



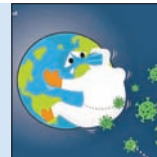
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EDITORIAL
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Tehran Times editor-in-chief

We are all together

Only a few months after its outbreak, the coronavirus has changed the face of the earth, maybe forever. The world, as we knew, may have ceased to exist. This is not the first time in history that a virus infects the entire globe, but this is the first time in history that a virus questions the whole pride of our modern-day medical and non-medical technology has brought us for the last couple of decades.

The coronavirus has brought many countries to their knees. Not a single country in the whole world can claim immunity in the face of the pandemic. Medical systems and staff are under never-experienced-before pressure. Economies are on the threshold of crashing. Some governments are falling. Millions of jobs and thousands of lives are being lost every day. Advanced medical technology enterprises that clearly will benefit the most from developing the first coronavirus vaccine are speaking of months and months before such a vaccine is developed. And to millions of men and women all around the world, it seems there is no hope...

But there is still hope. All sorts of belief systems aside, we still have each other. We can/should count on each other's help. This is a war. Who in their right mind would resist accepting that this is a war against humanity? That this is a once-in-a-century-opportunity that can unite us in the way to a greater good? That this is actually why we live in societies and groups rather than individually? After centuries of living in isolated groups, today, man has a very precious asset at his disposal: The International Community.

But like every community in history, there are grits in this community too. Like every war which ended in defeat because of sabotage, our global army is also infected by undesirable elements that can take us down to the humiliation of defeat. These disposables, despite all the sacrifices that those on the front line (especially medical staff) are making in every country, are taking all the measures they can to undermine other countries' endeavors in this multi-dimensional fight. They are the incarnation of "Zombies" in flesh-and-blood trying to eat our brains.

To push them back, to win this war, we must come to realize we are in this all together.

Why impact of low oil prices on Iran is 'minimal'?

By Salman Parviz

TEHRAN — Global oil prices have been hit with double whammy by the spat between Russia and Saudi Arabia in mid-March over output cuts and the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

However, the two countries and other large oil producers were racing to negotiate a deal to stem the historic price crash. The OPEC+, made up of OPEC producers and allies including Russia, held talks on

Thursday and agreed to cut output in May and June by a record 10 million barrels per day (bpd) as oil price fell below \$30 a barrel.

By the end of March due to Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, more than half the world was in lockdowns and travel restrictions were imposed by most countries. With shops closed, streets deserted flights cancelled and the transport sector coming to a halt, the demand for oil

is set to plunge by as much as 27 million bpd in April, a decline unprecedented in the history of oil according to a report by Rystad Energy. The report sees a demand hit of around 20m bpd in May and more than 15m bpd in June.

As a result shares of major international oil companies fell 12-19.5 percent in March, a worrisome position for banks with energy loans. IEA confirmed in March that oil demand will decline for the first time since 2009.

Following announcement of stimulus plans declared by U.S., Europe, Japan, Scandinavian countries, to name a few major economies, oil prices recovered and according to Oilprice.com Brent crude was trading at 33.87 on Friday.

Implications of oil price crash for Iran will be minimal given the U.S. sanctions has eroded the country's dependence on oil exports to a great extent, diversifying the country's "resistance" economy.

Turkish court indicts 20 Saudis for murdering Khashoggi

A Turkish court has accepted an indictment brought against 20 Saudis, including two former associates of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, for the brutal murder of prominent dissident and journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul in 2018.

The 117-page indictment prepared by Istanbul prosecutors was accepted by the city's Heavy Penal Court No. 11 on Saturday, Turkey's state Anadolu news agency reported.

It identified the associates as former deputy intelligence chief Ahmad Asiri and former royal aide Saud al-Qahtani.

According to the document, Mansour Othman M. Abbahussain, working as major general and intelligence officer in Saudi Arabia, "was tasked in the office of bin Salman and instructed by

Asiri to bring Khashoggi back to the country and to kill him if he resisted," the agency reported.

Khashoggi, a former advocate of the Saudi royal court who had become a critic of bin Salman, was killed and his body dismembered by a Saudi hit squad after being lured into the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018. The Washington Post, for which Khashoggi was a columnist, reported in November that year that the CIA had concluded that bin Salman personally ordered his killing.

Agnes Callamard, the United Nations special rapporteur for extrajudicial summary or arbitrary executions, has said there was credible evidence that the crown prince and other ranking Saudi officials were individually liable. She has called for an independent and impartial international inquiry into the foul play.

After exiting the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (also referred to as Iran nuclear deal), in May 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump's administration imposed a series of historically tough sanctions on Iran's oil, banking and transportation sectors. Sanctions are intended to bring "maximum pressure" campaign for the Islamic Republic designed to reduce Iran's oil exports to "zero".

Initially the U.S. provided waivers that allowed big economic powers to continue importing crude from Iran. The waivers ended in April 2019 helping push up the price of Brent crude, the international benchmark, to above \$75 a barrel. Most of Iran's crude exports went to five main buyers: India, China, South Korea, Japan and Turkey.

Iran exported 2.5m bpd before the U.S. decision to reimpose sanctions and by the time the waivers ended Iran's oil exports had dropped to 1-1.3m bpd. **→5**

Families of prisoners to receive financial aid

TEHRAN — Upon an order by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the underprivileged families of prisoners will be supported financially, Judiciary Chief Seyed Ebrahim Raisi announced on Monday.

"Based on the order of the Leader and through actions that will be taken by the Mostazafan Foundation, tens of

thousands of underprivileged families of prisoners will be supported financially," he said during a meeting of the Judiciary Supreme Council.

He noted that all the bodies are obliged to respect the people's dignity.

Elsewhere, he attached great importance to domestic production in order to improve the economy. **→2**

Ansarullah says Saudi ceasefire merely aimed at misleading world

A high-ranking official from Yemen's Houthis Ansarullah movement has roundly rejected as fraudulent a two-week ceasefire declared by the coalition led by the Saudi regime, saying the declaration deceitfully targets the world public opinion.

Mohammed Abdul-Salam, the spokesman for Ansarullah, said in a post on his official Twitter page that Yemen has seen an escalation in fighting and airstrikes carried out by the coalition at the same

time as the siege of Yemen continues, Press TV reported.

"The declared ceasefire is deceitful and meant to mislead the world public opinion. If there were a serious intention and sheer willpower towards peace, the UN Security Council should have passed a formal resolution to stop the absurd war on Yemen and lift the unjust siege; rather it sufficed to a worthless statement in order to appease the (Saudi-led) alliance," Abdul-Salam added. **→10**

TPO to dispatch 10 commercial attachés to major export destinations

TEHRAN — Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) of Iran plans to dispatch at least 10 commercial attachés to 10 major export destinations of the country in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 20), according to an official with TPO.

Masoud Kamali Ardakani, the deputy head of TPO for development of export markets, mentioned Russia, Turkey, Iraqi Kurdistan, Oman, China, India,

Afghanistan and Armenia as the major export markets for dispatching the new commercial attachés, Tasnim news agency reported on Monday.

Re-imposition of the U.S. sanctions on Iranian economy has led the Islamic Republic to reduce its dependence on oil revenues and elevate its other sources of income instead; while increasing non-oil exports has come as the most significant approach in this regard. **→4**



ARTICLE
Faranak Bakhtiari
Tehran Times journalist

Knowledge-based companies pushing for 'surge in production'

Iran has developed plans to support and empower knowledge-based companies as a step forward to materialize the goal of surge in production, as the economy is grappling with the coronavirus predicament.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has named the current Iranian calendar year, 1399, as the 'Year of Surge in Production', aiming to create a tangible change in people's lives.

A total budget of 63 trillion rials (nearly \$1.5 billion at the official rate of 42,000 rials) is proposed to be allocated to support the knowledge-based companies leaping for production, Rouhollah Zolfaghari, deputy head of the Innovation and Prosperity Fund said.

"Last year, our performance in the implementation of innovative projects was 10 times more than last year," he said, adding, "over the previous year, some 13 trillion rials (about \$309 million) provided to knowledge-based companies, besides, various loans amounting to 25 trillion rials (around \$595 million)."

Some of the activities had instant results last year, and companies were able to play a good role in the country, while some of them will come up with good results in the coming year, and a significant rise in production will appear, he explained.

Despite the work done last year, in the coming year, detailed plans have been prepared to support knowledge-based companies, through which 45 trillion rials (about \$1 billion) in the form of loans will be considered for the production.

This year, the Fund will also invest some 3 trillion rials (about \$71 million) in sectors at risk and we will be able to manufacture new products along with minimizing the investment risks through insurance coverage, he stated.

Also, a total budget of 600 billion rials (nearly \$14 million) in the form of non-repayable loans has been earmarked so that the companies can commercialize their products, and if they are in the research and development phase, proceeds in collaboration with universities, scientific and research centers, he added. **→9**



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Tehran experiencing clean air amid corona concerns

These days, the megacity of Tehran is experiencing clean air as lockdown measures amid the coronavirus outbreak has slashed traffic to a great extent.

Since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20), the city's air quality index has been excellent in 14 days and good in 9 days.

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

Zarif discusses Afghanistan with Turkish, Russian and Qatari foreign ministers

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has discussed the political crisis in Afghanistan and the latest developments in the country with his Turkish, Russian and Qatari counterparts in separate phone calls on Monday.



The chief diplomats also discussed the ongoing peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

During a phone conversation on Sunday with Afghan acting foreign minister Mohammad Hanef Atmar, Zarif highlighted the necessity of unity among various Afghan groups.

Also, in separate phone conversations with Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah on April 7, Zarif expressed Tehran's support for dialogue between rival factions.

Zarif emphasized that the political structure has provided the ground for peace and national reconciliation in Afghanistan. He also reaffirmed Iran's support for dialogue between rival groups with the participation of all 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 followed 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 readiness to help settle political problems in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has been facing a political crisis since last September's presidential elections. The Election Commission announced that Ghani won the presidential election but Abdullah has also proclaimed himself winner.

U.S. has no right to impede IMF loan to Iran: government

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Government spokesperson Ali Rabiei said on Monday that the United States has no right to prevent the International Monetary Fund (IMF) from giving loan to Iran.

"From the legal point of view, the United States is not in the position to obstruct the legal performance of institutions and international organizations," he said in a press conference.

He added, "The United States must understand that the international institutions are not its property."

The government spokesman also urged other states to the IMF to stop the U.S. inhuman actions.

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

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

President Hassan Rouhani said on Thursday that the IMF must fulfil its duties unbiasedly.

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

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

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

In a tweet on March 26, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said, "Even the world's largest economy (the U.S.) needs others to help it fight the pandemic, yet refuses to halt its Economic Terrorism against Iran."

Zarif said the Covid-19 is ravaging the world and sparing no nation.

"Does the U.S. want a 'forever pandemic'?" Zarif asked. The chief diplomat said it is "moral imperative to stop observing the bully's sanctions".

■ **'We have to fight sanctions and coronavirus'**

Rabiei also said that the Iranians must fight both the coronavirus and the sanctions.

"We will succeed in this path," he noted.

Zarif receives four new ambassadors to Iran

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The new ambassadors of the Czech Republic, Republic of Bulgaria, People's Republic of Korea, and Nicaragua to Tehran presented a copy of their credentials to Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Monday.

Also, the departing Iraqi ambassador to Iran Sa'd Javad Ghandil sat for talks with Zarif before leaving for his country.

According to Mehr, released photos by the Foreign Ministry show that social distancing guidelines set to contain the coronavirus outbreak have been followed during the diplomatic meetings.

Families of prisoners to receive financial aid

➔ "The first step in boosting domestic production is strengthening national determination and public participation and also tapping the capacities," the top judge pointed out.

In a New Year message on March 20, Ayatollah Khamenei said a further surge in production is needed in the country, saying the slogan of the New Year is "Surge in Production".

