the debris is too smoky for a calm, realistic appraisal.

But one thing is for sure. The toll the lockdown is taking on the world's flagship economy, the U.S.'s, is overwhelming and painful, rendering any prospect of a fast bounce-back slim and bleak.

It has ushered in a torrent of unemployment filings and a waiver of hunger, "the like of which has never been seen before". Only in the past three weeks, more than 16 million Americans have lost their jobs. The unprecedented job loss will drag on spending, which explains up to 70% of the country's economic growth.

Despite the dire economic situation, long grocery lines do not seem to get shorter or go away. A sad reminder of a consumerist culture exacerbated by an authority that is failing to retain the public's trust due to misinformation about and inappropriate response to the disaster.

Among others, the outbreak has contributed to the unmasking of the corporate world, wherein grocery stores and gun

shops are "essential" businesses in equal measures at times of hardship such as a pandemic.

For the haves who access survival resources, guns are of course needed for maximum protection in a country that always brags about abundance and security and presents itself as the envy of the world.

For the have-nots the story has a dramatic twist to it. They have neither food nor guns and that's why they scramble to food banks.

It seems that the coronavirus is not the only invisible enemy hitting the U.S. hard these days. So is the hunger.

One piece of evidence for this is a drone footage of a miles-long line of cars waiting for food last week in the Monongahela River leading to the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank.

In a second piece of evidence, one food bank in Omaha, Food Bank of the Heartland, saw a nine-fold increase in its typical monthly purchases, according to a New York Times report.

The flocking to food banks and pantries was not unexpected in a country with a nation-wide anti-hunger program, known as



SNAP, that helped 40 million low-income Americans afford a nutritionally adequate diet only in one month in 2018.

With the number of American hungerers being nearly as half as Iran's population, no one in Iran would buy into the U.S.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo who said this past September Iran's leaders needed to return to the table for talks "if they want their people to eat."

We Iranians call it, the pot calling the kettle black.

considerable achievements."

Since the glorious victory of the Islamic Revolution, the Army Force of the country has produced defense equipment, he said, adding, "for this purpose, we will not seek help from other countries in meeting our defense demands in the region as we have managed to produce our defense needs ourselves."

Like the previous year, the Armed Forces of the country will be in the frontline in producing defense equipment in the current year named after 'surge in production', Sayyari emphasized.

The Army and the Armed Forces will certainly unveil new achievements this year in line with the 'surge in production' motto, he added.



TEHRAN (MNA) — Deputy Coordinator of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Army, Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari said that the country will not seek help from other countries to meet its defense needs.

Speaking on Sun. regarding the realization of this year's motto 'surge in production', as introduced by Leader of the Islamic Revolution, he said, "the Army and Armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran have been a forerunner in the implementation of these mottos introduced by the Leader in all years."

He pointed to the motto in the previous year entitled "Boosting Domestic Production" and added, "in the previous year [ended March 20, 2020], the Armed Forces of the country witnessed

Zarif, Guterres discuss U.S. sanctions amid coronavirus pandemic

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has conferred on the United States' sanctions against the Islamic Republic in a phone talk with United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres.



During the phone conversation on Saturday evening, Zarif and Guterres discussed the illegal sanctions' negative impact on Iran's fight against the coronavirus outbreak, according to the Foreign Ministry website.

Tehran has repeatedly condemned Washington's sanctions - which were imposed after the U.S. unilaterally withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal in May 2018 - for hampering its fight against the novel coronavirus crisis.

Zarif has said the bans on Iran even exceed what would be "permissible in the battlefield" and called on the international community that it is "immoral" to succumb to illegal sanctions.

Iran's ambassador to the UN offices in Geneva has written a letter to the World Health Organization chief saying that sanctions against Iran exemplify "crimes against humanity".

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.

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

He 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 added.

Also, on Saturday, the Vatican expressed sympathy with the Iranian people and talked to the U.S. over its draconian sanctions on Tehran.

The Vatican's secretary of state Cardinal Pietro Parolin talked to U.S. officials following a letter by head of Iran's Islamic Seminars Alireza Arafti to leader of the Roman Catholic Church Pope Francis.

Meanwhile, during the Saturday phone call, Zarif and Guterres also discussed the latest developments in Yemen.

The war-torn country on Friday reported its first case of infection with the novel coronavirus in a southern province under the control of Saudi-sponsored militiamen loyal to the country's former President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi.

This has raised fears of an outbreak in an impoverished country where five years of a bloody campaign led by the regime in Riyadh have shattered the health system.

On Thursday night, the spokesman for Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement, Mohammed Abdul-Salam, 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.

Cleric proposes formation of global committee of religious leaders to address COVID-19

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — Secretary of Iran's Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution has called for the establishment of a joint committee of world religious leaders to figure out how to help people across the globe amid the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, also called COVID-19.

In a letter to a number of major religious leaders and organizers of social campaigns in the world, Saeed Reza Ameli stressed the need for a revision of the values relating to life and for the establishment of justice at various levels across the globe.

His letter follows a recent speech from Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei who highlighted the significance of a strategic approach to inclusive justice in the world and establishing a Mahdawi society (a society that genuinely awaits the Savior).

Ameli also denounced the man-made disasters in the shape of wars, sanctions and massacre of people, saying the outbreak of the novel coronavirus pandemic is reminiscent of the cruelties of the hegemony and capitalism which have resulted in hunger, social inequality and widespread tyranny against human societies.

The new coronavirus has infected more than 1,780,000 people around the world and killed over 108,000 so far.



Qalibaf appointed new head of SEO

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Hasan Qalibaf was appointed as the new head of Iran's Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO), IRNA reported.

Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejpasand appointed Qalibaf to the post replacing Shapour Mohammadi who was the SEO head since July 26, 1996.

Qalibaf was previously the head of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), the main stock market in Iran.

Tax income up 31% in a year

1 → As the oil sale accounts for just seven percent of the country's income in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 20), the revenues gained from elimination of hidden energy subsidies as well as increased tax incomes will replace oil revenues, according to Head of Iran's Plan and Budget Organization (PBO) Mohammad Bagher Nobakht.



"This does not mean a rise in tax income; but by setting new tax bases and eliminating unnecessary exemptions at a time of economic warfare, more tax revenues will be provided," the official had said in late November, 2019.

Trump keeps wanting to reopen the economy

Public health officials almost universally agree that the best way to keep coronavirus deaths to a minimum is for Americans to stay at home as much as possible. Yet President Donald Trump keeps wanting to reopen the economy as he tries to weigh economic health and public health.

A look at the polling data reveals, however, why he may want to err on the side of keeping folks at home.

Normally, presidential elections depend a lot on the state of the economy. Trump has to be seeing the economy shedding jobs and has to know the economy has historically been linked to a president's re-election hopes. I, myself, made the connection just last week.

And indeed, the percentage of voters who think the economy is getting worse skyrocketed to 60% in the latest Quinnipiac University poll. That's up from 28% at the beginning of March. When this many voters think the economy is getting worse historically, incumbents almost always lose.

The same poll, however, found that Trump's approval rating on the economy is 51%. This is no different than the average of Quinnipiac polls taken since May 2019. Voters, it seems, are not for the moment blaming Trump for any economic downturn.

This lack of attribution follows a general pattern we've seen throughout Trump's presidency. In fact, it's a trend dating back to Barack Obama's administration. Both of their approval ratings changed little, even as consumer sentiment moved around. For most presidents, there's a clear correlation.

Putting aside Obama and Trump, we see that voters are willing to forgive economic downturns in times of crisis. Think back to 2002. George W. Bush's Republican Party did exceedingly well in that year's midterms, even as the unemployment rate was hovering around its highest rate from 1995 to 2007.



Meanwhile, everything we see in the polling data suggests that almost no one thinks that we need to reopen the economy right now. In a Fox News poll this week, 80% of voters nationwide say they would favor the federal government announcing a stay at home order for everybody but essential workers. You usually can't get 80% of voters to agree upon anything, and the 80% is certainly higher than the approval Trump is getting for his handling of the coronavirus.

Voters aren't concerned Trump is being too proactive. If anything, they think he is being too cautious. The same Fox News poll showed that a mere 4% of voters thought Trump was overreacting to the virus. That compares with 47% who think he isn't taking the virus seriously enough.

Americans expect to have disruption to their lives for a good while longer. Most voters, 75%, in the Fox News poll believe the worst of the epidemic is yet to come. An ABC News poll found that the vast majority of Americans (91%) have had their daily routines interrupted by the virus, and a majority of those (56%) don't expect their routines to get back to normal until at least July.

The point is that there's a lot in the data to indicate that Americans want the President to focus most on the public health issue at hand more so than they are worried about him fixing the economy right now. If people are allowed to go about their normal routine too soon and the number of coronavirus cases rise afterward, there's a good case to be made that's far more dangerous to Trump's reelection chances than a bad economy.

(Source: CNN)

More gains for stock market

By Mahnaz Abdi

TEHRAN— Past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19) witnessed a very fruitful performance for the country's stock market.

TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), which is the main stock market of Iran, passed a trend of more and more growth in the past year, until it posted the record high of half million points on February 24 when it climbed 4,831 points to 503,735.

And as TSE Head Ali Sahraei has announced, the value of trades at the Tehran Stock Exchange jumped 2.6 folds, while Return on Investment (ROI) reached 180 percent in the previous year.

TSE is one of the four major stock exchanges of Iran, the other three exchanges are Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME), and Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX). The lucrative status



was also witnessed in these markets in the past year.

While growth and development in the Iranian stock market have been started in recent years, the previous year was in fact

a time of flourishing for the country's stock exchanges.

Different factors contribute to the past year's prominent success in the stock market.

One important factor was proper ground laid in the stock market and providing better conditions for traders.

The other factor was the status of parallel markets, such as those of foreign currency, gold coin, and housing in the past year that made making investment in the stock market an obviously better and more profitable choice for the investors.

And now despite the economic condition created by the coronavirus outbreak, the Iranian stock market is experiencing more growth in the current Iranian year, which began on March 20.

On Saturday, TEDPIX hit the record high of 600,000 points, as it gained 10,803 points to 608,000. Some 6.663 billion securities worth 57.27 trillion rials (about \$1.36 billion) were traded through 37,000 deals at TSE.

The index also climbed on Sunday, it gained 15,422 points to 623,278, as 7.445 securities valued at 63.726 trillion rials (about \$1.5 billion) were traded.

Iran to hold expo on medical, healthcare achievements

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran International Exhibitions Company (IIEC) plans to hold an exhibition on the country's medical and healthcare achievements in the battle against the coronavirus outbreak, IRNA reported on Sunday.

According to the IIEC Managing Director Bahman Hosseinzadeh, with a focus on the surge in production, the event will be held after the holy month of Ramadan (ends on May 23).

The mentioned exhibition is aimed to introduce laboratory equipment, medical staff uniforms, and all kinds of protection masks, while presenting new technologies in the field of disinfectant and sanitizer production developed by Iranian manufacturers during the coronavirus outbreak, the official said.

He further noted that all necessary measures will be taken to assure the safety and health of both visitors and exhibitors during the event.

Ensuring a safe distance between visitors and exhibitors, providing sanitizers and disinfection equipment such as spray tunnels in the exhibition hall's entrance, providing alcohol spray in the booths as well as providing protection masks are among such measures.

Hosseinzadeh also underlined some of the Leader's comments regarding the importance and necessity of the surge in production in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 20), noting: "As the front line of the



surge in production, exhibitions will take the first step by offering a platform for presenting the country's products and marketing for export development."

IMF can give Iran financial support despite U.S. pressures: Bloomberg

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is able to provide Iran with its rightful financial assistance despite the U.S. efforts to sabotage the disbursement of the funds, Bloomberg reported on Sunday.

As reported, the U.S. which has a 16.51 percent vote share in IMF cannot veto the IMF board but it could use its sanction powers to sabotage the process.

The U.S. administration has been trying to prevent Iran from accessing its financial resources all around the world during the coronavirus crisis and the Islamic Republic has asked the IMF for a \$5 billion loan which has also faced the U.S. opposition.

The European Union, however, has voiced its support for Iran's request, calling on the Trump administration to ease its economic pressure on Iran at this time of crisis.

The report further argued that the IMF can take some measures in order to address both Iran and the U.S. concerns.

First, the Fund can account for the unease of U.S. regulators by excluding dollars, which are normally part of the Special Drawing Right (SDR) basket of currencies in which loans are made. Iran could even agree to accept the loan in euros alone, given that the EU is its primary supplier of medical goods.



Second, the loan could be paid into an account maintained in Europe by the Central Bank of Iran. This would mean that the funds are spent within the European financial system, and therefore subject to oversight from regulators who can monitor for potential misuse, in communication with American counterparts.

The Trump administration has itself implemented a similar system as part of the Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement, a payment channel launched in February

that enables the Central Bank of Iran to use assets in Switzerland towards payment of humanitarian exports by Swiss companies.

Administration officials know a loan to Iran can be "de-risked" but what they are actually seeking to avoid is a political defeat.

To that end, the IMF could seek a more discrete way to provide financial support: it could boost Iran's access to liquid foreign-exchange assets by arranging the sale of some of Iran's assets at the Fund to a third party, such as a European country.

In this scenario, the IMF would reallocate some portion of Iran's 1.55 billion in SDR holdings (valued at approximately \$2.1 billion) to the buyer, which would then make a payment to Iran in a foreign currency, such as euros, to an account maintained by Iran's central bank outside the country. The funds would then be spent in accordance with the same oversight measures described above. Such a transaction would not require approval from the IMF board of governors, meaning the U.S. can avoid appearing isolated during an approval vote.

It can be done. The question now is whether the IMF has the will to do it.

Iranian exports to Armenia resumed

Administration (IRICA), announced, adding that with 250 trucks passing through the border on Aras River, trade with the neighboring country is normalizing after weeks.

"Armenia imported over \$430 million worth of Iranian goods in the past Iranian calendar year [ended on March 19] to become the country's second export destination among the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)'s member states after Russia," he said.

Iran's preferential trade agreement with the EAEU has had a significant impact on the country's trade relations with Armenia, according to the head of Iran-Armenia Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

"The two sides are applying tariff discounts

offered based on the agreement and there has been no problem in this regard", Hervik Yarijanian said in January.

According to the official, the volume of trade between the two countries has witnessed an outstanding rise since the agreement became effective in last October.

Iran mainly imports red meat from Armenia, while Armenia imports polymer raw materials, machinery, industrial gases, manufactured artifacts, leather and leather goods from Iran, he said.