"Last year's slogan was 'Boosting Production'. This year, I want to say that we need a further surge in production - as the slogan of the year. This year is the year of 'Surge in Production'. This is the slogan of the year," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

Sanctions function as enemy's fifth column in coronavirus fight: Iran

Iran's permanent mission to UN says 'emergency aid is not the panacea'

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iran's permanent mission to the United Nations said in a message on Sunday that in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, sanctions function as enemy's "fifth column".

"In our common fight against COVID-19, sanctions, by undermining our front from within in favor of the enemy, function exactly like the 'fifth column'. It is but a treachery," the message said.

Following is text of the message entitled "The Impacts of U.S. Sanctions in the War Against Coronavirus" published by the Tasnim news agency:

The entire world is now facing a World War Against COVID-19. This relentless and highly contagious virus, as the common enemy of the whole human family, is seriously threatening the lives of all with no distinction as to nationality, race, color, religion or gender.

At this common fight, all of humanity is on the same front. But, despite our tireless efforts, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), the virus is clearly "accelerating".

We MUST win this battle by standing united, going beyond mere "expression of solidarity" and demonstrating "solidarity in action" as well as well-coordinated international cooperation.

To succeed quickly and sustainably, we must ensure that no individual, family, community or nation is left behind as no nation will be spared and no one will be safe until everyone all over the world is safe.

Any act whatsoever restricting the ability of a nation to tackle the crisis would let the disease spread like wildfire and consequently weaken the global fight against the pandemic.

A clear example is the continued application of unilateral sanctions, which undermine the related ability of targeted nations and the whole world to fight the pandemic. Accordingly, their application under current unprecedented global health crisis involving all nations is against the common interests of humanity.

In short, in our common fight against COVID-19, sanctions, by undermining our front from within in favor of the enemy, function exactly like the "fifth column". It is but a treachery.



■ **Sanctions inhibit Iran's ability to fight COVID-19**

While Iran is experiencing one of the worst outbreaks of the coronavirus, the U.S. sanctions — which, according to the U.S. officials are the most extensive sanctions ever imposed on a country — are drastically hindering Iran's efforts to identify and treat patients and effectively prevent the spread of the virus.

This is despite the fact that Iran's medical facilities, doctors and nurses are among the very finest in the world, and the professional nature of its national efforts to suppress COVID-19 is highly acknowledged by the WHO.

The so-called humanitarian exemptions are not working.

To escape from the disgrace of the illegal and immoral nature of sanctions, the U.S. officials continue to claim that humanitarian and medical needs are exempt from sanctions.

On 27 February 2020, the U.S. Treasury finalized with much fanfare "The Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement" (SHTA) allowing certain humanitarian transactions with Iran. However, this narrow channel does not match Iran's humanitarian needs in the current situation.

The United States has forced SHTA to pursue a very tight and tough procedure, under the pretexes like "ensuring the upmost transparency" or "enhanced due diligence" — requiring companies to provide extensive

information to the Treasury Department every month on the Iranian beneficiaries of the goods, the Iranian companies' business relationships and financial details and alike — thus making it practically very difficult for companies to trade with Iran.

Additionally, almost impossible or cumbersome nature of transferring Iran's reserves blocked outside the country to the designated Swiss bank, not only does not allow the SHTA to function properly now but may actually render it redundant in a matter of few months.

Likewise, recently several companies that supply the medical equipment required to fight the coronavirus have stopped shipping to Iran because the current U.S. sanctions regime makes the shipping of such items to Iran almost impossible.

Moreover, the only message of the U.S.' additional new sanctions, imposed in the midst of the coronavirus outbreak, is that companies must avoid doing any business with Iran, even if their work is humanitarian in nature.

In short, the U.S. sanctions regime, including its related penalties, is extremely broad and has created a compliance minefield for the legal trade with Iran and consequently, medical suppliers and relief organizations simply steer clear of doing business in Iran in the fear of accidentally getting caught up in the U.S. sanctions' web.

Zarif, Guterres talk on phone for second time in 24 hours

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres have exchanged views about the recent regional developments, especially the ongoing crisis in Yemen.

During a phone talk on Sunday night, Guterres elaborated on the measures taken by the UN to hold the ceasefire in Yemen, according to Mehr.

Zarif underlined that Yemen's crisis does not have a military solution.

The foreign minister added that a consistent ceasefire can be a good start for the political resolution of the ongoing situation in the war-torn country.

This was the second phone conversation between Zarif and Guterres in less than 24 hours.

During a 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 against the impoverished country as a publicity stunt.

During the Sunday phone call, Zarif also presented a report on Iran's diplomatic efforts to help resolve the political crisis in Afghanistan and briefed Guterres on his talks with the top Afghan officials, including President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, Afghanistan's Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, and National Security Advisor Mohammad Hanif Atmar.

Last week, Guterres renewed his call for a global ceasefire, urging all parties in conflict to lay down arms and allow war-torn nations to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

On Saturday, the two sides conferred on the United States' sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

■ **Zarif, Guterres say sanctions have negative impact on Iran's fight against coronavirus**

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 2015 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.

Iraq must take decisions as an independent country: MP

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Alaeddin Boroujerdi, a senior and veteran Iranian MP who sits on the Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, has said that Iraq must take decisions as an independent country without any foreign interference.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that Iraq must take decisions as an independent country. We strongly oppose illegal interferences," he told ISNA in an interview published on Monday.

The MP also said that foreign forces must leave Iraq.

"The United States' bases in Iraq means lack of respect for the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty," he noted.

Hassan Danaeefar, the former Iranian ambassador to Iraq, told ILNA in an interview published on Saturday that the U.S. has no choice other than exiting its forces from Iraq.

"The people of Iraq will not let the United States influence the country's sovereignty, and Washington has no way but leaving Iraq," he said.

He noted that many of the U.S. forces are leaving bases in Iraq and the country's demand is being fulfilled.

The Iraqi Parliament voted on January 5 to expel the U.S. troops from Iraq.

In an interview with Tasnim news agency in January, Danaeefar said that it is essential that the U.S. leave Iraq now that the Iraqi

parliament has voted to expel American forces from the country.

The Iraqi people have the experience of fighting the U.S. occupation, the ambassador said, predicting the Iraqis will rise against U.S. forces if they refuse to leave the country.

"So, if the occupant does not respect the Iraqis' approval, they [the Iraqis] will fight them," he said.

He said if the U.S. refuses to leave, Iraq can file a complaint in international courts.

The U.S. invaded Iraq in March 2003 under the false claim that the country was hiding weapons of mass destruction. The invasion took place despite repeated confirmations by international bodies, including the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency, that Iraq did not have any secret weapons program.

Majid Takht-Ravanchi, Iran's ambassador to the United Nations, has said that the U.S. must leave the region, noting that the U.S. is unwelcome in the region.

"Iraq and the region are dissatisfied with the presence of the United States, and the United States must respect the Iraqi parliament's approval to end the United States' military presence," IRNA quoted him as saying in an interview with Aljazeera in January.

He said the Iraqi parliament's approval is the result of more than 17 years of the U.S. occupation of the country.



■ **Boroujerdi wishes Kadhimi success**

Boroujerdi also wished success for new-designated Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi.

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.

Iraj Masjedi, the Iranian ambassador to

Iraq, has said that Iran supports designation of Kadhimi as the new prime minister.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran respects Iraq's law and political system and supports any figure who has been nominated through legal procedure and after gaining the parliament's vote of confidence," he tweeted, ISNA reported on Sunday.

Masjedi said on Friday that Iran has a "positive view" on designation of Kadhimi as the new prime minister.

"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 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 Iraq are also very strong. Every year millions of citizens from each country visit holy shrines in either country.

Judiciary chief, top officials allocate 20% of their salaries for coronavirus victims

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi has announced that senior Judiciary officials, including himself, will allocate 20 percent of their monthly salaries for three months to help those affected by the coronavirus outbreak.

Raisi said the decision has been made after Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called on all Iranians to provide sincere assistance to the needy and the poor in the society, Mehr reported.

In a similar move, it was announced on Sunday that top commanders of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) have donated 20 percent of their monthly salary to coronavirus relief efforts.

IRGC spokesman Ramezan 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,"

the government 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 on April 6.

President Hassan Rouhani thanked the Leader for his consent and ordered the money to be spent mostly on purchasing the equipment and goods needed by 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 coronavirus, also called COVID-19, initially emerged in China late last year and soon spread across the world.

As of Monday, the total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran reached 73,303, of whom 4,585 have died and 45,983 recovered.

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.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Iran does not need charity from U.S. President Donald Trump to contain the virus.

"What we want is for him to STOP preventing Iran from selling oil & other products, buying its needs & making & receiving payments," Zarif said in a tweet on April 7.

Chinese ambassador: Iran enjoying fine public health system

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — As Iran is fighting to contain the deadly coronavirus pandemic, China's ambassador to Tehran says "Iran is among the countries enjoying fine public health system in the Middle East."

In an interview with the Tehran Times, Ambassador Chang Hua also says the collaboration between medical experts from Iran and China "has produced positive results".

Following is the text of the interview:

Tehran Times: China enforced a strict quarantine in Hubei province, especially Wuhan. However, other countries did not follow such an approach. Your view, which approach has proven more effective?

Chang Hua: The prevention and control efforts have a direct bearing on the lives and health of the public of all countries, as well as on the livelihood of people, economy and politics, which should be thought comprehensively and fully by their governments, especially regarding quarantine and lockdown measures. The outbreaks of COVID-19 in various countries differ, and it's not the policy of countries to adopt the same strategy of quarantine and lockdown, with many countries imposing no home quarantine on its residents.

As early as late January, the Chinese government has taken the most comprehensive, rigorous and thorough measures, and mobilized the whole country to support Wuhan and Hubei Province in a determined attempt to block the spread of the virus and save lives of patients to the greatest extent. China's great success is grounded on China's national conditions, and the great efforts and sacrifice of the Chinese people should be noted. The Covid-19 is still spreading, and various countries are constantly upgrading and adjusting their responses. It is the freedom of various countries to determine independently whether to enforce a strict quarantine or not in accordance with their specific conditions and in the interest of their peoples. We have noted that many countries are learning from China's experience and taking isolation measures of various levels with obvious effects.

■ Tehran Times: Are experts in Iran and China sharing views on how to contain COVID-19 in Iran?

Chang Hua: At the end of February, not far from the outbreak of COVID-19 in Iran, a team of volunteer experts from the Red Cross Society of China came to Iran to share with their Iranian counterparts China's experience and conduct cooperation in fighting the disease. In one month's stay in Iran, the Chinese experts worked very hard. They exchanged views on prevention and control measures, especially epidemiological survey, and clinical diagnosis and treatment with Iranian counterparts from the Ministry of Health, Center for Disease Control, Red Crescent Society of Iran, research institutions, visited hospitals and communities in Tehran, and advised on epidemic prevention. The collaboration between the experts has produced positive results. Furthermore, China's COVID-19 diagnostic and therapeutic package has been updated to the seventh edition, and has been provided to the Iranian side for reference in the first place.

■ Tehran Times: In view of its 1.4 billion population, what is the reason behind China's success in containing the highly transmissible COVID-19 in comparison to certain other countries?

Chang Hua: In China, Early detection, reporting, quarantine and treatment of cases has been emphasized, and resources, high-caliber experts and medical facilities have been channeled to treating patients with severe conditions. These measures have proved effective in raising the admission and cure rates and lowering the infection and fatality rates. China has mobilized medical workers across the country to support Hubei Province. A total of 346 medical teams of more than 42,600 medical workers have been dispatched to Hubei. Two special hospitals were built within 10 days respectively and 16 mobile hospitals converted from public venues were built in Wuhan, which greatly con-



"It is expected that China will make great progress in vaccine development in two or three months."

tributes to ensure hospital admission and treatment for all those in need. Under the strong leadership of the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government, it is the arduous efforts, solidarity, and sacrifice of 1.4 billion people that accounts for the temporary victory in battling COVID-19 and the low case-fatality rate. Iran is among the countries enjoying fine public health system in the Middle East. I believe Iran can effectively tackle the outbreak.