He further noted that Iran has a much greater export capability compared to Armenia, adding that traders have not yet gotten used to the idea of the preferential trade agreement and hopefully with the expansion

of this deal, more Iranian traders will be attracted to the Armenian market.

Iran and Armenia have been emphasizing the need for preserving and expanding trade relations between the two countries since the preferential trade deal between Iran and EAEU was implemented.

While the U.S. renewed sanctions on Iran are aimed at isolating the Islamic Republic both politically and economically, Iran's relations, especially in the economic sectors, with its neighbors are seemed not to be affected by the sanctions.

The northwestern neighbor Armenia is one of the countries preserving and expanding its economic relations with Iran regardless of the sanction condition.

How sharply has China's economy contracted?

By Richard Henderson

As the coronavirus pandemic grows, investor attention has largely shifted from backward-looking indicators that confirm the severity of the economic shutdown to more frequently updating trackers of activity. But this week will see the biggest of all Chinese economic readings, due for release on Friday, once again take center stage.

China's first-quarter GDP is all but certain to have shrunk. The only question is how sharply. The worse Friday's reading, the slimmer the chances that Beijing can deliver on the "V-shaped" recovery it has assured the world is coming.

Tao Wang, head of economic research at UBS, predicts a 10 percent contraction, which would indicate a devastating impact on employment. UBS estimates 50m-60m people in the services sector may be without work, with another 20m jobless workers in the industrial and construction sectors. But Ms. Wang added that "as economic activities normalize and with the help of policies supporting [small and medium enterprises], we expect these numbers to decline quickly and substantially in the coming quarters".

UBS estimates that job losses may narrow to fewer than 50m by the end of the first half of 2020. Yet other readings on economic activity are not encouraging.

The FT's own China Economic Activity index shows backsliding after some upward momentum last month, with activity still down close to 40 percent from pre-outbreak levels.

The mostly optimistic mood in financial markets will be tested on Tuesday when IMF chief economist Gita Gopinath outlines the latest global economic outlook at the start of the



organization's two-day meeting.

In early March, the IMF set aside \$50bn to help coronavirus-hit countries. The move was made as it warned that the outbreak would force it to cut its global economic growth forecast to below the 2.9 per cent rate recorded last year.

This week's meeting comes as the Australian dollar and the UK pound — two currencies that plumbed historic lows against the US dollar in March — have recovered some lost ground. But analysts are divided over whether the pullback in the US dollar is temporary or a sign that the worst of the crisis is over.

Analysts at Generali Investments think that coming to terms with coronavirus will allow investors to re-establish riskier positions and damp demand for the dollar.

"With more visibility on the fallout and the global shutdown to be gradually eased, safe-haven demand for the greenback is likely to recede," said Thomas Hempel, an analyst at the

European asset manager Generali Investments.

But Goldman Sachs strategist Zach Pandl said the dollar's behavior so far this year mirrored that of 2008-09, suggesting that further falls in equity prices would push the US currency higher again. "We expect the dollar to remain firm as long as risky assets remain weak," he said.

US-listed companies are facing renewed pressure to curb the amounts they spend on dividends and share repurchases, as economic activity slows.

Already, 13 companies in the S&P 500 have cut dividends. Goldman Sachs said in a note to clients last week, adding that total payouts could fall 25 per cent below 2019 levels. Share buybacks will fare worse, Goldman said, halving to \$371bn.

Part of the reason stems from limits on dividend and buyback payments for companies receiving money through the \$2tn US government spending package to support the economy. "The bill stipulates that any company that borrows money from the Treasury may not repurchase stock or pay a dividend until 12 months after the loan is repaid," Goldman analysts wrote.

Airlines including Delta and Air Alaska and aircraft manufacturer Boeing are among the companies to already scrap dividend and share buybacks.

Share buybacks have boomed in recent years, reaching a record \$806bn in 2018, the first year after the corporate tax cuts ushered in by President Donald Trump. The popularity of buybacks has made US companies the largest block of stock purchasers in the market, and a reduction in activity removes a key pillar of support for stock prices after the most volatile period since the 2008 financial crisis.

(Source: Financial Times)

‘Diversifying technological products main goal of RIPI’

ENERGY TEHRAN — Head of Iran's Research Institute of Petroleum Industry (RIPI) says the institute has it on the agenda to diversify the basket of technological products in the oil industry, Shana reported.

“The research institute is not just a research contractor, it plays a strategic role in addressing the needs of the oil industry,” Jafar Tofiqi said.

“We will be facing more demand from the oil industry in the current [Iranian calendar] year (began on March 20), so we need to expand the basket of our technological products in order to meet those requirements; this requires more capacity building and empowerment within the Petroleum Industry Research Institute,” the official stressed.

He went on to say that the technological requirements of the oil industry are constantly evolving: “In the current situation, when foreign companies are not present, this



opportunity should be used to replace these companies to create value and technology.”

According to the official, considering the workforce's health and wellbeing, looking out for new technologies, pushing to go

completely green and accelerating research projects as well as providing sustainable financial resources are also among the major priorities of the RIPI in the current year.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Tofiqi stressed

the need to expand the network of cooperation between the research institute and the country's top universities and research centers, saying: “Since there is a lot of capacity in universities and research centers in the country, good ideas have been formed in these centers that we can use to expand our projects.”

He also pointed to the development of RIPI's overseas activities and said: “Although cooperation with foreign institutions is very difficult in the current situation, we can use the opportunities created to cooperate with neighboring countries.”

RIPI was initially established under the title of “Iran Petroleum Industry Research Development Office” in 1959. Its primary aim was carrying out research on application of petroleum materials.

The main strategy of PIRI is creating value added via development and indigenization of new technologies used in the oil industry.

Venezuela's private sector proposes loosening of gasoline import rules

Representatives of Venezuela's private oil service companies have proposed the government loosen restrictions on gasoline imports and sales, as the country faces its worst motor fuel shortages in more than a decade.

In a public statement this week and in discussions with officials of President Nicolas Maduro's socialist government and state oil company Petroleos de Venezuela, members of the Oil Chamber grouping of contractors and service companies proposed allowing private firms to import gasoline, according to three people with knowledge of the talks.

The proposal faces many obstacles, not least generous subsidies that make gasoline essentially free at the pump in Venezuela, which would complicate efforts by private companies to turn a profit. A 2008 law also reserves activities related to liquid fuel supply, including gasoline transport, to the state. “It is necessary, but it is not viable,” said one of the people, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

It was not clear which companies, if any, are planning to import and sell fuel, which has been exclusively handled by PDVSA for over a decade.

The push comes after weeks of acute gasoline scarcity, as PDVSA's refineries produce at less than a 10th of capacity after years of underinvestment and lack of maintenance, and as U.S. sanctions complicate imports.

That has left some farmers unable to bring their crops to market, paralyzed food transport into Venezuela's cities, and forced some doctors to wait in line for gasoline for hours just to get to work at hospitals as the country combats the outbreak of the new coronavirus.

“Fuel is indispensable for the health and



food sectors, and so we must temporarily deregulate the internal market and allow the importation of fuels from various external private sources,” the Zulia chapter of the Oil Chamber wrote in a statement published on Twitter on Wednesday.

PDVSA did not respond to a request for comment.

Oil Chamber president, Reinaldo Quintero, said on Saturday the Zulia chapter's proposal did not represent the official position of the overall group, which was supporting PDVSA's plan to improve the situation by repairing refineries.

“We will always propose ways to improve the oil industry,” Quintero said in a telephone interview.

A source at PDVSA said the company was wary of the proposal and preferred to focus on ongoing efforts to revive output at the company's refineries. Officials have pledged to restart gasoline production at the 146,000 barrel-per-day El Palito refinery.

“It will take some time,” Rafael Lacava, the Maduro-aligned governor of Carabobo State, where El Palito is located, said in a video posted on Twitter. “But I am sure that sooner rather than later, we will be normalizing the fuel market on the streets.”

(Source: Reuters)

U.S. senators press Saudi officials to put oil cut in motion

Republican U.S. senators from oil states who recently introduced legislation to remove American troops from Saudi Arabia said on Saturday they had spoken with three officials from the kingdom and urged them to take concrete action to cut crude output.

Saudi Arabia and Russia were close to finalizing a deal with other producers in the informal OPEC+ group to cut crude output by a record 10 million barrels per day (bpd), or about 10% of global output.

Oil prices had fallen to 18-year lows as the coronavirus outbreak has closed down economies across the world and after Saudi Arabia and Russia boosted output in a race for market share.

The call was led by Senators Dan Sullivan and Kevin Cramer, who introduced legislation in March to remove U.S. troops, Patriot missiles and THAAD defense systems from Saudi Arabia unless it cut output.

There were 11 Republican senators on the nearly two-hour call, including Bill Cassidy, who introduced legislation last week to remove the U.S. troops in 30 days, a month faster than the previous legislation.

While the bills are unlikely to pass, the senators have played an unusual role in raising pressure on longtime ally Saudi Arabia, as President Donald Trump, a fellow Republican, has been in talks with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman urging him to boost output.

They spoke with Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, Deputy Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman and the Saudi ambassador to the United States, Princess Reema bint Bandar bin Sultan.

Sullivan, of Alaska, applauded Saudi Arabia's taking part in the agreement to cut output, but said “actions speak louder



than words.”

“The Kingdom needs to take sustainable, concrete actions to significantly cut oil production, and it needs to do so soon,” Sullivan said.

Saudi Arabia's action to boost production during a pandemic was “inexcusable” and “won't be forgotten,” said Cramer, of North Dakota.

The United States, the world's top oil producer, is gradually cutting about 2 million bpd of output as reduced demand and low oil prices force some heavily leveraged producers into bankruptcy.

The push by Republican senators was a sign of how Congress could raise pressure on Saudi Arabia if it does not stick to the oil cut plan. If the kingdom does not cut output, pointed measures could be included later this year in must-pass legislation such as the annual defense policy bill.

In January, the United States had 2,500 military personnel in Saudi Arabia. In October 2019, Washington deployed about 3,000 troops there at a time of heightened tensions with Iran.

The Saudi embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

(Source: Reuters)

How the pandemic wiped out oil demand around the world

Global oil demand is being destroyed as the coronavirus forces people around the world to remain indoors and avoid all unnecessary travel.

Currently, between a third and a half of the world's population are in lockdown, meaning few people are driving, flying or doing much that would require the use of crude or its derivatives.

The ramifications for the oil market are huge, with refiners, producers and even petrostates all facing uncertain futures. The most immediate set of data from America starkly illustrated the impact. On Wednesday, the U.S. Energy Information Administration reported U.S. drivers consumed the least gasoline for at least 30 years, as normal life ground to a halt.

■ Demand destruction

Demand for crude could fall by 27 million barrels a day this month, according to Rystad Energy AS, while Trafifigra Group estimates the current hit to consumption is around 35 million barrels a day.

Against this backdrop, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, meeting via video conference on Thursday, agreed to cut production by 10 million barrels a day.

The agreement, which dwarves previous interventions and has been sponsored by U.S. President Donald Trump, would end the price war between Riyadh and Moscow that helped pushed oil down to the lowest in almost two decades. The deal, however, is at risk of collapse after Mexico refused to sign up.

Attention now turns to today's meeting of G-20 oil ministers, chaired by Saudi Arabia, where countries outside OPEC+, including the U.S., are expected to make commitments to support oil markets.

Below is a reminder of how consumption has been affected in various countries.



■ U.S.

U.S. oil demand has now fallen to 14.4 million barrels a day, the lowest in data going back to 1990 and a drop of more than 30% from pre-crisis levels, government figures showed Wednesday. In its short-term outlook, the EIA forecast the hit to oil demand will be 16.7 million barrels a day in April. A number of U.S. refiners, including HollyFrontier Corp. and Marathon Petroleum Corp., cut run rates by 30%.

■ India

Crude demand in the world's third-biggest consumer has collapsed by as much as 70% as India endures the planet's largest national lockdown, according to officials at the country's refiners. Consumption for the entire month could average about 50% below last year's levels but that's based on India's three-week lockdown ending on April 15 as planned, according to the officials. That's 3.1 million barrels a day of lost oil demand, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

■ China

Oil refineries in China, the world's biggest crude importer, may increase processing rates to near last year's average levels this month, providing a glimmer of hope to a global market reeling from the virus. Meanwhile, processing at private refiners, known as teapots, will continue to ramp up with some idled plants set to resume in April, Chinese industry researcher SCI99 said. Wuhan, the epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, officially re-opened on Wednesday after being locked down for almost four months.

India, China and the U.S. account for about 40% of global oil demand

■ Canada

Canadian oil producers are the most affected globally by the Covid-19 demand hit with supply shut-ins seen surpassing 1.1 million barrels a day in the second quarter, Thomas Liles, Rystad Energy's senior analyst, wrote in a report. To date, Canada is estimated to have shut at least 325,000 barrels a day.

■ Spain

In Spain, one of the countries hit worst by the disease, oil product demand fell by 23% in March, according to BloombergNEF. Air and road fuel consumption were the most affected, with gasoline and road diesel falling by 35.5% and 26.5% respectively. Demand for kerosene, predominantly consumed in the aviation sector, fell 42.5% as aircraft remained grounded across much of the country. Spain has extended its lockdown until April 25.

■ Italy

Italy, which together with Spain imposed some of Europe's harshest restrictions on movement, is also expected to extend its lockdown from April 13. With the nation under strict restrictions of movement, retail fuel sales have plunged 85%, according to service station union estimates. The country's refiners risk permanent supply-chain disruption if the country's lockdown runs into June and companies stockpile crude and reduce production, industry lobby FederPetroli Italia said.

■ UK

Sales of gasoline and diesel in the U.K. were down by 66% and 57%, respectively, as of March 31, according to the U.K. Petrol Retailers Association. Britain's top supermarket, Tesco Plc, said gasoline sales were down 70% over the “last weeks” following the U.K. lockdown.

■ Netherlands

A survey of Dutch car dealers, driving schools and transport companies revealed that respondents had lost almost half of their revenue due to the coronavirus and about 80% may need to seek additional credit within three months. “The Netherlands really has come to a standstill,” said Bovag spokesman Tom Huyskens. “Only those that really need it are driving, filling up their tank, but otherwise traffic has pretty much stopped.”

(Source: Bloomberg)

Coronacrisis Is Killing Argentina's Shale Oil Boom

Argentina's Vaca Muerta shale is on life support just weeks after the meltdown in global crude oil prices.