■ Tehran Times: At what stage is China in producing medicine or vaccine for the virus?

Chang Hua: Zhong Nanshan, a leading expert tackling the virus and an academican of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said that since the outbreak of the pandemic, researchers from various countries have been working hard to develop vaccines. The COVID-19 vaccine has passed animal experiments in China and will be used in human clinical trials. It is expected that China will make great progress in vaccine development in two or three months. Now the world is struggling to find effective vaccines and drugs. Various countries have shown solidarity tackling the pandemic. And we also need solidarity in developing drugs and vaccines? which is the only way to pool excellent scientists and quicken the process of developing effective vaccines and medicines.

■ Tehran Times: There are a war of words between the U.S. and China about the origin of COVID-19. China says the U.S. deserves an explanation to China in this regard and the U.S. calls it "Wuhan virus". Can you explain this?

Chang Hua: As China has repeatedly pointed out, origin-tracing of the virus is a complicated matter, where we should rely on professional views from the science community. WHO and the international community explicitly object to linking the virus with specific countries or regions, or seeking stigmatization. They have commended China's response. However, some American politicians continue to defy global consensus, stigmatize China and discredit its pandemic response. The sinister intention behind this attempt is to deflect attention at home and shift the blame to the innocent.

I have to point out that the COVID-19 pandemic is spreading across the globe and the situation in the U.S.

"China and Iran should have in mind a long-term picture and enrich their comprehensive strategic partnership through enhancing mutual trust, overcoming difficulties and deepening practical cooperation in various fields."

is getting worse. Under such circumstances, I hope these American politicians stop provoking political disputes and disrupting international cooperation in combating the virus, rather focus on containing the spread at home and contributing to global cooperation. We advise these politicians not to go further down the wrong path.

The U.S. side are trying to stigmatize China's efforts in an attempt to shirk responsibility. They have ignored the huge sacrifices the Chinese people made in safeguarding the health and safety of all mankind, and vilified China's significant contributions to global public health security. Their moves run counter to the WHO's professional advice and the expectations and efforts of the international community to fight the pandemic together. We hope the U.S. side will respect facts and the international consensus, and keep its own house in order rather than slander others and shift responsibility. It needs to play a constructive role in enhancing international cooperation and safeguarding international public health security.

■ Tehran Times: Against the background of sanctions, it will become more difficult for Iran to fight the Covid-19 epidemic. What responsibility should the international community bear? Now, assuming that Iran failed to fight the epidemic due to sanctions, what will happen in the world?

Chang Hua: China and Iran maintain close cooperation. We provided assistance supplies such as test kits to Iran, and dispatched a team of volunteer experts to help Iran fight the epidemic. Now is the critical stage of epidemic control for the Iranian government and people. To continue the unilateral sanctions on Iran at this time will worsen the situation, and is taking advantage of tragedy. It is obviously contrary to the humanitarian principle and seriously obstructs Iran's fight against the epidemic as well as the humanitarian aid to Iran by UN and other international organizations. Iran's 80 million people's difficulties in their fight against COVID-19 due to American sanctions are also not conducive to the efforts in the Middle East and beyond. China urges the United States to immediately lift sanctions against Iran, avoid hindering Iran's epidemic response and further harm to Iranian people's livelihood.

■ Tehran Times: On April 6, a joint statement from 24 former world dignitaries stated that sanctions against Iran should be relaxed in the context of the current epidemic. What do you think this statement means?

Chang Hua: China has always resolutely opposed the United States invoking its domestic laws and imposing unilateral sanctions and so-called "long-arm jurisdiction" against other countries including China. Against the backdrop of the current epidemic, China urges the United States to immediately lift its sanctions against Iran, to avoid hindering Iran's epidemic response and further harm to Iranian people's livelihood. We also call on the international community and Iran to strengthen cooperation and jointly safeguard global and regional public health security.

■ Tehran Times: As Iran's largest trading partner, how do you assess China-Iran economic and trade relations under the dual pressure of epidemic situation and sanctions?

Chang Hua: China and Iran enjoy strong economic complementarities and huge cooperation potential. To be honest, the United States' unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA and reinstating sanctions on Iran have caused difficulties and obstacles to China-Iran economic and trade cooperation. However, China has always been safeguarding legitimate cooperation with Iran in areas of trade and energy by taking concrete actions, and encourages international efforts to guarantee Iran's legitimate economic benefits. Unilateral sanctions and bullying are unpopular and definitely not to last. China and Iran should have in mind a long-term picture and enrich their comprehensive strategic partnership through enhancing mutual trust, overcoming difficulties and deepening practical cooperation in various fields.

"Unilateral sanctions on Iran at this time will worsen the situation."

Iran can defeat COVID-19 without relying on West: Sayyari

'Iran can contain COVID-19 by relying on domestic knowledge and capacity'

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari says Iran can defeat the COVID-19 outbreak by relying on its domestic capabilities and past experiences.

"Regarding confronting coronavirus and other issues, we have no choice but to stand on our own feet ... we should not wait for the lifting of sanctions," Sayyari, the Army deputy commander for coordination affairs, told the Mehr news agency on Monday.

He went on laud the country's production of required materials and equipment for the anti-coronavirus fight such as face masks, disinfectants, ventilators, test kits, and hospital beds in the shortest time possible.



"Nobody helps you without making you feel obligated, so we need to use our past experiences, rely on domestic knowledge and capacity, and believe that we can do it. Be sure that we can defeat the coronavirus."

The global outbreak of the virus proved that each country is busy solving its own problems, he said, adding, "America, with all its claims of being an advanced country, is pirating masks of other countries and its people are fighting in supermarkets over toilet paper ... This shows that the civilization they claim to have is just fake."

"Did the same happen in Iran after the outbreak given the existence of all the sanctions, economic pressures, and hostilities towards the nation? Absolutely not," he added.

Iranian people are following humanity and sacrificing their lives despite going through hard days, he said, noting that this shows "the Iranian nation's cultural identity."

Iran is under illegal sanctions imposed by the United States after the Trump administration withdrew from the JCPOA in May 2018.

Despite calls from the international community to lift the unilateral sanctions amid the outbreak, Washington has refused to do so and has even reportedly blocked Iran's request for a \$5 billion emergency fund from the IMF. Foreign Minister Zarif described the U.S. efforts as "medical terrorism".

Meanwhile, Iran, which is one of the hardest-hit by the virus with over 73,000 infections as of Monday, has mobilized domestic capacities to fight the outbreak by producing the required equipment.

In a letter to the G-20 economic powers on March 24, United Nations Secretary General Antonio 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 Seminaries Alireza Arafati to leader of the Roman Catholic Church Pope Francis.

Key parliament committee to discuss government's measures against outbreak

TEHRAN (MNA) — Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee is scheduled to hold a meeting on Tuesday afternoon to discuss the plans of Rouhani's administration for combating the coronavirus outbreak.

Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Reza Rahmani and Finance Minister Farhad Dehpasand will attend the meeting as administration's representatives.



The Parliament held an open session last week with VP Jahangiri and Health Minister Saeed Namaki in participation to address the country's measures against the outbreak.

Lawmakers will hold two open sessions on Tuesday and Wednesday.

According to the latest announcement of the Health Ministry on Sunday, the number of COVID-19 infections has hit 71,686 with the death toll rising to 4,474.

"Origin-tracing of the virus is a complicated matter."

TPO to dispatch 10 commercial attachés to major export destinations

1 → To expand non-oil exports during the sanctions time, Iranian economic and trade organizations have been defining some strategies and resolved to pursue them vigorously.



The major strategy is to focus on the neighboring countries and the trade partners in the region, and it is in fact one of the top priorities of the government for defying the U.S. sanctions.

Opening trade centers in those countries and dispatching more commercial attachés there is an important measure to materialize this objective.

Stocks slip after best week since 2008

Global stocks have reversed course after the sharpest rally since 2008 with investors bracing for a flurry of earnings reports that will provide clues on how severe a blow the Covid-19 outbreak has dealt to corporate America.

Markets barometers in Japan and South Korea dropped more than 1.5 percent on Monday, with the CSI 300 index of the biggest listed companies in Mainland China down 0.4 percent.

Trading in S&P 500 futures signaled a loss of around 1.5 percent on Wall Street when trading resumes after a long weekend. Most European markets were closed for Easter Monday. Monday's decline marks a stark contrast to last week, when MSCI's broad measure of developed and emerging market stocks rallied 10 percent in its biggest rise in almost 12 years.

Sentiment has been bolstered in recent days by signs of an "eagerly-awaited inflection in the viral curve," said David Kostin, Goldman Sachs chief US equities strategist. Mr. Kostin pointed to data showing the rate of growth in Covid-19 cases in New York was slowing, while several countries like hard-hit Italy and Spain had also seen a flattening in their epidemiological curves and are preparing to ease the lockdown measures that have strangled their economies. "These data points represented a major improvement," said Mr. Kostin.



Market attention has now begun to shift to first-quarter earnings season in the US, which is expected to provide a glimpse of how heavy a hit firms sustained as the Covid-19 crisis was gathering pace in the first three months of 2020. It will also give analysts and investors an opportunity to query executives on their outlook for coming months. The country's biggest lenders, JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, Citigroup and Wells Fargo, are all set to publish their quarterly accounts this week.

They are typically considered bellwethers for the broader economy because of their central position in the financial system. Wall Street analysts have already over the past three months reduced their 2020 composite earnings per share estimates for the companies listed on the S&P 500 index by 15 percent, according to FactSet data. Profits are now forecast to decline 8 percent this year, which would mark the biggest fall since 2009 during the financial crisis.

Mr. Kostin said further reductions could be on the horizon. "Concerned investors have focused on the fact that the first-quarter earnings season will inevitably lead to a wave of downward revisions to analyst estimates," he said.

A decline in forecast earnings would prove problematic, Mr. Kostin said, because it means investors would need to accept more stretched price-to-earnings valuations, or stock prices would need to fall further. The S&P 500 is down around 14 percent for the year, having recovered over recent weeks from a sharper fall.

In commodities, oil prices zigzagged after Saudi Arabia and Russia reached a deal to make the biggest production cuts on record. Brent crude was recently down 1.2 percent, at \$31.06 per barrel, having earlier climbed as high as \$33.99. US marker West Texas Intermediate ticked up 6 cents to \$22.81, also surrendering the vast bulk of its gains.

The choppy trade came after OPEC+ producers agreed to remove almost 10m barrels per day from global supply. The cuts start from May and diminish in size before expiring in April 2022. The "problem is that OPEC+ have taken too long to get to this point," said Warren Patterson, head of commodities strategy at ING.

"The issue is that we are seeing significant levels of demand destruction right now," Mr. Patterson added that there was "downside risk" to crude prices, given a global glut was likely to last through the second quarter, but that the deal could put a floor under Brent crude of about \$25 per barrel.

(Source: Financial Times)

EAEU removes import tariffs on 10 Iranian products

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) has removed tariff rates for the import of 10 Iranian products, according to the head of Iranian National Union of Agricultural Products.

Reza Nourani said that the Eurasian Economic Union in a letter sent to the Trade Promotion Organization of (TPO) of Iran stated that it has removed the import tariffs for 10 Iranian products, Mehr news agency reported.

These products, subjected to import tariffs by the union, include potatoes, onions, garlic, cabbages, carrots, peppers, fruit juices, wheat, black grains, long-grain rice and baby food, he added.

Removing tariff rates for Iranian products by Eurasian Economic Union while the country is under sanctions and grappling with the outbreak of coronavirus will increase export and production, Nourani emphasized.

Turning to the required infrastructures, the official said, "Refrigerated containers should be added for increasing export. Unfortunately, we lack refrigerated containers for rail export and/or these refrigerated containers should at least be purchased or rented by Russia and Turkey."

The value of trade between Iran and the members of the EAEU reached \$1.489 billion in the five-month period after the implementation of the preferential trade agreement on



October 27, 2019, IRNA reported last week.

According to the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), Ruhollah Latifi, 67 percent of the mentioned figure has been the share of Iran's imports and 33 percent was gained from exports.

The official put the weight of the exports to the EAEU countries at 1.15 million tons with a value of \$489.9 million, while the imports from the zone were 2.95 million tons at the value of \$999.3 million.

He further noted that the preferential exports of Iran to the EAEU zone have been 123,960 tons with a value of nearly \$136 million, while the preferential imports stood at 2.38 million tons with a value of nearly \$750 million.

Iran's biggest export destination among the EAEU countries has been Russia which accounted for about 50 percent of the total trade with the region.

Armenia and Kazakhstan occupied the second and third places with 24.6 percent

and 16 percent shares, he said.

The biggest EAEU exporter to Iran has also been Russia, accounting for 71.4 percent of EAEU export to Iran followed by Kazakhstan and Belarus, according to the official.

Iran's exports to the EAEU members were mainly fresh apples, fresh and dried pistachios, liquefied natural gas, fresh kiwis, cucumbers and fermented cucumbers; and the main preferential-tariff goods exported to the zone has been kiwis, fresh pistachio, dried grapes, lettuce, cauliflower, and broccoli.

The main imported items from the EAEU zone have been barley, livestock corns, sunflower seed oil, meat, and newsprint.

After several years of negotiations, Iran and Eurasian Economic Union finally reached a free trade agreement in 2018 based on which about 862 commodity items are subject to preferential tariffs.

The interim agreement enabling the formation of a free trade area between Iran and the EAEU was signed on May 17, 2018, and officially came into force on October 27, 2019.

Iran is a very important market in the region and the development of ties with this country is of high significance for the EAEU members (Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan).

The free trade agreement between Iran and this union has laid the ground for the expansion of trade ties between the two sides.

Global economy already set for historic contraction

By Chris Giles

The global economy was facing the worst collapse since the second world war as coronavirus began to strike in March, well before the height of the crisis, according to the latest Brookings-FT tracking index.

The index comes as the IMF prepares to hold virtual spring meetings this week, when it will release forecasts showing the deepest contraction for the global economy since the 1930s great depression.

With confidence indicators falling off a cliff, financial markets in turmoil and real economic indicators plunging, bankruptcies and job losses will leave deep scars on the world economy and hinder its healing for a long time to come, the data suggest.

Kristalina Georgieva, IMF managing director, said that 170 of its 189 member countries would suffer falling output per head in 2020. "The bleak outlook applies to advanced and developing economies alike. This crisis knows no boundaries. Everybody hurts," she said.

Three months ago, the fund had expected increases in prosperity in 160 countries. With no country immune from the Covid-19 crisis, a recovery once the lockdowns have been eased is likely to be slower than hoped, said Professor Eswar Prasad of the Brookings Institution, who railed at the lack of a co-ordinated policy response from governments.

"The inability of national governments to come together even at such a critical time to forge a common front against the pandemic highlights a dangerous fracturing of international co-operation. This is further damaging business and consumer confidence, which are already in free fall," Prof Prasad said.

France, Germany and the UK face historic recessions as all indicators of activity and trade tumble," he added. The Brookings-FT Tracking Index for the Global Economic Recovery (Tiger) compares indicators of real activity, financial markets and investor confidence with their historical averages for the global economy and for individual countries.

It showed historically large declines across financial indicators, real economic data and confidence indicators in March, well before the worst effects on the economies of most countries.

Only in China are the data stabilizing, having fallen steeply much earlier after it suffered first from lockdowns after coronavirus emerged in Wuhan. Prof Prasad said: "In some respects, China's command economy is built to better withstand such massive shocks compared to market economies.

But the economy is hardly out of the woods yet, especially with unemployment rising, domestic and external demand likely to remain weak, and given the risks of a second wave of infection."

China's exports slump seen extending to March as coronavirus ravages global economy

The slump in China's exports is expected to have extended into March while a collapse in oil price likely deepened a decline in imports, a Reuters poll showed, as the coronavirus cripples the global economy and overall demand.

The pandemic's sweeping impact on businesses and consumers has triggered an unprecedented burst of stimulus from policymakers around the world in the past two months, but the widespread lockdowns in many economies is seen delaying a recovery in trade both in China and globally.

The grim trade report is likely to reinforce views that China's economy sharply contracted in the first quarter for the first time since at least 1992. Analysts are already forecasting



a steep global recession this year as the virus has prompted worldwide restrictions on movement of people and goods.

Exports from the world's second-largest

economy are expected to have fallen 14% in March from a year earlier, according to a median estimate from the survey of 31 economists, slowing the downturn somewhat from a 17.2% contraction in January-February period.

Imports, meanwhile, are set to have shrunk 9.5% from a year earlier, the sharpest drop since July 2016 and versus an 4.0% decline in January-February.

The World Trade Organization last week forecast that goods trade would shrink more steeply this year than in the global financial crisis a decade ago before rebounding in 2021 as the COVID-19 pandemic recedes.

Early in the outbreak, China imposed tough travel restrictions and factory suspensions to

curb the spread of the coronavirus, squeezing labor supplies and sending exporters scrambling to fulfil orders.

But as the pandemic ravages the economies of China's trading partners, overseas orders have been scrapped, with many privately-owned exporters firing workers and warning about factory closures in not too distant future.

"Foreign demand from European and U.S. markets may have already significantly contracted in March," said UBS Economist Tao Wang, noting an official survey of factories released earlier this month showed export orders continued to fall in March

(Source: Reuters)

Inside the global race to prevent another depression

Economic firefighters around the world have a problem they've never seen before: a lightning-fast economic collapse strapped to a virulent global pandemic and wild, whipsawing financial markets threatening to amplify the damage.

From Washington to Brussels to Frankfurt to Berlin and beyond, officials in advanced economies are rolling out the biggest fiscal and monetary policy bazookas they've ever imagined. Some of the players, notably U.S. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, have forged a close fire-fighting partnership echoing their predecessors' during the 2008 financial crisis. Officials who confronted the brink of economic calamity during a European debt crisis that began a decade ago — such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the new European Central Bank president, Christine Lagarde — are revising their playbooks and trying to avoid renewing the divides of that conflict.

Economists, traders and average citizens are all too aware that those efforts can't stop the coronavirus, which is causing a once-in-a-century human and economic catastrophe that's still playing out with no clear end in sight. They're starting to brace for a longer and deeper downturn than any of them imagined just a month ago when the mass shutdowns began across the global economy. And they've yet to grapple with the consequences of the economic damage rippling from the largest and strongest economies to the smaller and weaker



ones with fewer resources.

The world's finance ministers and central bankers will gather virtually this week for the International Monetary Fund's semi-annual meeting of 189 member nations — a pandemic-era replacement for the usual in-person gathering in Washington. At the top of the agenda will be charting a course for fighting a global economic collapse unlike any other in the IMF's 75-year history.

"The depth of the recession, just in terms of jobs lost and

fallen output, will not compare to anything we've seen in the last 150 years. The only question is duration," said Kenneth Rogoff, a Harvard professor and former IMF chief economist who has studied every recent downturn. "The economic tools we are using are important, but it's a natural catastrophe or war — we are in the middle of it and just getting out of it is kind of the main thing right now."

The massive infusions of cash from central banks and governments around the world will help. But new approaches will ultimately be required, Rogoff argued, including possible global debt moratoriums for emerging-market economies such as India likely to be slammed by the virus. He also said central banks such as the Fed may be forced into unprecedented steps to revive growth — such as lowering interest rates below zero, a move the central bank has long resisted in part because of mixed evidence of its effectiveness.

The big institutional players in this global economic drama are battle-tested veterans at spraying foam on the runaway in the form of giant spending programs and an alphabet soup of lending facilities and central bank interventions. The U.S. Fed and Treasury just last week announced efforts designed to dole out more than \$2 trillion in loans to businesses and municipalities, on top of trillions of dollars already promised through other lending and stimulus efforts.

(Source: politico.eu)



pretty quickly in the third and fourth quarters, so it is in single digits by the start of next year," she said.

Prof Prasad was less optimistic. "Demand has been ravaged, there are extensive disruptions to manufacturing supply chains, and a financial crisis is unfolding simultaneously," he said. "Unlike the 2008-09 crisis that was triggered by liquidity shortages in financial markets, the crisis now unfolding involves more fundamental solvency issues for many firms and industries beyond finance."

With central banks increasingly active and governments preparing historically large insurance packages for households and companies, the IMF will say this week that there is likely to be a "partial recovery" in 2021. But Ms Georgieva warned that the outlook could still get worse if the pandemic continued to spread around the world.

(Source: Financial Times)

Analysts calling OPEC, allies historic deal ‘insufficient’

By Ebrahim Fallahi

TEHRAN — After four days of deliberation and drama, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its Russian-led allies finally managed to get Mexico to join a global pact for cutting oil production by 9.7 million barrels per day (bpd) in May and June.

Despite the oil markets' positive reaction to the decision (the international benchmark Brent crude gaining 1.24 percent to \$31.87 per barrel in early Monday) analysts and experts all around the world believe that this is not going to be enough to offset the huge fall in the demand side.

The group, formerly known as the OPEC+, had earlier reached a primary agreement to cut their output by at least 10 million barrels for the mentioned months but Mexico did not agree with a 400,000 bpd share which was expected from the country.

Finally, with the U.S. intervention, Saudi Arabia and the Russians agreed to deepen their cuts offset Mexico's partial commitment.

Following the big agreement, on Sunday, Goldman Sachs released a report saying that the bank expected the downward trend of the oil prices to continue in the coming weeks despite the "historic yet insufficient" deal.

According to Goldman, the agreed figure is not going to be enough to offset the demand fall following the coronavirus outbreak.

"Ultimately, this simply reflects that no voluntary cuts could be large enough to offset the 19 million bpd average April-May demand loss due to the coronavirus," the



Goldman report said.

Despite the unanimity of the experts on the magnitude of the demand rout and the fact that the cuts are still insufficient, some of them are less skeptical about the positive impacts of the deal.

Morgan Stanley's market analysts, for instance, raised their forecast for the oil prices in the coming weeks, saying that although the cuts are not going to be enough in the short-term, they will prevent a huge surplus erupting in the market in the second half of 2020.

"This is at least a temporary relief for the energy industry and for the global economy," Rystad Energy's head of analysis Per

Magnus Nysveen told CNBC.

"Even though the production cuts are smaller than what the market needed and only postpone the stock building constraints problem, the worst is for now avoided."

■ A long-term solution

Considering the fact that the agreed production cuts are not enough to wipe out all the surplus oil from the market, the most obvious solution is to reduce the global oil market even more.

However, since most of the world's economies are already grappling with the economic consequences of the pandemic, expecting those that are part of the current pact to cut more is not just nor logical.

Therefore, other nations, like Canada, Norway and the U.S., that is currently the world's biggest oil producer, should also take responsibility and shoulder some of the burden.

We should also bear in mind that the oil market's current condition is, first of all, the biggest threat for the U.S. shale industry, so obviously, Washington should be among the nations that are paying the price for preventing the conditions from getting worse.

But apparently, the U.S. doesn't seem to be willing to pay any price, taking the role of a by standing cheerleader, Trump has said that the U.S. is not going to cut its production since the market is naturally curbing the U.S. output!

On Friday, the U.S. Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette claimed that the U.S. oil output is expected to decrease by about two million bpd by the end of the year.

Unfortunately, the sole reliance on the market forces is not going to be of any help for the current situation and a more solid solution, as many believe, would be for all nations to come together and take responsibility to lead the market out of the current crisis.