On Thursday, the regional news outlet in the Vaca Muerta, Rio Negro, reported that the “crisis in the oil industry escalated to higher levels” this week. Argentina's partially state-owned YPF suddenly cut production by 50 percent at its Loma Campana oil field – the flagship project for the much-hyped Vaca Muerta shale – because demand collapsed and the company has insufficient storage for its oil.

Like many other countries, Argentina imposed a version of a lockdown order to contain the coronavirus pandemic, leading to an abrupt collapse in oil demand. YPF said that its fuel sales have declined by as much as 70 percent.

It's a similar story playing out in many places around the globe – a sharp drop in retail fuel sales led to topped off storage levels, cuts at refineries, and ultimately to shut-ins at the well head.

As Rio Negro reported, the striking thing about the immediate cut in production at Loma Campana – which YPF operates jointly with Chevron – is the fact that the field is the one of the most competitive in Vaca Muerta. It is the most important unconventional oil field in Argentina



and arguably the most significant in all of South America.

YPF's Loma Campana is not the only field that could suffer immediate curtailments. Vista Oil & Gas has also been forced to cut output, closing at least eight wells. Vista staged a highly-anticipated IPO last year on the New York and Mexican stock exchanges and it is backed by a New York private equity company.

Meanwhile, Royal Dutch Shell, ExxonMobil and Pan American Energy (a subsidiary of BP) also cut production, although they have not made precise volumes public.

The Vaca Muerta was already on thin ice before the global pandemic and the Saudi-Russian price war. Last year, after then-President Mauricio Macri performed dismally in the Argentine version of a presidential primary, the country's financial markets went into a tailspin. The peso plunged in value and inflation soared, forcing President Macri to freeze fuel prices to shield the country from the economic fallout.

The oil industry slammed on the breaks as a result, scrapping rigs and reducing the rate of fracking in Vaca Muerta.

The downturn was part of a broader economic recession and debt crisis facing Argentina, one that is now much worse because of the global pandemic. Just days ago, the Argentine government announced a delay of payments on \$10 billion of domestic bonds, a move that some credit analysts say is tantamount to a default. A much larger negotiation over some \$83 billion in debt looms, including the fate of the IMF's largest bailout package in its history – a \$57 billion loan initiated in 2018.

A cornerstone of Macri's plan for growth was scaling up Vaca Muerta, a plan that was always riddled with risk. Argentina's massive shale formation has enormous geologic potential, but it has a litany of problems that do not exist in Texas or North Dakota. Costs are higher. Infrastructure – pipelines, compressor stations, sand mines, export facilities, etc. – is woefully behind.

Then there is the macroeconomic instability, which is not a trivial matter. High inflation, a volatile currency, export taxes and a dismal near-term outlook has kept the oil majors from jumping in with both feet.

Argentina has essentially been trying to replicate the Permian boom, but without the advantages that exist in the U.S. – deep capital markets, extensive petroleum infrastructure, drilling technologies and mineral rights in the hands of landowners. If U.S. shale was built on debt and unprofitable drilling, the task for Argentina is substantially more difficult.

These problems have always plagued the Vaca Muerta. Macri's plan included heavy subsidies for gas production, which succeeded in initiating a drilling boom. But it was a huge drain on the budget and ultimately was unsustainable.

All of that is to say that the outlook heading into 2020 was pretty negative to begin with. The number of frac stages fell from 676 in August to just 346 in January. The new President Alberto Fernandez has waffled on a new strategy to revive drilling, and ultimately has not offered anything new.

Now with a pandemic sweeping across the globe and oil markets in disarray, the wheels are coming off. The Argentine oil industry is pressing the government to subsidize prices, offering a guaranteed price in the mid-\$50s per barrel. The government has suggested that it could consider a price in the mid-\$40s, but has not agreed to anything as of yet, Buenos Aires-based journalist Fernando Heredia told Oilprice.com

But another round of subsidies carries the same risks as before. “A Macri-like approach to foreign companies is certain death,” IEEFA said in a December report. “The new administration would be well-served to learn from the decade-long financial failure of unconventional production in the U.S., despite impressive production gains.”

Where the international oil majors have dabbled in the Vaca Muerta, YPF has been the anchor, the main driver of drilling. In March, YPF executive president Daniel Gonzalez issued an internal warning of “very difficult” times ahead. “We have stopped drilling and completing wells. We are wrapping up leaving the last new wells and equipment in a safe condition,” the executive said in March.

The cut in production at Loma Campana is a new stage of crisis for the company, and for the Vaca Muerta shale as a whole.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Second Announcement



IN THE NAME OF GOD
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BROADCASTING

INTERNATIONAL TENDER No: 99/103-01/03

Tender Holder:

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BROADCASTING (IRIB)

Subject of Tender :

Leasing 9MHz space on Eutelsat 21B (E21B) for three years in accordance with the technical specification and other terms and conditions mentioned in the tender documents.

Deadline and how to receive the tender documents:

From **Sunday 12th April 2020** (1399/01/24) until **Wednesday 15th April 2020** (1399/01/27) by 04:00 p.m with presentation of introductory letter by company or its representative and the receipt of paying the documents fee.

Place of receiving the tender document:

Interested participants may refer to purchasing (KALA) Dept. ,4th Floor of IRIB Administration Complex ,Hotel Esteghlal St. Vali -Assr Ave,Tehran, Iran

The fee of the tender documents and how to deposit it:

Submission of payment receipt for the amount of 1,000,000 Rials to account 4101029171204273 with BIC No.IR 310100004101029171204273 IRAN Central Bank in the name of IRIB.

Type and amount of guarantee for participation to tender:

The amount of deposit for participant in tender is USD 25962 fixed or its equivalent in Rials 4050000000 which should be in the form of Bank Guarantee.

Time and place of delivering Bidding Envelopes:

The sealed packages/envelopes and (Qualification Evaluation in a separate sealed package/envelope) should be submitted no later than **11:00 a.m. on Saturday 16th May 2020** (1399/02/27) at the address mentioned in 4th clause.

Time and place of opening Qualification Evaluation envelopes:

The date of opening the Qualification Evaluation envelopes is on **Saturday 16th May 2020** at **12:00 p.m** (1399/02/27) in the office of International Purchasing .

Time and place of opening Envelopes:

The envelopes A of those eligible participants who meets the qualification criterion and approval of Technical and Commercial committee will be opened on **Sunday 17th May 2020** at **03:00 p.m** (1399/02/28) in the office of Financial Vice President .In case of complete content in the envelopes A the envelopes of B and C of eligible participants will be opened at the same time and place.

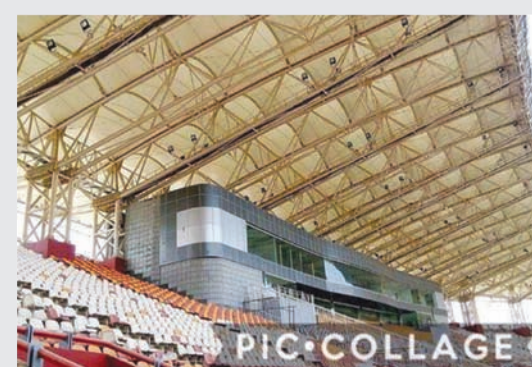
The participant must be qualified by the competent authorities.

For more information please see :

www.iriboffice.ir/tenders and http://iets.mporg.ir/ Tel: 00982122167053

Purchasing (Kala) Dept.,IRIB

Modern Stadium of Martyrs of Khuzestan Football Club (KSC)



Catch up with the latest news in Iran and beyond with



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

Get in touch
www.mehrnews.com



en.mehrnews.com
@Mehrnewscom

Biological viruses part of future ruthless asymmetrical warfare: Ogutcu

1 → Yet, it is still early, in my view, for this sacred desire to materialize any time soon no matter how much we want and the current circumstances force it on us simply because the leadership in Washington, Brussels, Moscow, and Beijing is not ready to take such a vital step. They are more concerned about their declining fortunes and future aspirations of supremacy than rewriting the rules that have governed all life on this planet.

They do not want the fragile balance of power to be upset and give advantage to other aspirants that emerge powerfully in the global equation. It is a great pity and missed opportunity that will have devastating consequences.

The current world order is largely based on liberalism and to some extent on realism approaches. What are the deficiencies of the said approaches revealed by coronavirus?

We must admit that the corona pandemic, like the attacks of September 11, 2001, the financial crisis of 2008 and many great depressions before it, has brought about a tremendous shock that will not go away anytime soon.

We do not know how long it will linger on and whether there will be a second wave of another virus, as speculated, to further shock us.

Whilst we expect common, coordinated actions at the global level, the cracks amongst the traditional power centers, the US and Europe, are growing wide and internal solidarity is set to weaken. Russia is trying to create a strong position for itself in Eurasia, considered to be its "backyard," and even in the Middle East and East Mediterranean, and has built an effective "marriage of convenience" with China.

Can the Chinese leadership fill the gap left by the US? Does Beijing go beyond the regional superpower role and take on the global free investment and trade championship? Will it take the helm in climate change and energy as well?

China is struggling to tackle its own structural economic problems, which were challenging to the lead even before the disaster struck Wuhan.

Whether the unchecked power of the Chinese government is the main reason the country has successfully slowed—and perhaps even stopped—domestic transmission of the virus is of course questionable. Will China emerge from the crisis a stronger global power?

True, this crisis has also laid bare gaps in American policy. Biodefense is a key component of national security; the US needs to put more technology to work tracking diseases before the next big outbreak, as China has successfully done.

The EU faces growing problems with its cohesion: Southerners and northerners are having a shouting match over the proposal for corona bonds, while Viktor Orbán's Hungary is turning even more authoritarian, supposedly in the name of combating the outbreak. If the EU disintegrates into a loose and weak grouping of powerful individual members, this may not be a big surprise.

I believe that free, transparent and efficient economic and political systems are needed to win the fight against the coronavirus and drive the recovery. The leadership gap is bigger than any other gap in the West.

Despite all odds, we must maintain our optimism and prepare ourselves to avoid an unexpected fait accompli.

Although the outbreak of the virus has put the realism and self-help approaches in the center of the focus, it also has



revealed deficiencies of the realism which is based on state security and looks at the security issue just militarily. The outbreak of the virus also showed that militaristic economies also are not able to maintain the security of nations and governments in the post-corona era. What do you think of this?

An increasingly interconnected world means that the global impact of what has historically been local disease outbreaks can have far-reaching political, social and economic consequences.

The military cannot escape its devastating effects.

In an age of intercontinental-range ballistic missiles, long-range bombers and remotely controlled drones, the role of the military will also change.

Although we still have direct or proxy conventional wars being waged in different parts of the world, I believe that tomorrow's wars will no longer be fought by tanks, fighter jets, and missiles. The battlefields are trade, investment, technology, currency, energy, water, food, and values.

The biological viruses are no doubt part of this ruthless asymmetrical warfare without causing bloodshed and physical destruction. Recently, 10 drones were enough to wipe out almost half of the Saudi oil production and processing facilities.

Not surprisingly, the corona outbreak has given rise to conspiracy theories that the virus is man-made and it could possibly be a Chinese bioweapon, originally developed in a military medical research facility outside Shanghai. Likewise, the Chinese government spokesman blamed the US for developing this virus and spreading it in Wuhan in a hostile action to contain the "Middle Kingdom".

Thank God, both sides later declared a "ceasefire" in this exchange of accusations. However, even a mention of this possibility demonstrates that the coronavirus could well be an effective biological weapon if any side really wanted to use it.

It has already locked us in homes, caused the cruise industry to sink, stocks to plummet, food supply chains to disrupt and global mobility to stop. You can hardly achieve these through a conventional military action alone.

Even while most of the attention has been focused on the virus' impact on health policy and the economy — and rightfully so — there are security implications resulting from the

spread. We do not seem to have a Plan B for dealing with such outbreaks or the impacts on our military preparedness and operations. Even in NATO's most recent strategic concept, an official policy document to guide the Alliance to prepare for future threats, there is not even a single mention of the word "pandemic".

There are news reports that some military forces are trying to take advantage of the contagion crises in Iraq, Syria, and Libya by launching new attacks.

I believe that the coronavirus is a warning to us; unless we pull ourselves together for an effective, non-selfish global response and move towards creating a novel order to achieve peace, prosperity and ecological balance, the worst-case scenarios may come true, unfortunately.

If we accept that the post-corona world order will be different from the existing one, will the changes be structural and fundamental ones? Which meanings will experience fundamental changes?

Let's remember that after World War II, the common understanding of why both world wars took place was nationalism and not providing room to major nations on the world stage.

If today more countries go the way of Trump's US, saying "every sheep hangs on its own leg" and "my country first," it is unlikely that in the post-corona era we will be evolving towards a new environmentally friendly, healthy, conflict-free, equitable global order in finance, energy, trade, geopolitical that we all aspire.

It is common knowledge that effective governance is not necessarily the strong suit of liberal democracies. Rather, the true merits of a liberal society are its freedom of the press and information, and its rule of law. This does not guarantee a timely response to a virus outbreak. Singapore tolerates far more freedom of information than China, and South Korea is a liberal democracy. Their responses to the pandemic have been relatively successful so far, although their situations have not been as dire as in China's Hubei province.

The solution, therefore, is a hybrid regime that combines the voice of the people through popular elections with more decision-making power given to the "meritocrats". The emphasis of the Asian value of collectivism over individualism — a factor often attributed to the emergence of the "East Asia miracle" in the second half of last century — is also mentioned as one of the main reasons behind this region's success in fighting the pandemic better than the Western nations.

As a result of the current trends we follow, we may end up with the first stage of globalization coming to a halt. The second phase will not resemble what we have become accustomed to and may not be as free and liberal as the first. It can be an ugly and dangerous one.

In this age of rapidity and in light of the lessons learned from previous crises and conflicts, it is sad to say that a common effort cannot be launched swiftly and we have to wait further until our pains and hopelessness will grow everywhere. This will accompany, it goes without saying, serious social and political disturbances that will exasperate the situation.

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

Corbyn loses Labor Party's leadership due to stop opposing Israeli lobby

Jeremy Corbyn lost the leadership of the Britain's Labor Party to his rival Keir Starmer last week after he avoided defending himself against the Israeli lobby, a senior investigating journalist underscored in his article.

Asa Winstanley, who writes about Palestine and the Middle East, wrote in his article in the Middle East Monitor, "In the realms of post-mortems that have already been written on Corbyn's political career, many have examined this question. But very few have acknowledged a major facet of Corbyn's defeat, if not the greatest factor of all — Corbyn's refusal to fight the Israel lobby."

"So that's it. Jeremy Corbyn is out. Not with a bang, but with a whimper," he went on to say. "With the media's attention rightly focused on the coronavirus pandemic, coverage of Corbyn's departure as Labor leader last weekend was muted," he further said.

In truth, the die had already been cast the moment Corbyn announced, after December's election result, that he would be stepping down.

For all his flaws, Corbyn and the popular movement behind him, represented the single best chance for radical change in this country for a generation. Now, all that is gone, and this is a moment of woe.

This marks the end of an era in British politics — and, indeed in world politics.

Corbyn represented a serious challenge to 40 years of neoliberal consensus among political leaders in the West. In that respect, even in defeat, he has had some success. The national narrative has changed irrevocably — austerity has been utterly defeated.

It is now quite unimaginable for a British politician to talk about cuts to public services, especially to the National Health Service.

Corbyn played a pivotal role in bringing about change to the way politics is talked about in this country.

But let's not beat about the bush, Corbyn lost the election in December. There's no avoiding that fact, and it was a serious defeat for the left.

Over the course of five years, the Israel lobby, in alliance with Labor's own right wing, relentlessly smeared and defamed Corbyn and his movement as anti-Semites.

This is a decades-old strategy employed by Israel and its lobbyists, which they continue to use, because it continues to work.

Corbyn unfortunately had no strategy to counter this. Instead, betrayed by even some on the Labor left over the issue, he eventually began to concede.

He reluctantly indulged the smears, repeatedly apologizing for anti-Semitism in Labor, when in fact it was virtually non-existent — as all empirical polling data showed time and time again.

These apologies were to no avail. The Israel lobby always demands more. They wanted him out, and they continued the defamation campaign until the bitter end.

A leader from one such pro-Israel group boasted in a bizarre video rant over the Christmas holidays last year, that they had "slaughtered" Corbyn.

"We defeated him," proudly announced Joe Glasman of the so-called Campaign Against Antisemitism. "They tried to kill us," he ranted, but "we won." The Campaign Against Antisemitism is very misleadingly named. A more accurate title would be The Campaign Against Palestinians.

Despite his lies about Labor anti-Semitism, Glasman was correct in one aspect: the Israel lobby did defeat Corbyn.

The success of the "Labor anti-Semitism crisis" smear campaign will have to be faced by the British left, if they ever want to succeed in changing the country.

It is not the case that the Israel lobby is all-powerful in objective terms — it is not, and that is the tragedy of the situation. If Corbyn had truly fought them, they would have crumbled.

Instead, he stood by, as good socialists and anti-racists like Ken Livingstone, Marc Wadsworth, Jackie Walker and Chris Williamson were purged from the party.

He even failed to stop Labor adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's appalling redefinition of anti-Semitism — which deliberately conflates Palestine solidarity campaigning with anti-Jewish racism.

Polling by Lord Ashcroft after the general election indicated that the smear campaign was indeed successful. It was one of the top five reasons that voters had turned against Corbyn, after his major advances in the 2017 election.

That poll also showed that almost three quarters of Labor's membership thought that the anti-Semitism crisis had been "invented or wildly exaggerated". The same figure was 92 percent among Momentum members.

If only Corbyn and his team had listened to his own members, instead of attempting to embrace his own most bitter enemies within the party, especially such internal Labor pro-Israel elements such as the Jewish Labor Movement

and right-wing MP Margaret Hodge, the whole story would be different.

If the British left hopes to avoid Corbyn's fate in the future, they will have to learn this harsh lesson: never make concessions to the Israel lobby. It will never be enough, so they would be better served to reject their demands outright.

Winstanley also wrote in The Electronic Intifada that Starmer won the membership election to succeed left-winger and Palestine solidarity veteran Jeremy Corbyn last weekend.

Starmer first act as leader had been to declare the party's allegiance to the Israel lobby, and to signal an impending purge of the left wing of the party membership under the pretext of combating "Labor anti-Semitism."

Throughout his four and a half years as Labor leader, Corbyn was incessantly defamed with a manufactured anti-Semitism crisis by the Israel lobby and by the right wing of his own party.

"Anti-Semitism has been a stain on our party," Starmer claimed in his victory speech at the time, giving full credence to the smears against his predecessor.

"On behalf of the Labor Party, I am sorry," Starmer added.

Labor lawmakers — who are overwhelmingly right wing — never accepted the result of the democratic leadership election which brought Corbyn to national prominence in 2015, and repeatedly attempted to overthrow him.

They finally succeeded last December. After the party's defeat in the general election, Corbyn announced he would be stepping down.

Polling suggested that the Labor anti-Semitism smear campaign had a major impact on the general election outcome.

The Israel lobby was jubilant, with one major group gloating that they had "slaughtered" Corbyn.

But Labor members never accepted the false narrative.

"Invented or wildly exaggerated"

A major poll after the general election found that almost three quarters of them thought the crisis had been "invented or wildly exaggerated."

The figure was even higher — 92 percent — among members of Momentum, the party faction founded to back Corbyn.

Starmer in his speech paid tribute to Corbyn as his "friend" and promised to unite the party.

But he immediately followed with his comments about anti-Semitism, meaning the apology amounted to a swipe at Corbyn and the left-wing grassroots membership that brought him to power.

"I will tear out this poison by its roots," Starmer said, "and judge success by the return of our Jewish members and those who felt that they could no longer support us."

That statement erases the many Jewish members who remained loyal to the party, and who have spoken out consistently against the campaign to weaponize anti-Semitism to oust Corbyn and crush solidarity for Palestinian rights.

Starmer's declaration of allegiance to the Israel lobby was the only statement of substance in his pre-recorded victory speech.

Since then — despite the global coronavirus pandemic and millions of newly unemployed — he has made reassuring the Israel lobby his number one priority.

The very same day, Starmer wrote to the president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, an Israel lobby group which had been vehemently anti-Corbyn, repeating his apology.

He also reiterated an earlier commitment to a list of demands by the Board of Deputies that the new leader should purge the party membership.

"Within hours of the result, Keir Starmer called me to discuss anti-Jewish hate in the Labor Party," wrote former Labor lawmaker Ruth Smeeth, in a Times of Israel blog post.

A former professional Israel lobbyist, Smeeth has been one of Corbyn's bitterest opponents.

On Tuesday, Starmer wrote another sinnering apology to the Israel lobby, published in both the Evening Standard and the anti-Palestinian newspaper, The Jewish Chronicle.

"Once the coronavirus pandemic is over," he wrote, "I will be closing the Labor Party's offices for a day and inviting representatives of the Jewish community to come in and facilitate a day's training for all members of staff on anti-Semitism."

Even under Corbyn, Labor adopted a misleading and politically motivated redefinition of anti-Semitism which deliberately conflates Palestine solidarity activism with anti-Jewish racism.

The Board of Deputies' demands included the stipulation that training on anti-Semitism in the party be run only by the Jewish Labor Movement and not "fringe organizations" — a veiled reference to left-wing pro-Corbyn group, Jewish Voice for Labor.

Founded in 2004, the Jewish Labor Movement had been a moribund group, but was resurrected by pro-Israel activists in September 2015, specifically to fight Corbyn.

A glance at Palestinian camps in Lebanon amid Coronavirus pandemic

A Palestinian activist criticized clamping down of refugee camps in Lebanon, noting the move will not save the Middle Eastern country from COVID-19 outbreak.

Dalal Yassine, who serves as a program and policy advisor to The Palestinian Policy Network of Al-Shabaka, wrote in her analytic article published by Al Jazeera on April 11 that the Palestinian and Syrian refugees need adequate testing and healthcare, not more restrictions on their movement.

As the coronavirus outbreak spread around the world, the World Health Organization (WHO) was quick to recommend that countries take measures to contain the deadly virus. It urged physical distancing to limit the spread of the virus and encouraged increased personal and public hygiene.

In Lebanon, this has provided another opportunity for political figures to target marginalized communities, especially Palestinian and Syrian refugees.

At a March 13 news conference, Samir Geagea, the leader of the Lebanese Forces party, who is known for making racist statements, implied that Palestinian and Syrian refugees would be spreaders of COVID-19 in Lebanon and argued that the refugee communities posed a threat to public health.

Despite Geagea's attempts to blame the outbreak on refugee populations, Lebanon's first COVID-19 cases were not Palestinian or Syrian refugees. Rather, it is suspected they were Lebanese nationals who were returning from other countries and Jesuit priests who had travelled to Italy.

The priests are based in a church less than 30 minutes away from Geagea's home in Ma'arab, north of Beirut, yet he made no mention of them in his news conference.

Instead, he called for the Lebanese Army to tighten security around the Palestinian and Syrian refugee camps and limit entry and exit to and from them.

It soon became clear that the local authorities shared Geagea's attitude towards refugees.

On March 15, the government announced general mobilization across the country and local authorities started coordinating with security forces to stop "unnecessary" movement from camps. Refugee communities have already complained that the curfews they face are longer than those imposed on Lebanese citizens. In some areas, they are allowed to be outside of their houses for just five hours.

Palestinians have faced restrictions for decades by the Lebanese authorities, and so have Syrians more recently. That the Lebanese authorities are resorting to such actions amid the COVID-19 outbreak is rather unsurprising.

Putting more restrictions on refugees than on the rest of the population will not stop the spread of the virus, but it will add to the suffering of these marginalized groups. What both the Lebanese and refugee communities need is improved access to testing, health care, clean water, personal protective gear, and hygienic products.

UNRWA, the agency responsible for Palestinian refugees in the Middle East, recently announced that it would coordinate with the Lebanese health ministry to provide COVID-19 testing and treatment for Palestinian refugees at Beirut's Rafik Hariri Hospital. Similarly, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has said it will assist with the cost of these services for the Syrian refugees.

On March 28, Lebanese Health Minister Hamad Hassan declared that Lebanon will share responsibility with the appropriate UN agencies for refugee healthcare. However, it is unclear whether access to services will be on an equal basis or if there will be discrimination in care as well.

Given the persistent problems with access to services among refugees and the fragmented nature of health care provision in Lebanon, it is doubtful that they would have adequate health care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lebanon is home to more than 475,000 Palestinian refugees, many of whom have lived in the country since they were expelled or forced to flee from Palestine in the 1948 Nakba. More than half live in 12 officially recognized refugee camps.

Palestinian refugees are denied access to healthcare services in Lebanese government hospitals. Instead, 28 UNRWA-run health facilities provide modest primary healthcare services. Chronic or severe health conditions are transferred to hospitals run by the Palestinian Red Crescent. UNRWA also assists Palestinian refugees with some of the costs for care by specialists in private Lebanese hospitals. These efforts, however, have not provided adequate care for Palestinian refugees and have diminished even more after the U.S. decided to cut funding for the agency.

The situation of the more than 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon is no better. The UNHCR, not UNRWA, is responsible for ensuring that Syrian refugees have access to health care services in Lebanon. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been persistent issues of access and availability beyond primary healthcare services.

In the past, the Lebanese government has systematically left out Palestinian and Syrian refugees from public health initiatives. In 2018, for example, the health ministry launched a national campaign for the early detection of breast cancer which was aimed at "Lebanese women only", and excluded foreign women residing in Lebanon, including Palestinians and Syrians.

The health ministry justified the exclusions by claiming that the campaign was directed at citizens who pay taxes. However, Palestinian and Syrian refugees are not tax-exempt and pay any fees required for services to the Lebanese treasury.

With persistent racist rhetoric coming from politicians similar to Geagea, there are now fears that refugees in Lebanon will not only be scapegoats for the government's inability to cope with an outbreak, but they will also not have access to proper healthcare when the virus reaches their communities. This combination of political rhetoric, new security restrictions, and uncertain access to treatment could serve to discourage refugees from seeking care and contribute to the spread of COVID-19.

The coronavirus outbreak affects all of us and the virus does not discriminate in who it strikes. Racism and scapegoating of vulnerable communities will certainly not defeat it.

If COVID-19 spreads in the refugee camps and gatherings in Lebanon it will be a humanitarian catastrophe - one that will not remain limited to the Palestinian or Syrian refugees.

As of April 12, a sum of 619 cases of coronavirus infection has been reported in Lebanon out of which 20 infected patients have died and 77 others have recovered.

Millennia-old bronze stamp recovered in northeast Iran

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Iranian authorities have confiscated a millennia-old bronze stamp in Naqab village, northeastern North Khorasan province, CHTN reported on Sunday.



While patrolling the area, officers recovered the stamp, which belongs to the third millennium BC, said Hossein Qanbarzadeh, a senior police official in charge of protecting cultural heritage.

Beside its natural sights, Naqab village is famous for its historical sites and ancient hills. It seems the ancient city of Assak, the capital of Arsacid Empire (247 BC – 224 CE), was located in this area.

According to Encyclopedia Iranica, during the Bronze Age the populations of the Iranian plateau, bounded on the east by the Hindu Kush and the Himalayas and on the west by the lowlands of Khuzestan and Mesopotamia. There is also evidence that at the end of the 4th millennium BC settlements throughout Iran were linked in a common cultural network, the “Proto-Elamite horizon.”

Garment workshops to produce medical products amid corona outbreak

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – Five traditional costumes production workshops in Kordestan province, western Iran, have been repurposed to make protective face masks, medical caps and disposable overshoes as the country is fighting the coronavirus pandemic.



Over 15 workers have been employed to produce 5,000 masks, 6,000 caps and 4,000 overshoes per day, meeting health protocols, CHTN reported on Sunday.

Earlier this month, a handicrafts workshop in Torbat-e Heydarieh in Khorasan Razavi province, northeast of the country, was also readjusted to produce face masks.

The total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran reached 71,686 on Sunday, of whom 4,474 have died and 43,894 recovered.

Lorestan registers nearly one million overnight stays in year

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Iranians made about one million overnight stays in Lorestan province during the previous Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended March 20), CHTN reported on Sunday.



The overnight stays have been recorded in Lorestan’s various residential centers including hotels, ecological houses, apartment hotels, guest houses and temporary lodgments.

Soaked in history and culture, Lorestan is one of the lesser-known travel destinations in Iran, which mainly acts as a gateway to the sweltering plains below in adjoining Khuzestan province.

Most travelers just pass through on their way to the UNESCO sites of Susa, Tchogha Zanbil, and Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System. Lorestan is also a region of raw beauty that an avid nature lover could spend weeks exploring.

Lorestan was inhabited by Iranian Indo-European peoples, including the Medes, c. 1000 BC. Cimmerians and Scythians intermittently ruled the region from about 700 to 625 BC. The Luristan Bronzes, noted for their eclectic array of Assyrian, Babylonian, and Iranian artistic motifs, date from this turbulent period.