With all that being said, however, it should be noted that even if all the nations collaborate and cut their production, the oil prices are not going to bounce back immediately.

The oil market, which has been negatively affected by various geopolitical factors in recent years, is going to need time to heal and get back to a more balanced state.

Over 34b cubic meters of water stored behind Iranian dams

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Iran Water Resources Management Company (IWRM) announced that 34.8 billion cubic meters of water is stored behind the dams across the country, IRNA reported.

As reported, this amount of water is 10 percent lower than the figure for this time in the previous year.

Following the coronavirus outbreak in Iran, water consumption has increased dramatically, so that the energy minister has urged people to manage their consumption in peak consumption hours.



Earlier in February, Iran's deputy energy minister had said that over 50 percent of the capacity of the country's dams were filled and the rest was kept for flood management.

Speaking on the sidelines of an exhibition in Tehran, Ghasem Taghizadeh Khamesi expressed hope that considering the heavy snowfall, the country won't be facing any water shortage in the upcoming hot seasons.

There are currently 193 dams operating throughout the country, of them 61 dams are full by over 90 percent and in 28 dams the stored water is 28 percent of the full capacity.

Australia's booming LNG industry stalls after fall in oil prices amid coronavirus

The extraordinary growth in Australia's liquefied natural gas (LNG) industry, the main cause of recent rises in national greenhouse gas emissions, has stalled indefinitely, with decisions on more than \$80bn of investments delayed due to a collapsed oil price sunk by coronavirus and a geopolitical price war.

The price of Brent crude oil is less than half what it was in early January, having fallen again on Friday despite the Opec oil cartel and its allies reaching a supply deal to stop Saudi Arabia and Russia flooding the world with more oil than it can use. The Asian spot price for LNG, which is linked to the oil benchmark, is down about two-thirds in six months.

The unprecedented crash had already prompted oil and gas giants to defer investment decisions on projects including Woodside's massive Burrup Hub expansion off the Western Australian coast and Santos' \$7bn Barossa project 300km north of Darwin. A decision on the first parts of the Burrup Hub expansion, including a \$17bn development of the Scarborough gas field, has been pushed to 2021.

Calls on Barossa and the largest section of the proposed Burrup Hub, a \$30bn development of the untapped Browse gas field involving Woodside, Shell and BP, have been deferred to an unnamed date. In inland gas exploration, Origin Energy has paused exploration drilling for its unconventional gas project in Northern Territory's Beetaloo Basin.

Analysts said while prices were expected to rebound, the pace and scale of recovery were near impossible to forecast and may not reach the level required to justify new LNG investments for years, if at all. Climate activists said an extended delay was likely to make major new investments harder to justify as markets increasingly valued clean energy over fossil fuels.

Peter Coleman, Woodside's chief executive, told The Weekend Australian the industry was facing the worse situation he had seen and indicated the company's projects were not guaranteed to go ahead. "I would suggest if we're still sitting here in 12 months in the oil and gas industry in this difficult pricing situation then we're going to have a fundamentally different industry and a fundamentally different view of how to create value," he said.

David Low, a senior analyst with consultants Wood Mackenzie, said its assessment remained that Scarborough and Barossa projects would be sanctioned next year, but both projects still had challenges to overcome related to ownership structure, and could have their timelines pushed out.

"If oil prices are slow to recover, operators could opt to further delay discretionary spend and remain focused on strengthening their balance sheets. This will likely mean further delays for the Australian projects," Low told The Guardian.

Australia produces little oil, but its LNG industry has expanded dramatically since 2012 as developments have kicked off across the top end. It passed Qatar to become the world's biggest exporter last year, with revenue reaching \$51bn, placing it second to iron ore among the country's resource and energy exports.

Skyrocketing LNG production has added significantly to the country's heat-trapping greenhouse gas pollution. Its emissions in Australia (not counting those from burning the gas after it is shipped overseas) were up 16.9 percent in the year to September, all but cancelling out falls in emissions from electricity generation and agriculture as national emissions dipped just 0.4 percent.

The Conservation Council of Western Australia estimated the Burrup Hub expansion alone could add nearly 20m tons to the country's annual emissions, about 3.7 percent of the national total, if it were to go ahead in full. It could result in a further 80m tons a year when the gas was burned overseas.

The fall in the oil price is yet to fully hit existing Australian gas projects as it takes about three months for changes in the crude benchmark to affect LNG contracts, but hundreds of oil and gas workers have been laid off or stood down as companies slashed planned investment this year.

The oil price initially plummeted as OPEC leader Saudi Arabia and Russia flooded the market, in part to undermine the US shale industry. Combined with the significant reduction in demand due to Covid-19 economic shutdown, it sent oil prices to their lowest level in 18 years. On Friday, the Saudi-led group known as Opec+ agreed to reduce oil supply by 10 percent to little immediate effect.

Tom Swann, a senior researcher with the Australia Institute think tank, said a further complicating issue facing the oil and gas industry was the rising electrification of transport, which could lead to some investors rushing to get reserves out of the ground while there was a market to sell it into.

"Those three trends together [the pandemic, the geopolitical price war and electrification] just mean there is chronic uncertainty in the industry, and that's reflected in these companies share prices and investment decisions," he said.

(Source: The Guardian)

Oil prices turn negative after early gains on record output cut

Oil prices turned negative on Monday, erasing gains made after major producers agreed record global output cuts, pressured by concerns that the cuts will not be sufficient to head off oversupply as the coronavirus pandemic hammers demand.

After four days of wrangling, the OPEC+ group of oil producers, comprising the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Russia and other countries, agreed to cut output by 9.7 million barrels per day (bpd) in May and June, representing about 10 percent of global supply.

Brent crude futures were down 52 cents, or 1.7 percent, at \$30.96 a barrel by 0810 GMT after opening at a session high of \$33.99. U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures fell 12 cents, or 0.5 percent, to \$22.64 but were oscillating in and out of positive territory.

"What this deal does is enable the global

oil industry and national economies and other industries that depend upon it to avoid a very deep crisis," said IHS Markit Vice Chairman Daniel Yergin.

U.S. President Donald Trump praised the deal, saying it would save jobs in the U.S. energy industry.

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates volunteered to make cuts even deeper than those agreed, which would effectively bring OPEC+ supply down by 12.5 million bpd from current levels, the Saudi energy minister said.

However, analysts cast doubts on producers' likely compliance with the cuts.

Even at full compliance, demand weakness concerns capped oil price gains. Worldwide fuel consumption is down roughly 30 percent because of the COVID-19 pandemic that has killed more than 100,000 people worldwide and kept businesses and gov-

ernments on lockdown.

"We expect the OPEC+ decision at best to establish a floor under the market," said Harry Tchilinguirian of BNP Paribas, adding that oil price gains could also be capped by hedging by producers.

"We do not expect a sustained recovery in the oil price until pent-up demand is released in Q3," he said.

The deal had been delayed since Thursday after Mexico balked at the cuts it was asked to make. The OPEC+ group met on Sunday, resulting in a cut four times deeper than the previous record reduction in 2008.

OPEC+ has also said it wanted producers outside the group, such as the United States, Canada, Brazil and Norway, to cut a further 5 million bpd.

Canada and Norway signaled a willingness to cut. The United States, where antitrust legislation makes it hard to act

Why impact of low oil prices on Iran is 'minimal'?

Tough year ahead for the global economy

1 → When I asked Tehran University Professor from the Faculty of World Studies, Dr. Foad Izadi last February about Iranian oil exports he said: "Iran is presently exporting crude to some Chinese companies unofficially. Officially the export is zero."

The Kepler oil tanker tracking and intelligence firm estimated Iran crude oil exports has dropped to less than 250,000 bpd.

■ Annual fiscal budget

Iran's 2020-21 fiscal budget is based on a prediction of selling one million barrels at \$50 per barrel. This aspect of budget needs to be scrutinized because of rock bottom oil prices and restrictions on Iran's crude export. The budget, which started March 20, was presented to the parliament in November but deliberations were disrupted due to the devastating COVID-19 crisis and the election of the new conservative parliament.

The real losers of such low oil prices are oil-dependent countries like Saudi Arabia and United States which has become world's largest producer due to shale oil boom. Saudi Arabia has budget breakeven at Brent \$84 per barrel and the U.S. has recently become an energy powerhouse. Most of U.S. shale producers budgeted for oil between \$55-65 per barrel in 2020. As in 2014, when the oil price dropped below \$50 from \$110 in a few weeks, it triggered a temporary collapse of the U.S. shale industry. As a tough year is expected ahead of us, the most biting of Iran's economic challenges remain the U.S. sanctions, depletion of foreign exchange reserves, and combined losses resulting from COVID-19 outbreak



The sun sets beyond an oil pumping unit, also known as a 'nodding donkey' or pumping jack. (Photo: Andrey Rudakov / Bloomberg / Getty Images)

and disruptions caused to businesses that would reduce tax.

China, Russia and European Union have asked U.S. to temporarily suspend the sanctions due to the coronavirus outbreak. Despite recommendations from many countries and U.S. politicians to relax sanctions on Iran, Trump administration continues to ratchet up the sanctions. On March 26, the U.S. blacklisted five Iran and Iraq-based companies and 15 individuals, its third round in the month of March.

The governor of the Central Bank of Iran had asked IMF in early March for a \$5 billion in emergency loans. It is for the first time since 1962 that Iran has sought IMF assistance. The request is being blocked by the U.S., which accounts for slightly more than 16.5 percent of IMF's voting shares

solar energy complex in Benban, Aswan, at a capacity of 1,465MW.

Aside from the NREA's government wind farms in Zafarana and Gabal El Zeit that produce over 1,100MW, private sector projects come with almost double the annual growth rates. Future projections expect a faster implementation of renewable energy projects depending on their competitiveness.

Al-Khayat noted that using solar energy to operate irrigation wells in the 1.5m feddan project is a must, not a luxury. The use of solar energy for these wells reduces the pressure on the electricity grid, whilst exploiting renewable energy available.

It also ensures that no wells operate except during periods of sunshine, allowing maximum utilisation of the underground reservoir and its preservation for a long period.

He stressed that Egypt is ready for continued cooperation and to exchange experience and knowledge in the electricity and renewable energy fields in Africa. This comes especially as NREA is currently implementing renewable energy projects in about 15 countries across the continent, through Egyptian grants and joint cooperation agreements.

(Source: ewind.es)

Egypt considers 6.3 GW wind energy, concentrated solar power and PV projects

Egypt's New and Renewable Energy Authority (NREA) is studying requests to build power plants at a total capacity of 6.34GW, of which 2.75GW projects are by the private sector.

NREA Head Mohamed Al-Khayat told Daily News Egypt that the potential projects include photovoltaic power plants with a capacity of 170MW and wind farms of 250MW by the public sector on one hand, and other 1,950MW wind farms and 800MW photovoltaic power plants by the private sector.

Al-Khayat said Egypt's total electricity production capacity amounted to 20.782bn KWh in 2019, including 14.597bn KWh from hydroelectricity plants, 3.270bn KWh from

wind farms, and roughly 2.403bn KWh from solar parks. In addition, traditional thermal power plants produced 4.7m KWh. The country's total fuel savings reached about 4.3m tonnes of oil equivalent.

He added that the state aims to up the contributions of renewable energy to the electricity generation mix to about 20% by 2022, with the possibility of doubling it by 2035. This would be undertaken by adopting a package of flexible policies and models to encourage private investments, such as build-own-operate (BOO).

Al-Khayat said that the feed-in tariff strategy resulted in the implementation of the



EXTENSION OF ONE TIER GENERAL INTERNATIONAL TENDER NOTICE

Iranian Ideal Tobacco Co. located at Qazvin Ave, Qazvin square, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, Zip code: 1331839182, intends to purchase below non tobacco raw materials through international tender:

Item	Description	Unit	Quantity
1	Cigarette paper 22 mmx6000 m	Bobin	2,600
2	Cigarette paper 27 mmx6000 m double 40cu	Bobin	2,000
3	Cigarette paper 19 mmx6000 m Bahman super slim	Bobin	9,080
4	Cigarette paper 27 mmx4000 m	Bobin	5,110
5	Cigarette paper 21mmx6000 m	Bobin	9,000
6	Cigarette paper 27 mmx6000 m	Bobin	24,000
7	Tipping paper 70 mmx2400 m Bahman super slim blue	Bobin	2,300
8	Cork tipping paper 38 mmx2400 m	Bobin	10,310
9	Tipping paper 62mmx2400 m Tir Slim Black	Bobin	1,780
10	Cork tipping paper 50mmx2400 m	Bobin	8,200
11	Tipping paper 64 mmx2400 m Ultra light	Bobin	3,175
12	Tipping paper 64 mmx2400 m T4	Bobin	805
13	Tipping paper 64 mmx2400 m Nano Black	Bobin	3,270
14	Tipping paper 50 mmx2400 m Bahman light	Bobin	1,580
15	Tipping paper 62mmx2400 m Bahman ketabi	Bobin	880
16	Tipping paper 50 mmx2400 m Tir light	Bobin	1,180
17	Plug wrap 27mmx6000m	Bobin	11,100
18	Plug wrap 26.5mmx6000m	Bobin	2,040
19	Plug wrap 22mmx6000m	Bobin	5,100
20	Acetate cellulose tow 3y-35000	Kg	405,500
21	Acetate cellulose tow 5y-30000	Kg	61,300
22	Acetate cellulose tow 4y-35000	Kg	33,300
23	Filter rod 120 mm Bahman super slim blue	Rod	175,887,000
24	Filter rod 108 mm Bahman ketabi	Rod	51,000,000
25	Filter rod 108 mm Tir Slim black	Rod	104,100,000
26	Filter rod 108 mm Bahman Nano	Rod	279,200,000
27	Tipping adhesive (MAX Glue)	Kg	73,150
28	Triacetone (Plasticizer)	Kg	46,300
29	Side seaming (SE Glue)	Kg	34,490
30	Packaging Glue 7302	Kg	8,000
31	Packaging Glue 7301	Kg	6,250
32	Golden Self- Adhesive Tear tape 1.6 mmx12000 m	Bobin	4,010
33	Clear Self- Adhesive Tear tape 1.6 mmx12000 m	Bobin	290
34	Clear Self- Adhesive Tear tape 1.6 mmx50000 m	Bobin	175
35	Cocoa powder	Kg	32,000

Please note the following:

Tender documents in English and Farsi will be obtainable from March/12/2020 till **April/22/2020** at Iranian Ideal Tobacco Company. Tender and Contracts Secretariat Office, Qazvin Ave, Qazvin square, Tehran, Iran, or from the national tender website: www.iets.MPORG.ir register the participation process and receive tender documents.

Suppliers, wishing to participate in the tender, could register in the Iranian Tobacco Company Identification System (www.irtobacco.com).

The samples of each item and the related data sheet and safety data sheet should be dispatched in standard reinforced packing format as below to Security Office, located at Golchin Building, Iranian Tobacco Company, Qazvin Ave, Qazvin square, Tehran, Iran, P.O.Box: 1331838734 exact and complete information of vendor should be indicated on each sample.

Description	Quantity of sample	Description	Quantity of sample
Glue and triacetone	60 kgs of each kind	Cigarette paper	5 Bobins of each size
Tipping Paper	5 Bobins of each size	Plug Wrap Paper	5 Bobins of each size
Golden & Clear Self Adhesive Tear Tape	5 Bobins of each size	Acetate Cellulose Tow	2 bales of each type
Filter rod	10000 rods	-	-

The samples are receivable from March/12/2020 till **April/23/2020**. Offers must be submitted to our Tender and Contracts Secretariat Office located at, **Iranian Ideal Tobacco Company, Qazvin Ave, Qazvin square, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran. Zip Code: 1331839182 until May/9/2020.**

For more information, you can contact to 0098 21- 51261920, IITC's Tender and Contracts Secretariat Office.

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

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

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TEHRAN, Feb. 20 (MNA) -- Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh held a phone

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Yemeni forces have little reason to trust Saudi proclamations: Prof. Cavell

By Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

TEHRAN — The history of Saudi deception and dishonesty has led to Yemeni forces' distrust towards their announcements, says professor of political science Colin S. Cavell.

"The Yemeni liberation forces have little reason to trust Saudi proclamations neither of a ceasefire nor that this may be a Saudi plan for peace, as Saudi pronouncements ring hollow to Yemeni ears due to Saudi deceit, deceptions, dishonesty, and disinformation over the years," Cavell, a full professor of political science at Bluefield State College in Bluefield, West Virginia, told Mehr News Agency in an exclusive interview regarding the latest developments in Yemen.

Here is the full text of the interview:

■ The Saudi-led coalition has announced a ceasefire from Thursday. They claim that the move comes in support of UN efforts to end the devastating five-year war and to contain the coronavirus outbreak. Is Riyadh taking advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity for a face-saving exit from the Yemen war?

On April 8, 2020, the Saudi-led coalition announced a two-week ceasefire in their war on the Yemeni people on the Arabian Peninsula, where, since the Saudi invasion of the country in March 2015, the Saudi air force has relentlessly bombed the Yemeni people who had risen up in 2014 and ran the Saudi-installed President Abd Rabbuh Masur Hadi out of the country whereupon he took up refuge in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi ceasefire was to commence today, April 9, 2020, and lasts till April 23, 2020, though the Saudi coalition grouping, the so-called "Joint Forces Command of the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen" said that the ceasefire period is subject to "extension". Ostensibly, the Saudi coalition states that their unilateral announcement of a ceasefire is to aid in the suppression of the spread of the COVID-19 Pandemic, though some of the Yemeni liberation forces believe the Saudi move may be an attempt to utilize the deadly virus as cover to extricate themselves from their five-year losing war to reassert their hegemonic control over Yemen while not admitting defeat. Others, however, suspect the Saudis are only attempting to regroup their forces, rearm, and continue to pursue their brutal killing spree across the Yemeni landscape by attempting to lull the Yemeni fighters into a disengagement from defending their people and territory.

Distrust between the Yemeni people and the Saudi



aggressors is palpable, as the Saudi monarchical kingdom has exercised de facto dictatorship over Yemen for decades with the assistance of first British and then American imperial rule over the Middle East in the twentieth century. Since the invasion of the country in March 2015, Saudi destruction has wrought havoc on the 30 million population of Yemen, including the displacement of over two and one-half million people who have been internally displaced by the war, more than a million who have fled elsewhere in the Arab world, produced a famine that affects the daily lives of over 17 million Yemenis, facilitated the largest outbreak of the deadly disease cholera in the world, and has resulted so far in over 100,000 deaths.

■ This is not the first time that a ceasefire is being announced. The Saudi-led coalition has a long history of violating previous ones. Do you think they would violate the most recent ceasefire if required?

The Yemeni liberation forces have little reason to trust Saudi proclamations neither of a ceasefire nor that this may be a Saudi plan for peace, as Saudi pronouncements ring hollow to Yemeni ears due to Saudi deceit, deceptions, dishonesty, and disinformation over the years. Indeed, the Yemeni revolutionary government pushes its own demands for peace including an end to the Saudi blockade of Yemeni ports, the reopening of Yemeni airports, the cessation of the continuous Saudi

bombardments of the country (aided and abetted by U.S. and U.K. bombs and satellite intelligence), commitments by Saudi Arabia for the rebuilding of schools, hospitals, and infrastructure in the country, and direct political talks between the Saudi monarchy and Yemeni liberation representatives regarding the future relationship between the two governments. Given the disastrous track record of the de facto Saudi ruler, Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman (MbS) since his rise to power beginning in 2011, including the prolonged and disastrous war in Yemen, breaking diplomatic relations with the government of Qatar, detaining, interrogating, shaking down and, in some instances, killing top Saudi leaders, the brutal execution of Washington Post journalist Jamal Kashoggi, the detention, imprisonment, forced disappearances, and murders of human rights activists, women's rights activists, and anyone MbS deems a threat, there is no evidence to suggests that the current Saudi leadership is either to be trusted or even be deemed competent. To most international observers, MbS is pejoratively referred to as the Saudi "Clown" Prince.

■ Have other countries, especially the West who always claim to support human rights, performed their duties toward ending the humanitarian crisis in Yemen?

The United States government, the United Kingdom government, the Israeli government, and other western allies seek to maintain western control over the entirety of the Arabian Peninsula both for geostrategic reasons and to have access to the region's rich store of oil and natural gas. Western strategists are concerned that an independent Yemen will weaken the Saudi monarchy which is the linchpin of western hegemony in the Middle East/North Africa region. Should the Yemeni people break free of the Saudi yoke, others in the region may do so as well. As a consequence, western governments, led by the United States and the United Kingdom, continue to sell arms, ammunition, planes, military supplies, and other instruments of war to the Saudi-led coalition while providing it with intelligence, military advice, and logistical support. The US claims it is attempting to restore the United Nations recognized government of Yemen to power from what it claims is an Iranian-sponsored Houthi rebellion in Yemen. What western governments are primarily concerned about, however, is propping up their traditional and reliable ally, the undemocratic Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as the House of Saud is the imposed caretaker over what western leaders regard as "their oil" [meaning "western-controlled oil"].

Experts urge maritime boundary agreement in Eastern Mediterranean to prevent possible war

By Mohammad Jafari

The Eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, whose energy resources and geopolitical importance can't be ignored, should be regarded internationally to prevent the sea's littoral states from engaging in any possible dispute over maritime boundary delimitation, geopolitical experts urged, noting that a comprehensive agreement can act as a precautionary measure to block way on a new probable bloody crisis in the region.

Jonathon Roberts, who is a researcher at the Transatlantic Leadership Network in Washington DC, and John B. Craig, who was a former Special Assistant to the President for Combating Terrorism under George W. Bush, wrote in a joint analytic article published by The Hill that the Eastern Mediterranean currently sits atop a veritable sea of potential. Energy discoveries in the past decade have transformed both economic and geopolitical perspectives of the region. With some experts making comparisons of the proven reserves ranging from the North Sea to Iraq, the region is widely regarded as a 'next big thing.' Large-scale projects and infrastructure agreements are already underway that will bring outside investment, needed financial windfalls and rapid development.

Politically, partnerships have been established that foster needed intra-regional cooperation. Both Brussels and Capitol Hill have turned their eyes toward the Eastern Mediterranean. States from outside the region such as Quai d'Orsay and the U.S. State Department have sought to elevate engagement in the region. All this brings hope for the possibility of a bright and cooperative future for the Eastern Mediterranean.

However, the onset of hydrocarbon diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean is accompanied by a counterpart gunboat diplomacy. Firebrand rhetoric and tense foreign policy threatens to negate opportunities at hand. The region experiences increasing militarization

as warships accompany drill-ships on exploration, or are sent from other countries, and alarming arms procurements and military exercises are conducted. Rivalry threatens to take away hard-won progress toward cooperation and instead manifest deadlock and contests in which there is no winner.

At the heart of these tensions is the ongoing dispute over regional maritime boundaries. Of the 13 maritime boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean, 11 of them remain unresolved or disputed. Inclusive and equitable resolution of such disputes is of urgent importance if the Eastern Mediterranean is to successfully realize its projects, attract further investment, and formulate lasting ties that bind among neighbors.

Disagreements over maritime boundaries occur precisely because of the economic opportunities within the waters. Rather than using the potential windfalls as a launching point for closer ties, the region's neighbors have felt undercut in the full extent of their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) or excluded from consultation. This isn't necessarily always due to coercive action from another state; the most internationally agreed-upon method for defining maritime boundaries and a country's EEZ is in and of itself undefined, and always situational.