Lorestan was incorporated into the growing Achaemenid Empire in about 540 BC and successively was part of the Seleucid, Parthian, and Sasanid dynasties.

Discover Ozbaki hill that goes down 9,000 years in history

→ 1 “The significance of the site was such that the invaders, after occupying it, chose it as their settlement and their rulers built a castle to control a major part of their territories in the central plateau,” Majidzadeh noted.

His article on the hill, which has been posted to the Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies, is given below:

With a longitude of 50.34 and a latitude of 35.54, the historical site of Ozbaki is situated 15 km southwest of the Old Town of Hashtgerd in Savojbolagh region, some 73 km to the west of Tehran. The altitude of the Ozbaki village from the sea level is 1118 meters. It is a vast ancient site, comprised of some short mounds and a high mound standing 26 meters above the surrounding lands.

Some of the mounds, according to residents are: Kumush Tappeh, located 400 meters to the west of the tall mound known as Ozbaki Tappeh, Jairan Tappeh located 250 meters to the south of Ozbaki Tappeh, and Yan Tappeh, located at some 700 meters to the southwest of Ozbaki Tappeh. The archeology team named three other mounds as Doshan Tappeh, Maral Tappeh and Takhtgah Tappeh. Considering the depth of ancient layers of soil down to unscathed soil proven in the northern side of Ozbaki Tappeh, its altitude from intact earth is more than 30 meters.

Considering the scattered form of the mounds and according to earthenware findings, it can be said that the area of Ozbaki site is about 100 acres. Before excavations at Ozbaki Tappeh, the oldest sites so far found in the central Iranian Plateau were only found in the Silk Tappeh near Kashan and Zagheh Tappeh in the Qazvin Plain. These relics have been identified in the Ozbaki site, at Yan Tappeh, in the form of a small village covering an approximate area of one acre. In this small, pillow-shaped mound of which 200 square meters have so far been excavated, relics of five periods of clay brick architecture have been identified, dating back to two cultural eras in the seventh and sixth millenniums BC.

In all of the five periods, the bricks are handmade, the oldest of them being the most ancient type of bricks found in archeological excavations in the whole Middle East.

The average area of buildings in this site is 2.5 to 3.5 square meters, and in some cases larger. Although no trace of roofs have so far been found from these architectural remains, their excessive smallness indicates that they were covered with primitive material such as tree branches and leaves and possibly a layer of cob. Inhabitants of this settlement buried their dead on the floor of their dwellings and covered the floor with bricks.

The expanse of the settlements of these people, whose relics have been found in recent decades all throughout the Central



Undated photos depict holidaymakers visiting the prehistorical Ozbaki hill situated near Nazarabad, some 80 km west of Tehran.

Plateau does not exceed a few acres, in which the potters created the most beautiful earthenware of their times. However, in Ozbaki Tappeh these remains have been found across an area covering 400X800 meters (i.e. 30 acres) from the excavated layers, which are unique in their ago.

Simultaneous with the second period in Silk, the inhabitants of Yan Tappeh abandoned their settlements for unknown reasons, moving to site some 100 meters to the west of high mound of Ozbaki hill.

Until the 1970s, our knowledge of the chronicle of prehistoric cultures in the Central Plateau was based on the results of French excavations in Kashan’s Silk mound. According to this chronology, since the most ancient times up to the mid 4th millennium, BC the societies of these regions belonged to the same culture, one which continued during the above millennia continuously.

However, in the early 1970s, excavations led by this author in the Qabrestan Tappeh in the Qazvin plain revealed new findings in the form of different earthenware. In excavations in Ozbaki Tappeh we found similar remains of earthenware called Plum Ceramics because of their color. Coherent architectural remains belonging to this culture were also found, leaving no doubt about the invasion of migrating intruders, confirming social and political changes in

this part of land of Iran. Although there is still no concrete evidence of the origin of the invaders, it sees that their original homeland was a region beyond the Caucasus Mountains.

Furthermore, a minute study of the prehistoric earthenware of the Central Plateau shows that the differences between these periods are so considerable that each kind of pot represents a different ethnic group, indicating the movements of different ethnic groups in the Central Plateau. Doubtlessly future studies on human bone findings, particularly DNA tests will answer such questions.

The Plum Ceramic culture disappeared after a few centuries, replaced by another earthenware culture known in Silk Mound as the Third Period, ending with the start of the script era in Mesopotamia mid 4th millennium BC.

The discovery of objects such as tablets, statuettes, and “jagged” earthenware in Ozbaki Tappeh indicate some kind of commercial link between Susa in Khuzestan and this are in Tehran province.

Evidence found about the migration and presence of “Grey earthenware” Aryans particularly in the east and center of the Iranian Plateau up to the Medes kingdom is chiefly comprised of graves and cemeteries, therefore the general assumption is that the early Aryans were camp dwellers.

However, in the Ozbaki site the evidence found shows that after the arrival of the “Grey earthenware” Aryans in Iran in the second half of the 2nd millennium BC, this site turned into a large city, because the remains of their earthenware are scattered across an area measuring 1X1 km, and in the center of it, on top of ancient remains on the high mound of Ozbaki a castle was built covering around 2,200 square meters with a huge wall 7 meters wide, of which 3 meters of the height still remain. On the remains of this castle and before the Medes kingdom, two other castles were built, one on top of the remains of the other. The Medes finally built a fourth castle covering 900 square meters, three fourth of whose buildings have already been excavated.

Such a deployment of migrating Aryans in the Ozbaki site undoubtedly indicates its significance in prehistoric times, and shows that this site was possibly the largest and most important political and economic center, and in other words the heart of the cultures of the Central Plateau.

The significance of the site was such that the invaders, after occupying it, chose it as their settlement and their rulers built a castle to control a major part of their territories in the central plateau. The graveyard belonging to those people has been identified some 250 meters from the Doshan Tappeh buildings.

Rural tourism workshop held online due to coronavirus

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – A workshop on rural tourism in Tehran province was held online on Saturday due to the coronavirus outbreak in the country.

Organized by Tehran Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department, the workshop was held by Iranian scholar and tour leader Nima Azari.

The workshop aimed at promoting tourism in rural areas. Iran’s Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization said in 2018 that 2,000 eco-lodges would be constructed across the country until 2021. Experts say each eco-lodge unit generates jobs for seven to eight people on the average so that the scheme could create 160,000 jobs.

Having a very diverse natural setting, Iran offers varied



excursions to nature lovers. Sightseers may live with a nomad or rural family or enjoy an independent stay. The country is home to abundant historical mansions, caravanserais, bathhouses, madrasas, and other massive monuments, which can buttress its budding tourism and hospitality sectors if managed appropriately and refurbished properly.

The World Tourism Organization sees rural tourism a type of activity in which the visitor’s experience is related to a wide range of products generally linked to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle, culture, angling and sightseeing. Such tourism also possesses characteristics such as low population density, landscape dominated by agriculture and forestry, as well as traditional social structure and lifestyle.

Travelogue: Trip to Iran in October 2019

I am fascinated by countries with cultures different from ours and as soon as I learned that Dadmehr and Haeideh, two splendid Iranian spouses living in Pompeii, were organizing a trip to Iran for a small group, my heart exploded with joy.

When I told my children, relatives and friends that our destination would be Iran, everyone was perplexed and advised against it because it was considered dangerous.

We started with the curiosity to know not only the various archaeological sites, the beautiful and dazzling mosques and their great architecture but with the curiosity to go deeper into the knowledge of the culture and complexity of this country. Our guide, Reza, an architect who accompanied us throughout the tour together with a skilled driver, was professional, experienced, discreet and friendly. We moved from Tehran to Shiraz with an internal flight and all the transfers with a private bus. Our Iranian friends and guide took care to organize stops with fresh fruit, coffee, sweets and pistachios, all in an atmosphere of sympathy, cordiality and maximum availability.

The stages: Shiraz, the entrance to the “Pink” mosque with the chador, the tomb of Hafez, Persepolis

one of the wonders of the ancient world, the visit to the Naghsh-e Rostam site with the tombs of the Achaemenid kings and the Sassanid bas-reliefs, Yazd center of the Zoroastrian religion with visit “to the temple of fire” and to the “towers of silence”, Na’in with the Jameh mosque (Friday) one of the oldest in Iran, Pasargadae with the tomb of Cyrus the Great, Isfahan with the vast square of Imam with two mosques, wonderful gardens, the Shah’s palace and the Grand Bazaar, the Armenian quarter with its churches, Kashan with the Tabatabai House from the 19th century, Tehran with the Golestan palace, the royal residence of the Shahs and the jewelry museum a collection of precious stones that takes your breath away, Qom considered by the Shiites holy city.

We have lived very varied experiences, we have moved from the great megalopolis to the arid desert and spectacular scenery rich in vegetation. Together with Dadmer and Haeideh we have known the history of this nation through its cities and the faces of its inhabitants, during the journey we have read and commented on Hafez’s verses. Our friends, in addition to being very attentive to ours needs, they managed to make us immerse ourselves in the

wonderful atmosphere of this land, they guided us in our purchases, they made us appreciate the smells and the thousand flavors of Iranian cuisine, in Tehran they presented their friends who opened their wonderful home inviting us to dinner, they filled us with care and attention, they made us feel at home.

Through the explanations of Dadmer who has a beautiful Persian carpet shop in Pompeii, we have learned to appreciate and recognize the art of carpets, a heritage of these places. We experienced a unique and exciting experience at the carpet artist Seyed Abolhassan Mousavi, we saw wonderful hand-knotted carpets and in particular there was made by his son, a detailed description of an indescribable masterpiece concerning the last day of Pompeii which I hope and hopefully can reach Pompeii and be able to be appreciated by a wide public.

The journey was perfect, for us no danger, the Iranians are dangerous only at the wheel, Iran is a beautiful country that deserves to be visited for its history, its art, its culture and for its kindness and friendliness of its people.

This travelogue is written by Cyril, who posted it to the Cultural Institute of Iran, a representative of Iranian cultural institutions in Italy.

World Council of Churches urges U.S. to end Iran sanctions amid COVID-19

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — With the growing coronavirus pandemic, the World Council of Churches has called on the U.S. to end illegal and inhuman sanctions against Iran. In a letter to U.S. President Donald Trump published on April 9, the council wrote that “The novel coronavirus is a common enemy of humanity everywhere. An effective response to the pandemic demands an unprecedented degree of global solidarity and cooperation, special care for the most vulnerable, and swift action to mitigate the conditions which create additional vulnerability.”

The religious leaders share a deep concern for the impact on the people of Iran of the sanctions imposed by the United States. “Iran, currently with over 67,000 confirmed cases and more



than 4,000 documented deaths due to COVID-19, is by far the most affected country in the Eastern Mediterranean region, and one of the most affected countries in the world,” according to the letter.

“But its public health response is severely impeded by the strict sanctions regime imposed on the country unilaterally by the United States since May 2019, resulting in an almost total economic blockade.”

“Now is not the moment for pursuing grievances belonging to the politics of the world before COVID-19,” the letter reads. “Now is the moment for international solidarity and cooperation in controlling the spread of the virus, protecting the most vulnerable, and defeating this common enemy.”

Afghanistan thanks Iran for free services to refugees during COVID-19

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Afghanistan has appreciated Iran for offering health and treatment services to Afghan refugees infected with coronavirus free of charge.

The Afghan Foreign Ministry in a statement on Saturday announced its gratitude and appreciation to Iran for its humanitarian efforts to address the issue of Afghan refugees in the country.

All measures, especially the recent decree by the Iranian president to provide free medical treatment to Afghan refugees in Iranian public hospitals, have assured the Afghan government, IRNA reported on Sunday.

According to the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, providing transportation services to transit trucks and providing the necessary health assistance to vulnerable Afghan nationals are among the measures that are highly appreciated.

Given the outbreak of the coronavirus in the world and the neighboring country, the Afghan government wishes success to the Iranian government in countering the crisis and hopes that the world will recover from the epidemic soon, the statement reads.



Hassan Rouhani issued a decree that medical services for coronavirus patients should be free of charge in early April.

Iranian Health Minister Saeed Namaki in a letter to medical university chancellors across the country emphasized that patients who are not under insurance coverage or are underprivileged and also foreign nationals should not pay for the healthcare services and the costs will be compensated by the national health insurance system.

The total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran has reached 71,686, of whom 4,474 have died and 43,894 recovered, Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Sunday.

Coronavirus: Rare fin whales swim close to Marseille as lockdown curbs human activity

The world's second-largest mammal took advantage of the absence of human bustle and noise around major city to make a “very rare” appearance.

Two fin whales were spotted near Marseille, southern France, which, like almost all of Europe, is in lockdown during the coronavirus crisis.

A sea patrol filmed the pair powering through the waters off the Calanques national park, a protected reserve of outstanding natural beauty.

Didier Reault, president of the park board, said it was “very, very rare” for fin whales to be spotted and filmed at such close quarters in the reserve's waters.

The whales usually stay further out in deeper Mediterranean seas but seem to have been drawn in by the halt in maritime traffic, water sports, fishing and pleasure craft, Mr Reault said.

“The absence of human activity means the whales are far more serene, calm, and confident about rediscovering their playground that they abandon when there is maritime transport activity,” he said.

“It is clear that the lockdown of humans is helping nature and biodiversity rediscover their natural spaces,” the Independent reported.



The fin whale, the second-largest mammal in the world, after the blue whale, weighs up to 70 tons and grows at least 65ft long. It has a distinct ridge along its back behind the dorsal fin, which gives it the nickname “razorback”.

Wild animals have ventured into other places vacated by humans, too. In Llanudno, north Wales, mountain goats have roamed through the streets.

Mr Reault said he hoped people would emerge from lockdowns with greater appreciation for biodiversity, being “a bit more respectful of the tranquillity and serenity of animals”.

“We should tell ourselves that if we want to keep seeing [nature], we must know how to respect it,” he said.



IRCS receives public donations of \$14m to contain coronavirus

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Red Crescent Society has so far collected non-cash public donations worth 376 billion rials (nearly \$9 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) to counter COVID-19 pandemic in the country, IRCS head Karim Hemmati has announced.

Also, 220 billion rials (about \$5.2 million) have been paid in cash by the philanthropists to the IRCS to prevent the spread of the disease, he stated, IRNA reported.

Referring to some measures taken by the IRCS regarding the prevention of the virus throughout the country, he noted that since the onset of the outbreak, more than 980 voluntary plans and projects to con-

tain the epidemic has been implemented across the country, with 72,694 volunteers participating in the implementation of these projects.

The first phase of public donations was allocated to provide health and essential items for the deprived and unprivileged areas, and besides, 500,000 patients suffering special diseases were provided with essential health items, he explained.