At the same time, one can only imagine the immense achievements that could follow boundary resolution in the Eastern Mediterranean. Delimitation would build upon the commendable efforts of actors inside and outside the region to use hydrocarbon discoveries as a launching point for reconciling political differences, and working together on deals that benefit all associated. Resolution would remove obstacles to windfalls so desperately needed in the region. It would empower the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean to take ownership in building a concrete framework for intra-regional development.

Without the stronger ties built by coop-

eration, the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean become sitting ducks to exogenous shocks, particularly given the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. Following the pandemic and its immense health concerns is a grim economic outlook that has world markets entering a recession and oil dropping to an 18-year low. Amid this, many members of the international community have drawn together to prevent the spread of the virus, provide medical assistance, and to persevere. The countries of the Eastern Mediterranean can learn their lesson from this exemplary leadership; the time to stop goofy behavior in the Eastern Mediterranean is now, before halted investment or receding prices cripple the markets.

Understanding the need in the region and the potential that awaits the precise resolution of equitable delimitations, how is that best achieved? Energy executive Roudi Baroudi offers up the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) as a pathway to this achievement in his expert commentary and seminal work, soon to be published by the Transatlantic Leadership Network and distributed by Brookings Institution Press.

Using precise satellite imagery produced by the maritime boundary software used by the UN and by international courts and tribunals, Baroudi makes the following contention: when followed with a by-the-book approach, inclusive of all associated actors, and gaining precedent from successfully-resolved maritime issues, UNCLOS can be an effective tool in reaching legal certainty and mutual agreement of boundary conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Whatever the solution may be, the independent international legal experts on maritime borders must be engaged through an equally independent and preferably US-based platform to address best ways to link the methods of delimiting contentious areas to achieve equitable outcomes that UNCLOS has not fully addressed, allowing judicial

decisions on best methods available.

Exclusion, unilateral decision-making, and aggression will only maintain, if not intensify, the status quo.

Characterization of the Eastern Mediterranean must go beyond the dispute and conflict to include the opportunities awaiting it. Many actors are already beginning to do their part and must be celebrated for it. Coming to inclusive agreements on energy exploration holds immense potential for the region.

Since the 18th century, the exercise of sovereignty over waters beyond a state's coastline was limited to 3 nautical miles. Time, innovation, exploitations of maritime and subsoil resources, and ensuring territorial security have led states to feel compelled to extend their territorial waters and areas under their jurisdiction — namely the continental shelf and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

In 1982, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), governing international law pertaining to the maritime activities and interests of different States, acknowledged the idea of the EEZ, whereby a coastal state assumes jurisdiction over the exploration and exploitation of marine resources in its adjacent section of the continental shelf, extending 200 nautical miles from the shore. According to Article 3 of the 1982 UNCLOS, a state has the right to establish the breadth of its territorial sea up to a limit not exceeding 12 nautical miles from the coast. However, the country's EEZ, in which that country can claim mining, drilling and fishing rights, can extend an additional 200 miles.

Where the maritime distance between two countries is less than 424 miles, a bilateral agreement is required to determine a mutually agreed-upon dividing line for the respect EEZs. In the instance where the continental margin extends beyond 200 miles, a state may claim jurisdiction up to 350 miles from the baseline or 100 miles from the 2,500 meter depth line, or isobath.

report says.

After what the bank calls "disappointing" growth rates in previous years, in the fiscal year that started on April 1, the country's GDP growth is projected to stand between 1.5 and 2.8 percent. While the forecast expects India to face the mildest impact of the coronavirus crisis, the negative effect is still set to overtake the signs of a rebound that were seen at the end of 2019.

Other countries in South Asia such as Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh are also expected to suffer a steep decline in economic growth. The Maldives is expected to be hit hardest, with its economy possibly contracting up to 13 percent this year. Pakistan, Afghanistan, as well as Sri Lanka could also fall into recession due to the pandemic. However, in the worst-case scenario the whole region would experience a contraction of GDP.

(Source: RT)

U.S. must stop supporting Saudis' war on Yemen as COVID-19 hitting the poor nation

The United States should step up immediately and withdraw support for the Saudi war efforts in Yemen as the war-hit country has registered the first cases of coronavirus infection which can kill millions of Yemenis easier than any other nation, an expert in the battlefield issues underscored.

Bonnie Kristian, who is a fellow at Defense Priorities and contributing editor at The Week, wrote in her article in The Hill that the small Middle Eastern nation of Yemen was in dire straits even before the novel coronavirus pandemic began. One of the poorest countries in the region, Yemen has suffered more than five years of civil war; foreign military intervention and blockade; severe shortages of food, medicine, and clean water; and a deadly cholera epidemic.

Yemen's plight was already deemed the world's worst humanitarian crisis by the United Nations and now there could be a deadly COVID-19 outbreak, Kristian whose works have been published by CNN, Politico, USA Today, the Los Angeles Times, Defense One, and The American Conservative went on to say.

This pandemic has proven a formidable foe for the healthcare systems of advanced, stable nations like Italy and the United States, let alone Yemeni whose medical facilities have already been under-resourced and overwhelmed with war casualties, cholera, and other communicable illnesses.

Yemen desperately needs peace and open supply lines for its potential fight against COVID-19. Now more than ever, Washington must end its enablement of the Saudi-led coalition intervention in Yemen's conflict and support a peaceful, diplomatic resolution with the immediate opening of Yemen's airports and seaports for humanitarian aid. Riyadh has recently shown fresh interest in leaving Yemen even as it continues its air campaign. U.S. departure could tilt the scales toward peace.

The best preventive measure to control the spread of the novel coronavirus is hygiene, but the war has mired Yemen in filth. Pumps to sanitize the water supply sit idle for lack of fuel, while maintenance agencies tasked with chlorinating aquifers go without salaries and supplies. The situation has not improved in the three years since, especially as U.S.-supported Saudi airstrikes have targeted crucial water treatment facilities.

Vital infrastructure isn't all the Saudi-led intervention has destroyed: The coalition's airstrikes have a high rate of civilian casualties. The attack on a school bus that killed 40 children in 2018 was merely the most infamous of its genre. The U.S.-backed coalition has also hit hospitals, funerals, weddings, schools, markets, refugee camps, and residential neighborhoods, and it has continued to do so since the bus strike caused global outrage.

In March, a Saudi strike in northern Yemen killed 31 civilians, 19 of them children, and injured another 18 kids. "It was an attack on a civilian-populated area where children were in the vicinity," UNICEF reported at the time, which is to say, a tragedy that could have been avoided.

The scarcity of food and medical supplies caused by the Saudi coalition's ongoing air-and-sea blockade has compounded Yemeni deaths by illness and violence alike. The UN estimates a Yemeni child under 5 dies every 10 minutes of preventable causes like hunger and infectious disease. Medical workers have gone years without proper equipment or salary, and now they will likely have to grapple with coronavirus, too. "The test of coronavirus is expensive and it is not widely available in Yemen," Yemeni pharmacist Nasri Abdulaziz told "Middle East Eye," "so I think the cases will appear suddenly all at once and then we will face real trouble."

There is no overnight fix for Yemen's misery. But the single most effective way to help Yemen now is for Washington to stop supporting the Saudi-led coalition intervention. Without U.S. assistance — which has included weapons provision, naval blockade, refueling planes for airstrikes, drone strikes, and intelligence sharing — the coalition could not continue its fight in Yemen, at least not anywhere near its present scale.

If Washington withdraws, it will give Riyadh a new urgency in its peace talks with the Houthi movement. At the very least, the U.S. exit would make the Saudi stranglehold on much-needed food and medical supplies far more difficult to sustain, giving the Yemeni people a fighting chance against COVID-19.

Washington can and should stop contributing to the Saudi-led intervention immediately for Yemen's sake and our own. The Obama administration should never have gotten entangled in this war in the first place; the Trump administration should not have continued it.

According to the Anti War on Thursday, the Saudi-led coalition's unilateral ceasefire in Yemen took effect, and violence seems to be slowing down, even though the Houthi movement in Yemen has denied the ceasefire, and says they don't consider the Saudi announcement to be complete.

The Houthis argument is that the Saudis are continuing to use military force to enforce a nation-wide naval blockade, and that so long as that continues, they don't consider it a complete ceasefire.

The ceasefire was made in part because of concern that fighting would worsen the coronavirus pandemic in Yemen. Given Yemen's medical shortages, this could be a disaster, though with the naval blockade intact, Yemen will remain vulnerable either way.

According to local media outlets, Saudi Arabia has been striking Yemen since March 2015 to restore power to fugitive president Mansour Hadi, a close ally of Riyadh. The Saudi-led aggression has so far killed more than 20,000 Yemenis, including hundreds of women and children. Despite Riyadh's claims that it is bombing the positions of the Ansarullah fighters, Saudi bombers are flattening residential areas and civilian infrastructure.

Yemen is the world's largest humanitarian crisis with more than 22 million people in need and is seeing a spike in needs, fueled by ongoing conflict, a collapsing economy and diminished social services and livelihoods. The blockade on Yemen has smothered humanitarian deliveries of food and medicine to the import-dependent state.

The UN has repeatedly criticized the Saudi-led military coalition's bombing campaign and placed it on a blacklist of child rights violators last year.

A UN panel has also compiled a detailed report of civilian casualties caused by the Saudi military and its allies during their war against Yemen, saying the Riyadh-led coalition has used precision-guided munitions in its raids on civilian targets.

South Asian nations to face worst economic slump in 40 years as coronavirus cripples economies: World Bank

The Covid-19 pandemic will likely slow South Asia's once-bustling economies to the lowest level seen in decades, the World Bank has warned in its latest report.

The rapid spread of the virus and its aftermath for the global economy are so unprecedented that it's hard to make an accurate projection, the World Bank said in its South Asia Economic Focus report, which presented a range forecast, rather than a point forecast, for the first time.

The slowdown is expected to be seen in each of the region's eight countries, with growth projected to range between 1.8 and 2.8 percent this year, a dramatic drop from the previously forecast 6.3 percent. Even the upper level of the range forecast would be more than three percentage points below average growth since 1980.

"South Asia finds itself in a perfect storm of adverse effects. Tourism has dried up, supply chains have been



disrupted, demand for garments has collapsed and consumer and investor sentiments have deteriorated," the

Kerman crafts production rises despite coronavirus concerns

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – The production of homemade crafts in Kerman province, southeastern Iran, has increased during the coronavirus outbreak in the country.



Despite the impact of the coronavirus on tourism industry and its related jobs all over the world, craftspeople of Kerman province are producing more handicrafts in their home quarantine, said provincial tourism chief Kazem Hosseinzadeh, CHTN reported on Monday.

The official, however, didn't provide further detail on the quantity of homemade crafts or any comparison with the same period last year.

Baloch embroidery, hand-woven klim carpets, wicker works, patch and precious and semi-precious gemstones are among handicrafts being produced in Kerman province.

100 pieces of historical ceramics, glazed pottery restored

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** – A total of 100 pieces of historical ceramics and glazed pottery were restored in the laboratory of Khorasan Great Museum, northeastern city of Mashhad, during the past Iranian calendar year (ended March 20).



The pieces of glazed tiles and pottery were picked for restoration based on various aspects of their designs including stylistics and architectural decorations, deputy tourism chief Marjan Akbari said on Saturday, CHTN reported.

Referring to the cleansing, restoration, analysis, strengthening, and classification of the pieces, the official said: "Their roots to the historical identity of Khorasan were determined according to both the library and laboratory studies."

The most artistically important, though not the most ancient, prehistoric painted pottery of Iran is derived from Susiana (Elam), according to Encyclopedia Britannica. The stylized shapes of animals and birds are used, their curves and contrasting angularities skillfully adapted to the sensitive shapes of the clay vessels in a manner that implies a long history of evolutionary experiment.