Through the second phase, the IRCS, to provide medical items for COVID-19 patients in hospitals, purchased 100 ventilators worth approximately 160 billion rials (around \$3.8 million), 52 devices have been provided with the help of charities and public participation, he also said.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

3,863 Iranians lost lives in road crashes within 3 months

Road crash casualties amounted to 3,863 in the country during the first three months of the current Iranian calendar year (starting on March 21), traffic police chief Seyed Kamal Hadianfar has said. During the first three days of summer, 64 people were killed in traffic related accidents, while 1,375 others got injured, he added. He went on to note that 2,368 drivers were responsible for the crashes occurred in the aforementioned period.

Given that 91 percent of the country's total transportation is carried out on roads, there must be special attention to the infrastructure of the roads nationwide, he noted.

Approximately, 22,270,187 vehicles are running in the country and the number of motorcycles reach over 11 million, he said, adding that some 41 million of Iranians currently have driving license.

He further explained that during the two first months of this year, 2,584 people have lost their lives due to road accidents, which means that some 25 people got killed immediately at the crash scene each day, while the number increases to 41 people with taking into account the deaths happening on the way to hospitals.

۳,۸۶۳ نفر کشته در تصادفات ۳ ماه نخست سال

رئیس پلیس راهور گفت: در سه ماهه نخست سال جاری، ۳ هزار و ۸۶۳ نفر در تصادفات کشته شدند.

به گزارش خبرنگار باشگاه خبرنگاران پویا؛ سردار سید کمال هادیانفر اظهار کرد: دو هزار و ۳۶۸ راننده مقصر باعث مرگ این ۳ هزار و ۸۶۳ نفر در تصادفات شدند.

رئیس پلیس راهور ادامه داد: ۹۱ درصد تردها در کشور، در جاده‌ها صورت می‌گیرد که به زیرساخت جاده‌ها باید توجه ویژه‌ای شود.

وی تصریح کرد: اکنون ۲۲ میلیون و ۲۷۰ هزار و ۱۸۷ دستگاه خودرو و بیش از ۱۱ میلیون موتورسیکلت در کشور وجود دارد و ۴۱ میلیون نفر صاحب گواهینامه هستند.

هادیانفر افزود: بر اساس آمار پزشکی قانونی در دو ماه گذشته بیش از ۲ هزار و ۵۸۴ نفر در مجموع درون و برون‌شهری در تصادفات کشته شدند، یعنی به طور متوسط روزانه ۲۵ نفر در صحنه جان باختند که این آمار با انتقال مصدومان به ۴۱ نفر افزایش پیدا می‌کند یعنی تعدادی از فوتی‌ها در راه انتقال و در مراکز درمانی جان خود را از دست می‌دهند.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“cerebro-, cerebr-”

■ **Meaning:** brain

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

PHRASAL VERB

Think something up

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

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

IDIOM

Give somebody a (good) run for their money

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

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

Wildlife destruction ‘not a slippery slope but a series of cliff edges’

Wildlife species will die out and natural ecosystems collapse in the near future if the climate crisis goes unchecked, scientists have warned, as new research shows that the natural world is at far greater risk from climate breakdown than previously thought.

Catastrophe could strike this decade for some species, as key temperature thresholds are crossed. Instead of the anticipated gradual decline of species, there are likely to be a series of sudden collapses.

Ocean ecosystems will be first hit, as the seas have already warmed to an unprecedented extent, and problems such as lack of oxygen and an increase in acid worsen.

By the 2040s, a similarly abrupt collapse is likely to spread to the land, causing devastation among key species in Indonesia, the Amazon, India, northern Australia and sub-Saharan Africa and the Congo rainforest.

“It’s not a slippery slope, but a series of cliff edges, hitting different places at different times,” said Alex Pigot of University College London, lead author of the study, published today in the journal Nature.

What appears to happen, according to the study’s authors, is that most species can cope with warming temperatures for a while. But when a certain temperature threshold is crossed, suddenly a large proportion of species face conditions they have not experienced before, and the ecosystem can abruptly collapse.

The authors base their projections on dividing the globe into square cells of 100km by 100km, and within those cells studying the geographic ranges of more than 30,000 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and other animals and plants. They mapped this data against our knowledge of the climate from 1850 to 2005.

Then they broke down climate predictions from now until 2100 on an annual basis, examining when the species in each grid cell were likely to experience temperatures higher than they had before. That showed a different picture than had been previously possible, by giving a slow-motion projection, a bit like a time-lapse photograph, at a very fine scale, of how species would react each year as their habitats warmed.

“Despite many hundreds of studies looking at the impacts on biodiversity of climate change, this abrupt pattern [of collapse] hasn’t previously been detected, because most studies have focused on projections for one – or a few – snapshots of the future, say the year 2070 or 2100,” Pigot explained.

“In our study, we instead quantified how the risks to biodiversity from climate change will change over time at annual resolutions.”

The scientists found that, on average, 73% of the species facing unprecedented temperatures before 2100 will cross that threshold simultaneously. If global temperatures rise by 4C above pre-industrial levels by 2100, as they will if greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, then at least 15% of ecosystems will have an “abrupt exposure event”, meaning more than one fifth of their constituent species will cross the threshold in the same decade, causing irreversible damage.

But at less than 2C of warming, the limit set under the Paris agreement, only 2% of ecosystems will go through such abrupt change, sparing many of the species at risk from higher temperatures.

That means taking urgent action on emissions could save tens of thousands of species by “flattening the curve” of the impact, and providing more time for species and ecosystems to adapt.

(Source: The Guardian)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Conference on Afghanistan's cultural heritage

(June 16, 2003)

The cultural arm of the United Nations, UNESCO, is discussing plans to repair the damage done to the cultural heritage of Afghanistan. It aims to coordinate international efforts. This report from Lawrence Pollard:

This three day conference was originally planned for Kabul but has been moved to Paris because of the unstable situation in the Afghan Capital. And that gives a good idea of how huge the task facing UNESCO really is. The basic **aspiration** is that culture should serve as a **rallying point** for nation building - **in practice** neither the finances nor the security conditions seem very favourable. But UNESCO can and will be **drawing up** a strategy for what needs to be done, based on repair, protection and finance. It wants better coordination of projects and more of the promised finances **to materialize**.

The distance still to travel is enormous, though. The Kabul museum has no roof, may have to be relocated, and the 30% of its collection which hasn't been recently destroyed has to remain in secret storage for its own safety. Another **headline issue** is Bamiyan, the site of the world famous rock statues of the Buddha, blown up by the Taliban in 2001. Despite ambitious plans to rebuild them as replicas, much more basic and urgent is the **shoring up** of the cliff face, which is in danger of collapsing, and simply collecting and protecting the remaining fragments of the statues. The woeful **ongoing situation** of open archaeological sites which are being systematically plundered by antique smugglers will be another priority issue.

Words

aspiration: ambition, strong desire

a rallying point: a symbol of a political ideal which is intended to inspire people to unite in support

in practice: what happens in practice is what really happens, in contrast to what is supposed to happen

drawing up: planning; preparing and writing out

to materialize: to happen. If a possible event materialises, it actually happens

the distance still to travel is enormous: there is a lot more still to be done

headline issue: an important subject for discussion which makes headlines in the news

replicas: accurate copies

shoring up: strengthening something which is becoming weak

ongoing situation: continuing situation; an ongoing situation is continuing to happen

(Source: BBC)

Coronavirus job losses in U.S. could total 47 million, unemployment rate may hit 32%

Unemployment could skyrocket to a record high as the coronavirus pandemic puts millions of Americans out of work, according to a study from the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis.

As many as 47 million Americans could be subject to layoffs in the second quarter. When that figure is added to the number of people laid off in February, it comes out to 52.81 million Americans unemployed. That would send the unemployment rate to a massive 32%, according to the study published on March 24.

"These are very large numbers by historical standards," Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis economist Miguel Faria e Castro wrote in a blog post about his "back of the envelope" calculations for the labor market going forward. "But this is a rather unique shock that is unlike any other experienced by the US economy in the last 100 years."

The US unemployment rate in February was 3.5%. If it surged to 30% in the second quarter, it would top the highest rate on record of nearly 25% during the Great Depression.

The study came just before weekly US jobless-claims data released on Thursday spiked to a record 3.28 million for the week ending March 21. The weekly report of Americans who had filed for unemployment insurance was one of the first indicators of just how bad the coronavirus pandemic could be.

Palestine says Israel abusing COVID-19 to grab more lands

Palestinians believe Israel is taking advantage of the disease caused by the coronavirus pandemic to grab more of their lands and to escalate aggression against the people of Palestine.

Head of the anti-settlement commission of the Palestinian Authority said on Saturday that Israel is using the situation to expand its settlement activities in the occupied territories, Press TV reported.

In a separate statement on Saturday, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) warned against a recently-leaked understanding between the USA and Israel over Tel Aviv's plans for further annexation of Palestinian lands, and for the purpose of building illegal colonial settlements on the occupied Palestinian territories.

The statement, issued by PLO's Department for the Defense of Lands, said that the Israeli regime is exploiting the world's engagement in fight against coronavirus by considering some annexation plans that would confiscate more Palestinian-owned lands for illegal settlement purposes.

The comments came a few days after the Arab League warned Israel was exploiting the international community's preoccupation with the viral outbreak to push ahead with its settlement expansion in the occupied territories.

Speaking in a telephone conversation with PLO Secretary General Saeb Erekat on Tuesday, Arab League chief Ahmed Aboul Gheit said the Israeli violations include killing, arresting and displacing civilians, annexing new settlements, and attacking Palestinian holy sites.

British PM Johnson discharged from hospital after coronavirus treatment

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has been discharged from hospital and will continue his recovery from COVID-19 at Chequers, his official country residence, his Downing Street office said in a statement on Sunday.

Johnson, 55, was taken to St Thomas' Hospital in central London on April 5, suffering from persistent symptoms of the disease caused by the new coronavirus. On April 6 he was moved into intensive care, where he remained until April 9, Reuters reported.

"On the advice of his medical team, the PM will not be immediately returning to work. He wishes to thank everybody at St Thomas' for the brilliant care he has received," an official statement said.

In his first comments since leaving intensive care, Johnson said he owed his life to hospital staff.

"I can't thank them enough. I owe them my life," he said in comments that were released to journalists and confirmed by his office on Sunday.

His pregnant fiancée, Carrie Symonds, who has also suffered from COVID-19 symptoms, thanked National Health Service staff in a series of tweets shortly after the Downing Street statement on Johnson being discharged.

"There were times last week that were very dark indeed. My heart goes out to all those in similar situations, worried sick about their loved ones," she said.

Turkey dispatches some 300 allied militants from Syria to Libya: SOHR

Turkey has reportedly sent new batches of allied Takfiri militants from Syria to Libya, following a bill passed by the parliament earlier this year that allows the Ankara government to deploy forces to the North African country to intervene in the civil war.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, citing sources requesting not to be named, reported on Saturday that nearly 300 members of the so-called Sultan Murad Division, Northern Falcons Brigade and the Sham Legion militant groups arrived in Libya the previous day, Press TV reported.

The Observatory added that a batch of at least 150 Takfiris from the Sultan Murad Division had been transported by Turkish buses in the past few days from Syria's northwestern city of Afrin to the border with Turkey.

Another batch, consisting of tens of Takfiri recruits from Jarabulus and al-Bab cities, were moved to Hawar Kellis border region as well.

The Britain-based war monitor highlighted that Turkey has so far sent approximately 5,050 allied Takfiri militants from Syria to Libya, and nearly 1,950 others are currently receiving military training in Turkey in order to be sent to the war-ravaged North African country.

Libya plunged into chaos in 2011, when a popular uprising and a NATO intervention led to the ouster of long-time dictator Muammar Gaddafi and his execution by unruly fighters.

UN Middle East envoys urge warring parties to cease fighting now

The United Nations envoys in the Middle East have urged all warring parties in the region to end hostilities and turn their focus to "the true fight of our lives" - tackling the threat posed by the coronavirus pandemic.

According to al Jazeera, in a statement, the envoys for Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict stressed that solidarity is required to face the challenge of COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the new coronavirus. But this cannot happen "if the guns of war and conflict are not silenced", they said.

Many parties have responded positively to the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's appeal on March 23 for immediate ceasefires, the five envoys said. But there was a need for stepped-up action, they said, with COVID-19 compounding the suffering of people caught up in conflicts in the Middle East.

"At a time like this, partisanship and narrow interests must yield to the greater cause and the good of the people," their appeal said.

"That is why we echo the secretary-general in calling on all parties in the Middle East to work with the UN so we can 'focus on the true fight of our lives' which is COVID-19."

The UN envoys called on all parties to conflicts to engage without preconditions in negotiations to immediately halt hostilities, to sustain existing ceasefires, and to achieve "longer-term resolutions to the



persistent conflicts across the region".

They also urged all feuding parties "to reach out across conflict lines and cooperate locally, regionally and globally to stop the rapid spread of the virus" and to allow access for humanitarian aid and "humanitarian releases".

The appeal was signed by UN special envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen, UN special envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths, UN

Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov, UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jan Kubis and UN Special Representative for Iraq Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert.

Guterres said on April 3 that warring parties in 11 countries had responded positively to his ceasefire appeal: Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Colombia, Libya, Myanmar, the Philippines, South

Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen.

He told the UN Security Council in its first meeting on the coronavirus pandemic that he has been encouraged by the support for his call for a global ceasefire to all conflicts from world leaders, regional partners, civil society activists and religious leaders.

"From South America to Africa and from the Middle East to Asia we have seen conflict parties take some initial steps to end violence and fight the pandemic," he said on Thursday. "Still, we must remain cautious, as any gains are fragile and easily reversible, as conflicts have festered for years, distrust is deep, and there are many spoilers."

He also stressed that concerted international efforts, including by UN envoys, will be required to move from "good intentions to implementation", noting that "in many of the most critical situations, we have seen no let-up in fighting, and some conflicts have even intensified".

In Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country which is suffering the world's worst humanitarian crisis, a two-week ceasefire proposed by the Saudi-led coalition backing the UN-recognised government went into effect on Thursday.

But Houthi rebels, who control northern Yemen and the capital, Sanaa, quickly dismissed the Saudi ceasefire as a ploy to boost its international standing and accused the coalition of several attacks on Thursday.

UAE buys Israeli missile system for Libya rebels



The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has paid the Israeli regime to deliver an advanced anti-aircraft missile system to the Libyan rebels under the command of renegade general Khalifa Haftar, a report says.

The Libya Observer on Saturday cited the New Arab newspaper as reporting that the UAE's purchase of the

missile system was an effort to boost Haftar's forces trying to overtake the Libyan capital, Tripoli, and unseat the internationally-recognized government there.

"The UAE has signed a contract with Israel to provide Haftar with an air defense system made by [an] Israeli defense firm. The system has been transferred to Egypt in order to send it to pro-Haftar areas after training some of Haftar forces' military officers on how to use it," the report said, citing sources.

While the Emirates had traditionally been one of the many Arab countries to side with the Palestinians in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it has increasingly warmed up to the Tel Aviv regime in recent years.

It was unclear whether the Libyan rebels would receive direct training from Israel.

They have been fighting to overrun the Libyan capital since April last year but have been bogged down on the city's outskirts since the start; and in recent days, they have been suffering heavy losses in intensified fighting. The rebels have lost a dozen commanders, armored vehicles, ammunition supplies, and at least three fighter jets and one cargo plane.

The new Israeli missile system is meant to shore up the rebels' capabilities against the more powerful Libyan Air Force.

Fighting around Tripoli intensified in recent days after the rebels breached a March 21 humanitarian truce that had aimed to allow a focus on efforts to combat the coronavirus outbreak in the North African country.

Last Tuesday, Libyan government forces said Emirati drones had carried out two airstrikes in support of Libyan rebels near the city of Sirte.

And on Wednesday, the Libyan rebels claimed they had downed two Turkish drones. Tripoli receives backing from Turkey.

Libya plunged into chaos in 2011, when a popular uprising and a NATO intervention led to the ouster of long-time dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

Since 2014, two rival seats of power have emerged in the North African country — the United Nations-recognized government of Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj, and another group based in the eastern city of Tobruk, supported militarily by Haftar's rebels.

(Source: Press TV)

U.S. steps up intrusion as Iraq's new PM seeks to form govt.



the Associated Press that Patriot missile launchers and two other short-range systems were in place at Ain al-Asad air base in Iraq's Anbar Province and at the military facility in Kurdistan's regional capital, Erbil.

They further noted that a short-range rocket system had been installed at Camp Taji, north of Baghdad.

The U.S. military build-up not only violates Iraq's sovereignty, but also poses a threat to the country's armed forces and defies an Iraqi parliament vote on

January 5 that called for an end to the presence of all foreign troops.

The vote came two days after the U.S. assassination of General Soleimani in Iraq, along with Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) or Hashd al-Sha'abi, and eight other Iranian and Iraqi people.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo recently proposed that Washington and Baghdad "hold a strategic dialogue in June" to discuss the presence of Amer-

Netanyahu rival Gantz seeks more time to form coalition government

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's election rival Benny Gantz asked for additional time on Saturday to try to form a government with the long-time leader, to end more than a year of political deadlock.

A 28-day mandate to put together a governing coalition, following an inconclusive March 2 election, expires on April 14. Gantz, an ex-armed forces chief who heads the centrist Blue and White party, asked President Reuven Rivlin for a 14-day extension to the mandate, Reuters reported.

Gantz had run on a promise not to serve in a government with Netanyahu, citing the prime minister's indictment on corruption charges. Netanyahu denies those charges.

But in a reversal that dismayed many of his supporters, Gantz said the coronavirus crisis had made a national emergency government with Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party an imperative.

"The political, health and social crisis have brought me to the decision that even at a heavy political and personal price, I will do all I can to establish a government with the Likud," Gantz wrote in a letter to the president, published by his party.

Rivlin gave no immediate word on whether he would grant more time to Gantz, who in his letter said the two political rivals appeared close to a final agreement.

According to Israeli media reports, the parties have already agreed on a power-sharing deal in which Netanyahu would serve as prime minister for 18 months, after which Gantz would take over. Israel has held three inconclusive elections since last April.

With more than 10,000 reported cases of COVID-19 and 101 deaths, Israel's tight restrictions on movement aimed at curbing the coronavirus spread have forced many busi-



nesses to shut down and have sent unemployment rates soaring to about 25%.

Can the Iranian clubs ask players to take pay cut?

By Farrohk Hessabi

TEHRAN — The Iranian clubs face a crisis regarding the payment of the players' salaries, and the coronavirus pandemic has worsened the situation.

Coronavirus has hit football very hard. The pandemic is wreaking havoc on the financial side of football.

The suspension of sports events and, in particular, football matches has created a lot of uncertainty over whether leagues can finish their season.

This is a global crisis, and all leagues and clubs in the world face similar financial challenges. Most clubs in Europe are asking all staff (including players) to accept a substantial wage reduction.

Players from German soccer giants Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund agreed to a 20 percent pay cut while their matches are suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Real Madrid have become the latest Spanish club to apply pay cuts to alleviate the economic impact of the coronavirus crisis. Earlier, Barcelona football club's players took a 70 percent pay cut and made an extra contribution on top during the enforced La Liga break so that the club's other employees can earn their full salaries during the coronavirus crisis, captain Lionel Messi said.

In England, talks continue between Premier League clubs and the players' union the Professional Footballers' Association over player wage deferrals and cuts, but still, no agreement has been made.

FIFA has been working on recommendations and guidelines to address practical issues brought by the Covid-19 crisis.

The bureau of the FIFA Council on Tuesday endorsed a set of principles agreed upon by a taskforce exploring various issues including «football employment agreements that can no longer be performed».

A statement said: «If parties cannot



agree and, as a consequence, cases come to FIFA, the factors to be examined will include the following:

- whether there was a genuine attempt by the club to reach agreement with the players;
- what the economic situation of the club is;
- the proportionality of any adjustment to player contracts;
- the net income position of players after any contract adjustment; and
- whether players have been treated equally or not.

«In this way, FIFA hopes that it will be able to find solutions that are fair and balanced for both sides.»

Considering the Iranian football, the coronavirus pandemic has created a big question: How can the Iranian clubs reach an agreement with their players over wage deferral or pay cut?

In the Iran Professional League (IPL), out of 16 teams, only one or two clubs have fulfilled their obligations to pay the players' wages.

Most of the clubs were supposed to pay about 75 percent of their players' salaries; however, they have just pay 50 percent, or even less. So, as the clubs have not fulfilled their financial commitments, they cannot expect the players to agree for salary deduction

and help the clubs even though the coronavirus pandemic has worsened the economic situation of their teams.

The three main ways for the clubs to generate revenues are through broadcasting rights, ticket sales, and sponsorships.

Of these ways, the Iranian clubs have practically no income from broadcasting rights and ticket sale, and cannot account for such sources of money.

A lot of clubs are not financially stable, and they face crises and stress at the moment because they are not able to pay the salaries of the current players nor to invest in players in the next transfer market.

Ex-Iran boxer Haji Rasouli dies of coronavirus



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Former boxer Masoud Haji Rasouli passed away late Saturday.

He has reportedly died at age 70 after being diagnosed with coronavirus.

Rasouli was researching on the field of sport against Drug and Aids at the Azad University.

The member of Iran national boxing team won a gold medal in the 70's at the

Asian championships.

Tehran Times offers its heartfelt condolence to his bereaved family.

Iran's total death toll from the new coronavirus outbreak rose to 4,357 with 125 lives lost in the past 24 hours, according to a health ministry spokesman.

Some 42,000 coronavirus positive cases in the country have fully recovered from the disease, the spokesman said.

Mehrdad Hashemi on the verge of naming Persepolis GM



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Multiple sources have reported that Mehrdad Hashemi is on the verge of becoming the next general manager of Persepolis club.

Persepolis parted ways with Mohammadhassan Ansarifard in early march and Mehdi Rasoul-Panah was appointed as the club's acting president.

Now, the Iranian media reported that

Hashemi, who is a member of the club's board of directors, will be named as the club's GM within the next few days.

Persepolis are facing financial difficulties in paying the players and coaches' wages.

The Iran professional league (IPL) leaders sit top of the table with 10 points above the second team.

The Reds have had 12 GMs in the last eight years.

Motorsport legend Stirling Moss dies, aged 90

London (CNN) — Stirling Moss, a British motor racing legend widely considered one of the greatest drivers never to win a Formula One title, has died aged 90.

His wife, Susie Moss, told PA that he "died peacefully at his London home following a long illness."

"It was one lap too many," she said. "He just closed his eyes."

Moss was an active race driver between 1948 and 1962, competing in numerous classifications and winning 212 of the 529 races he competed in, famously including the 1955 Mille Miglia, a 1,000 mile (1,600km) race across Italy, in record time.

He was also the F1 Driver's Championship runner-up on four occasions over the course of his career.

Moss won 16 Grands Prix during his career, including "iconic" victories in Monaco and Germany in 1961, according to F1.

"Moss contested 66 Grands Prix from 1951 to 1961, driving for the likes of Vanwall, Maserati and Mercedes, where he famously formed a contented and ruthlessly effective partnership with lead driver Juan Manuel Fangio," said F1 in a statement.

"All at F1 send our heartfelt condolences to Lady Susie and Sir Stirling's family and friends."

Mercedes, one of Moss's former teams, said in a tweet on Sunday: "Today, the sporting world lost not only a true icon and a legend, but a gentleman. The Team and the Mercedes Motorsport family have lost a dear friend. Sir Stirling, we'll miss you."

It was on joining the all-conquering Mercedes team, led by Fangio, that his first F1 world championship success came, winning the 1955 British Grand Prix,



beating the legendary Argentine into second place.

Moss finished runner-up in the championship to Fangio that year and twice more subsequently, but it was in 1958 that he came closest to claiming the F1 world title.

He lost out to Mike Hawthorn by a single point, but at the Portuguese Grand Prix he helped get his British rival reinstated after he had been disqualified following a spin, sparing him a six-point penalty.

"I had no hesitation in doing it," Moss recalled many years later. "I can't see how this is open to debate. The fact that he was my only rival in the championship didn't come into my thinking. Absolutely not."

It was an incredible act of sportsmanship and helped cement his popularity among the British public, who admired his flamboyant style and never-say-die attitude.

Iran football league to resume in June: official

PLDC — Sadeq Doroodgar, the head of the federation's Football Financial Department, says that the Iran Professional League (IPL) will resume in June.

The all sports competitions have been postponed in Iran due to coronavirus outbreak.

This is a global crisis, and all leagues and clubs in the world face similar financial challenges. Most clubs in the world are asking all staff (including players) to accept a substantial wage reduction.

"Coronavirus is a world challenge and soccer's major stakeholders are involved in the situation. We have to sit down with all the stakeholders and parties involved (clubs) to come to an agreement," Doroodgar said.

"All countries have postponed the football matches but they are in relation with the stakeholders and we have to work on the issue as well," he added.

"We are responsible for marketing and have to fulfil our commitment. But if the organizers decide to finish the competition, we will have to make a new decision," he said.

Doroodgar also said he hopes the IPL will resume in June.

Paralympic champion Rostami diagnosed with coronavirus

TASNIM — Rio Paralympic champion Rouhollah Rostami has been diagnosed with coronavirus.

Rostami is under self-quarantine at home and is making "good progress" in his recovery.

Rostami also claimed a gold medal at the Nur-Sultan 2019 World Para Powerlifting Championships in July.

Iran Olympic silver medalist Ehsan Hadadi had been diagnosed with covid-19 but he has fully recovered from the disease.

Iran's total death toll from the new coronavirus outbreak rose to 4,357 with 125 lives lost in the past 24 hours, according to a health ministry spokesman.

Some 42,000 coronavirus positive cases in the country have fully recovered from the disease, the spokesman said.

The story behind Persepolis badge

With much of the Continental game on hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the AFC.com has decided to reveal the story behind the continental clubs' badges.

The-afc.com looks at six different sides from across the breadth of the Asian Football Confederation and explore the meaning behind their unique club crests.

In Iran, the confederation has chosen Persepolis as one of the most popular football club.

Persepolis FC was named after the historical landmark, Persepolis, the capital of the Achaemenid Empire and, thus, the club logo incorporates elements from one of the Islamic Republic of Iran's most revered landmarks.

The Tehran giants have changed their logo a number of times over the years, with falcon-winged men and bulls to symbolize productivity both previously prominent features. Since 2004, however, among its most striking attributes has been the two-headed mythical homa bird, attached by one body, to replicate a renowned column at Persepolis.

A cup is located on the top of the body as recognition of the club's achievements, while the Olympic rings beneath represent Persepolis as one of Iran's great sporting institutions.

In 2012, ahead of the 74th Tehran derby against their great rivals Esteghlal, Persepolis updated the logo once more. This shield-shaped version seen today also features the name Persepolis in both Persian and English.

Iran holds kata competitions online

IRNA — A karate official of Yazd, central Iran, said that due to the spread of coronavirus, for the first time ever, the kata competitions were held through social media, which was highly welcomed by the athletes.

Mohammadhadi Malek-Sabet said that the girls' and boy's competitions were held with 142 athletes in free and control styles.

Malek-Sabet said that in this event, athletes from Yazd, Meybod, Ardakan, and Baqeh, all in Yazd Province, performed their katas, filmed them and sent them for the referees.

He said that the referees will watch and give points to the athletes according to the most recent laws of the intentional federation regarding kata performance.

Malek-Sabet added that the event is held through social media in line with the campaign of staying home during coronavirus time to break the chain of infection.

He said the results will be announced after judgments.

Abbasali to return to Iran after undergoing surgery in Germany

MNA — The captain of Iranian women's Kumite karate team, Hamideh Abbasali, is scheduled to return to Iran after a month-long stay in Germany for treating his injury.

She was injured in the final bout of -68kg category against Italy's Clio Ferracuti in Karat 1-Premier League Salzburg in early March. She was rushed to a hospital after the game ended with a 2-1 win for her. The injury sparked fears that Abbasali might miss the upcoming 2020 Olympics.

The Iranian federation decided to pursue the athlete's treatment in Germany's Hannover where Dr. Babak Zargar Amini performed surgery on her torn PCL.

Now, some 35 days after the surgery, Abbasali can continue his light training without relying on Axillary crutches. She has been receiving physiotherapy treatment during this period in Germany.

She will depart Germany for Tehran tonight and will resume individual training after some days of rest.

As the 2020 Olympics has been postponed for a year, the Iranian karate star will have more time to recover and attain the required readiness to shine in the major event.

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 Barta Borna - 44197737

 Tehrantimes79  Tehrantimesdaily

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



GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

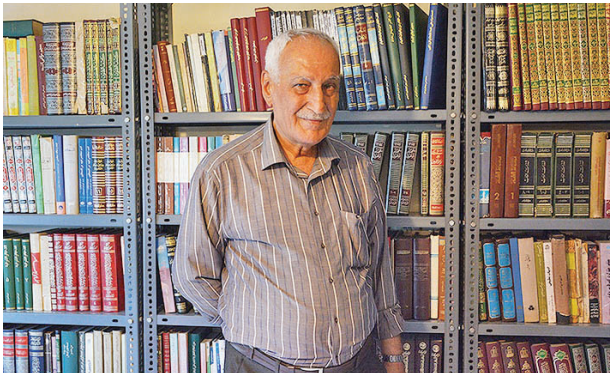
A believer divides his day and night into three parts: he spends some of it in communion with God; another part in repairing his life and needs; and the third part in providing his body and soul with legitimate and admirable joys.

Imam Ali (AS)

Top Iranian scholar Hassan Anusheh passes away at 75

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — Eminent Iranian scholar Hassan Anusheh, whose research contributed enormously to several Persian encyclopedias, died of cancer on Saturday at 75.

From 2005 to 2016 he was the director of a team of scholars that wrote "The Persian Language and Literature Encyclopedia". "Shiism Encyclopedia" alone carries about 3,000 articles by Anusheh, who also translated dozens of books, including George G. Cameron's "History of Early Iran", Clifford Edmund Bosworth's "The Later Ghaznavids" and "The History of the Saffarids of Sistan and the Malikis of Nimruz", into Persian. He was also the translator of "The Cambridge History of Iran" that has been authored by a number of scholars such



Eminent Iranologist Hassan Anusheh in an undated photo. (IBNA/Sobhan Farajvan)

as Ilya Gershevitch, Ehsan Yarshater and Richard N. Frye. The death of Anusheh, who was a member of the Academy of Persian Language and Literature, came as a shock to cultural figures and officials.

In a message of condolences published on Sunday, the director of the academy, Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel, said, "He was a prolific scholar who left a rich cultural legacy around the world by his studies on Persian literature and history."

"He was one of the outstanding Iranologists of our time who had embellished his knowledge and wisdom with his humility and respect for morals," Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi said in his message of condolences published on Sunday.

Former culture minister Ahmad Masjed-Jamei, who is a member of the Tehran City Council, also issued a message of condolences.

"He was an Iranologist who did his best nonstop in the field of Persian literature; the fruits of his research are invaluable works that introduce the supremacy of Persian literature to the world," he wrote in the message.

"Don't Touch Anything" to compete in Vienna Shorts

A R T **TEHRAN** — "Don't Touch Anything", a production of the Iranian Youth Cinema Society directed by Arghavan Heidaroleslam, will be competing in the Vienna International Shorts (VIS) running online from May 28 to June 2, the organizers have announced.



A scene from "Don't Touch Anything" directed by Arghavan Heidaroleslam.

The film is about a woman who is suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and she is expecting a guest.

The 17th edition of the festival has received more than 5,000 submissions, and 57 films from 27 countries will be competing in the international competition section.

Maestro Mashayekhi calls on Iranian youth to practice bricolage in home quarantine

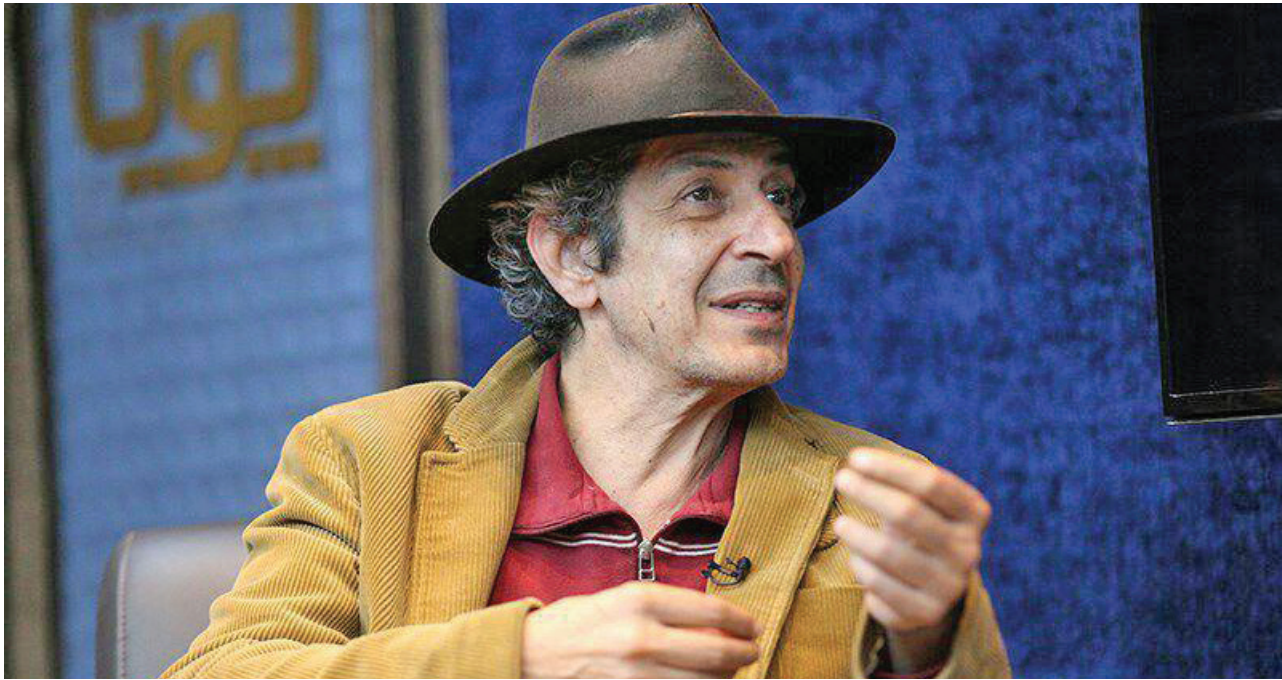
→1 "The important thing about music is that we must first think so as to see what the reason is that we need music in our lives. Do we like music for entertainment, do we like it for fun or do we want to find a new perspective on life," he said.

He suggested that people who are looking for a way to transfer their thoughts and feelings should remember that the virtual world has many facilities and they can make the best use of it.

"I think online concerts are good and entertain people but this is not the main thing," he added.

Musicians have cultural responsibilities because they can make the best use of this cultural tool to help relieve stress and heal the pain, giving messages of hope and good feelings.

"The main thing is that we should know that life means overcoming problems, and if people think that life is easy and sweet, they are making a mistake. Life means fighting with problems and then it gets sweet. We Iranians are perfect in getting involved in life and solving the problems in our lives, and I think we always can find solutions for our problems," he concluded.



Maestro Nader Mashayekhi in an undated photo. (Tasnim/Amin Ahui)



Front covers of the Turkish and Croatian versions of "Hannah, Our Hero".

"Hannah, Our Hero" translated into Croatian, Turkish

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — Iranian writer Ali-Asghar d e s k Seidabadi's latest story "Hannah, Our Hero" that teaches children how to take care of themselves during the coronavirus pandemic has also been translated into Croatian and Turkish.

Seidabadi wrote the book illustrated by his daughter Ghazaleh during the home quarantine, which began on March 20 in Iran.

The English, Italian, French and German PDF versions of the story were available for download on Seidabadi's official website <http://aliseidabadi.ir> last week.

"Hannah, Our Hero" has been translated into Turkish by Nadia Bakeri, while Bijan Alai is the translator of the

Croatian version.

The story is about several children including Hannah that go to visit their uncle, Bahman, who doesn't know that he is infected with COVID-19. All children are infected, but Hannah escapes uninfected due to her paying attention to the tips for dealing with coronavirus.

In a preface to the book, Seidabadi referred to some books written on coronavirus – COVID-19 by Chinese and American authors during the coronavirus pandemic and added, "They were useful books but for me, the social aspects of the event and its effect on our lives and tolerating the situation was more important than how to tackle and get rid of the virus."

Iranian artists launch online exhibit to escape recession during coronavirus pandemic

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranshahr Gallery d e s k in Tehran and the Surface Art and Design Project have recently launched an online gallery titled "Atelier 99" to escape from a slump in art sales that started in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The gallery intends to support visual artists in the difficult days of the pandemic, Iranshahr has announced on its website.

It also provides an opportunity for art aficionados to

visit exhibitions and purchase the artworks they like.

In addition, the works are offered at reasonable prices in which the shares of the galleries are omitted, encouraging private collectors and art aficionados to purchase a greater number of artworks.

Atelier 99 is currently playing host to an exhibition displaying works by Mostafa Chubtarash, Nilufar Kasbi, Narenj Kazemi, Leili Rashidi, Behruz Majidi, Mojgan Mollahosseini, Maryam Tabatabai, Zeinab Movahhed and several other artists.



A poster for "Atelier 99".

Filmmaker Obayashi, who portrayed war's horrors, dead at 82

TOKYO (AP) — Nobuhiko Obayashi, one of Japan's most prolific filmmakers who devoted his works to depicting war's horrors and singing the eternal power of movies, has died. He was 82.

The official site for his latest film, "Labyrinth of Cinema", said that Obayashi died late Friday.

Obayashi was diagnosed with terminal cancer in 2016, and was told he had just a few months. But he continued working, appearing frail and often in a wheelchair.

"Labyrinth of Cinema" had been scheduled to be released in Japan on the day of his death. The date has been pushed back because of the coronavirus pandemic, which has closed theaters.

"Director Obayashi fought his sickness to the day of the scheduled release of his film. Rest in peace, director Obayashi, you who loved films so much you kept on making them," the announcement said.

The film was showcased at the Tokyo International Film Festival last year, which honored him as a "cinematic magician" and screened several of his other works.

Obayashi stayed stubbornly true to his core pacifist message through more than 40 movies and thousands of TV shows, commercials and other video.

His films have kaleidoscopic, fairy tale-like imagery repeating his trademark motifs of colorful Japanese festivals, dripping blood, marching doll-like soldiers, shooting stars and winding cobblestone roads.

"Labyrinth of Cinema" is an homage to filmmaking. Its main characters, young Japanese men who go to an old movie theater but increasingly get sucked into crises, have names emulating Obayashi's favorite cinematic giants, Francois Truffaut, Mario Bava and Don Seigel.

Obayashi's "Miss Lonely," released in 1985, was shot in seaside Onomichi, the picturesque town in Hiroshima prefecture where Obayashi grew up and made animation clips by hand.

His other popular films include his 1977 "House," a horror comedy about youngsters who amble into a haunted house, and "Hanagatami," released in 2017, another take on his perennial themes of young love and the injustices of war that unfolds in iridescent hues.

Obayashi was a trailblazer in the world of Japanese TV commercials, hiring foreign movie stars like Catherine Deneuve and Charles Bronson, highlighted in his slick film work that seemed to symbolize Japan's postwar modernization.



In this Oct. 11, 2019, file photo, Japanese director Nobuhiko Obayashi holds up his hand in the sign language of "I love you" to stress that is an important message in his films, during an interview at his studio in Tokyo. (AP/Yuri Kageyama)

He was born in 1938, and his childhood overlapped with World War II, years remembered for Japan's aggression and atrocities against its neighbors but also a period during which Japanese people suffered hunger, abuse and mass deaths. His pacifist beliefs were reinforced by his father, an army doctor, who also gave him his first 8-millimeter camera.

His works lack Hollywood's action-packed plots and neat finales. Instead, they appear

to start from nowhere and end, then start up again, weaving in and out of scenes, often traveling in time.

During an Associated Press interview in 2019, Obayashi stressed his belief in the power of movies. Movies like his, he says, ask that important question: Where do you stand?

"Movies are not weak," he said, looking offended at such an idea. "Movies express freedom."

He said then he was working on another film, while acknowledging he was aware of the limitations of his health, all the work taking longer.

At the end of the interview, he said he wanted to demonstrate his lifetime goal for his filmmaking. He showed his hand, three fingers held up in the sign language of "I love you."

"Let's value freedom with all our might. Let's have no lies," said Obayashi.

Obayashi is survived by his wife Kyoko Obayashi, an actress and film producer, and their daughter Chigumi, an actress.

A ceremony to mourn his death was being planned, according to Japanese media, but details were not immediately available. The Tokyo city and central government have requested that public gatherings are avoided because of the pandemic.

Disney World furloughing 43,000 more workers due to virus

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Walt Disney World plans to stop paying wages to 43,000 workers in about a week while allowing them to keep their benefits for up to a year in what is the largest wave of furloughs since the theme park resort closed in mid-March because of the new coronavirus spread.

Workers will be able to keep their medical, dental and life insurance benefits for the length of the furlough period, or up to a year. Seniority and wage rates will remain unchanged for the workers whose furloughs start April 19, according to a statement from the Service Trades Council, the coalition of unions representing the Disney World workers.

"The union agreement provides stronger protections and benefits for 43,000 union workers at Disney than virtually any other furloughed or laid-off workers in the United States," the union said in a statement to members.

About 200 workers will remain on the job performing "essential duties" during the closure, and they will be offered positions based on seniority, the union said.

The agreement with the Service Trades Council marked the largest group of workers at Disney World to come to terms on furloughs with the company during the new coronavirus outbreak. With 77,000 workers, Disney World is the largest single-site group of workers in the nation.

Disney World's theme parks, entertainment district and



In this Monday, March 16, 2020, file photo, the road to the entrance of Walt Disney World has few cars, in Lake Buena Vista, Fla. (AP/John Raoux)

hotels closed in mid-March, and Disney has been paying its workers while they stay at home. That is scheduled to end April 19, Disney officials have said, because they don't know when the theme park resort will reopen.

On Friday, unions representing security guards and workers involved in facilities and operations reached agreements

under similar terms.

Earlier this week, Disney World and a union representing musicians who perform at its theme parks reached a similar agreement.

Disney also said it would furlough executive, salaried and hourly nonunion employees whose jobs aren't necessary at this time.

"This agreement provides an easier return to work when our community recovers from the impact of COVID-19," Disney officials said in a statement about Saturday's agreement. "We are grateful to have worked together in good faith to help our cast members navigate these unprecedented times."

Disney's cross-town rivals, Universal Orlando and SeaWorld Orlando, and their sister parks across the country, also closed their gates last month because of the coronavirus. SeaWorld said it had furloughed 90% of its workers.

Universal Orlando Resort and Universal Studios Hollywood said this week that they would stay closed through May 31. Full-time employees will be paid at 100% through April 19, but pay and workload for most workers will be reduced to 80% after that, and part-time hourly workers will be furloughed beginning May 3, Universal said. The company said it would continue to provide benefits for employees who already had them.