Travelogue: Trip to Iran in October 2019

By Anna Carotenuto

Part 1/1

It must be said that contributing to the success of our trip to Iran was the presence of a couple of Iranian friends, Dadmehr and Haiedhe who have been living in Italy for years and who are exquisite, cultured and open people, in love with their country of origin that has remained in their hearts through the carpets that light up their shop and represent invisible threads that keep them tied to their roots. The two of them simplified our journey and opened the homes of their friends and relatives who welcomed us with a sense of rare and generous hospitality.



File photo depicts people visiting the tomb of Cyrus the Great, founder of the Persian Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BC) in Pasargadae, southern Iran.

The journey followed the classic course of the highlands from Tehran to Shiraz, first with the plane and then with a minibus in the backward path, back to the capital. We started from Italy with a close-knit group of ten people.

The stages: Tehran, Shiraz, Pasargadae, Yazd, Isfahan, Nain, Kashan, Qom, Tehran. What will remain of this journey in our memories?

The beautiful dry and sweet climate of October, the scent of roses present everywhere, from jams to cool drinks that quenched our thirst at night in hotels, sweet dates, fresh pistachios, Sangak (a traditional flatbread), focaccia bread cooked on pebbles, a special tea tasted with sugar crystal sticks.

And again the "towers of silence" and the "towers of the wind" that brought back to a pre-Islamic past marked by the wisdom of Zarathustra, the wide and boundless landscapes seen on the way back that alternated desert places with visions of very high mountains with iridescent rocks that they ranged from ochre red to deep green.

This travelogue is posted to the Cultural Institute of Iran, a representative of Iranian cultural institutions in Italy.

Tehran's Golestan Palace offers minute-long online visit

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – While all museums and historical sites across Iran are on lockdown over the coronavirus pandemic, a series of videos have been produced to introduce the UNESCO-registered Golestan Palace in Tehran to online visitors.

Entitled "59 Seconds of Golestan", the series are presenting museums, buildings and galleries inside the palace as well as several interviews with different Iranian historians, researchers and scholars, Afarin Emami, the director of Golestan Palace announced on Monday, CHTN reported.

The videos are being streamed on the official website of the Golestan Palace and several other video sharing and film streaming websites such as Aparat every week during the quarantine time.

A destination for domestic and international travelers, Golestan Palace is located in the heart and historic core of Tehran. The palace complex is one of the oldest in the Iranian capital, originally built during the Safavid dynasty (1501–1736) in the historic walled city.

Following extensions and additions, it received its most characteristic features in the 19th century, when the palace complex was selected as the royal residence and seat of power by the Qajar ruling family (1789-1925). At present, Golestan Palace complex consists of eight key palace structures mostly used as museums and the eponymous gardens, a green shared center of the complex, surrounded by an outer wall with gates.

UNESCO has it that the complex exemplifies architectural and artistic achievements of the Qajar era including the introduction of European motifs and styles into Persian arts.



A view of the UNESCO-registered Golestan Palace in downtown Tehran

Lorestan tourist sites, museums host 1.5m visitors in year



Falak-ol-Aflak fortress in Khorramabad, Lorestan province.

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – More than 1.5 million visits were paid to tourist attractions and museums in Lorestan province, western Iran, during the past Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended March 20), provincial tourism chief announced on Sunday.

Falak-ol-Aflak fortress in Khorramabad, the capital of Lorestan province, was the top destination with over 220,000 visits, IRNA reported.

Foreign tourists also made over 1,000 visits to the province, which is one of the lesser-known travel destinations in Iran, and mainly acts as a gateway to the neighboring Khuzestan province which hosts 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.

75 tourism projects to come on stream in East Azarbaijan



TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – A total of 75 tourism-related projects are scheduled to be completed across Iran's northwestern East Azarbaijan province in the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21), provincial tourism chief has said.

"75 projects will be inaugurated by the yearend which is expected to significantly boost travel infrastructure in East Azarbaijan," Ahmad Hamzehzadeh said on Sunday, CHTN reported.

Some 30 restoration projects on historical monuments, hotels and recreational centers will be implemented by the private investor, the official said.

Soaked in history and culture for millennia, Tabriz, which is capital of East Azarbaijan, embraces several historical and religious sites, including

Jameh Mosque of Tabriz and Arg of Tabriz, and UNESCO-registered Tabriz Historic Bazaar Complex to name a few. The city became the capital of the Mongol Il-Khan Mahmud Gazan (1295–1304) and his successor, Timur (Tamerlane), a Turkic conqueror, took it in 1392. Some decades later the Kara Koyunlu Turkmen made it their capital, it was when the famous Blue Mosque was built in Tabriz.

The city retained its administrative status under the Safavid dynasty until 1548, when Shah Tahmasp I relocated his capital westward to Qazvin. During the next two centuries, Tabriz changed hands several times between Persia and Ottoman Empire. During the World War I, the city was temporarily occupied by Turkish and then Soviet troops.

German doctor traverses ancient Iranian route on horseback amid virus outbreak

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – While the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic has cancelled tours and flights in nearly all countries across the world, a German doctor has packed up and visited Iran to traverse an ancient route near the ruins of Persepolis in southern Iran on horseback.

The German physician's main motive for visiting Iran was to ride on a thoroughbred horse along an ancient route in the southern province of Fars that connects Parseh (Persepolis) to Pasargadae, just like what the people of ancient Iran did, Iran Front Page reported on Monday.

Iranian tour leader Amir Miri was in charge of organizing the German visitor's journey in conformity with health protocols and precautionary measures. He hosted the German doctor Orlika in his countryside inn for a couple of days before starting the journey.

"Orlika was in Iran last week. I wonder how she could have traveled to the heart of Iran under such conditions. She began her journey from Isfahan and then traveled to Yazd and Fars," Miri told ISNA.

The tour leader said he had come up with the idea of operating a caravan for a trip between Pasargadae and Persepolis several years ago.

"In order to launch such caravan, we needed to breed purebred horses. 'Dare Shoori' is one of the horse breeds indigenous to Fars," Miri noted.

"Riding on purebred horses that are kept and bred in local communities is one of the things the foreign tourists can experience. The horses in the equestrian clubs are more trained and are like the



cuisine in restaurants. They work in the same way and method all over the world. But the indigenous horses, like the local dishes, are among the ecotourism attractions. Every horse has a different performance according to its habitat and its owner's treatment. Horse riding in the ancient area of 'Kamin' (a plateau near Pasargadae) is as enjoyable as eating 'Sirmookey Dampokhtak' in Aghamir cottage," Miri said of his countryside guesthouse.

The tour leader then explained that organizing a three-day tour package for land travel between Parseh and Pasargadae takes a lot of energy and time. "So it required a great deal of effort to make the arrangements."

Miri said while the coronavirus outbreak had shut down the tourism industry, Orlika showed up and applied for the journey. "The German doctor believed that the coronavirus must be indigenized and deal with. One of the ways to fight (against the disease) is to have a strong body and take nutritious foods. In spite of all problems, Orlika became our first guest in year 1399."

The German physician's trip to Iran amid the global concerns about the coronavirus pandemic has even surprised her host.

"Taking the risk of traveling to Iran, experiencing horse-riding in 'Kamin' ancient area, traveling the ancient route between Parseh and Pasargadae and visiting the areas near the palaces of Cyrus the Great in Pasargadae have marked a pure experience," Miri concluded.

Knowledge-based companies pushing for ‘surge in production’

➔ He went on to state that more than 15 trillion rials (nearly \$358 million) have been allotted for the issuance of guarantees for knowledge-based companies, which will lead to the conclusion of contracts with state-run centers, agencies, and large industries, adding, this part will play a significant role in the production next year.

■ \$48m earmarked to support firms in fight against COVID-19

Elsewhere in his remarks, Zolfaghari said that since the onset of coronavirus outbreak in the country, the Innovation and Prosperity Fund has approved 5 trillion rials (around \$120 million) for the production of anti-corona products, which has been able to so far provide 2 trillion rials (around \$48 million).

This amount was paid to manufacturers of sanitary ware, disinfectants, medical and pharmaceutical equipment, and even companies that were affected by the outbreak of coronavirus in the country, he highlighted.

The Fund has sent requests to receive more financial assistance to support knowledge-based companies operating to combat the epidemic, he noted.

He went on to say that these facilities are either for knowledge-based companies whose businesses are damaged during the coronavirus crisis or for those manufacturing disinfectants, medicine, masks, COVID-19 diagnostic kits or software capable of detecting the virus.



At the beginning of the outbreak, a call was issued in which about 500 projects were sent to the Innovation and Prosperity Fund, he said, highlighting, some of the selected projects are currently running.

“Of course, we are still on negotiations with companies and are reviewing their plans to combat the pandemic,” he concluded.

Vice Presidency for Science and Technology unveiled the first production line of serology-based tests for COVID-19 on Saturday, which is producing 400,000 test kits monthly and is expected to reach up

to 2 million, being produced by knowledge-based companies.

Serology testing for coronavirus better quantifies the number of infected cases, including those that may be asymptomatic or have recovered. Serology tests are blood-based tests that can be used to identify whether people have been exposed to a particular pathogen by looking at their immune response.

■ Major step toward surge in production

Regarding the unexpected events that inevitably happen in the world much like

the coronavirus epidemic, all the countries may be better to focus on the private sector and empower knowledge-based companies to easier survive.

To tackle the ups and downs of economic growth, it is time for Iran to highlight the role of the private sector and definitely the production process.

currently, there are some 5,000 knowledge-based companies and 4.5 million students at different academic levels and graduates that are potentially talented to help cure the economy and pace up economic growth. However, it requires the focus of government officials and policymakers.

Production jumps happen when the three main aspects of government, educational system, and youth are functioning accurately; eliminating bureaucracy, smuggling, creating transparency and emphasizing innovation, focusing on the empowerment of knowledge-based companies are some of the issues that can pave the way for surge in production.

Knowledge-based companies must be supported to improve the quality of goods to reach international markets.

Although the plan should be completely implemented to determine its effectiveness, supporting the private sector is a way of economic growth which have been considered by many countries around the world years ago, and it seems to be a good step toward economic growth.

Carbon emissions from fossil fuels could fall by 2.5bn tonnes in 2020

Global carbon emissions from the fossil fuel industry could fall by a record 2.5bn tonnes this year, a reduction of 5%, as the coronavirus pandemic triggers the biggest drop in demand for fossil fuels on record.

The unprecedented restrictions on travel, work and industry due to the coronavirus is expected to cut billions of barrels of oil, trillions of cubic metres of gas and millions of tonnes of coal from the global energy system in 2020 alone, according to data commissioned by the Guardian.

This would lead to the fossil fuel industry's biggest drop in CO2 emissions on record, in a single year eclipsing the carbon slumps triggered by the largest recessions of the last 50 years combined.

Climate experts expected global carbon emissions from fossil fuels and cement production to rise in 2020, from an estimated 36.8bn tonnes of carbon dioxide last year. Instead, emissions may fall by about 5%, or 2.5bn tonnes of CO2, to its lowest levels in about a decade.

Dr Fatih Birol, the head of the International Energy Agency, has warned against viewing the steep decline in emissions from fossil fuels as a climate triumph.

“This decline is happening because of the economic meltdown in which thousands of people are losing their livelihoods, not as a result of the right government decisions in terms of climate policies,” he said.

“The reason we want to see emissions decline is because we want a more livable planet and happier, healthier people.”

The fossil fuel analysis undertaken by Rystad Energy, a Norwegian energy consultancy, found a sharp contraction in GDP and the abrupt halt of flights and driving could cause the world's oil demand to fall by more than five times the drop in demand triggered by the global financial crisis in 2008.

The analysts estimate demand for crude will fall by an average of 11m barrels of oil a day this year, or 4bn barrels in total. This alone would cut 1.8bn tonnes of CO2 emissions, which would otherwise have contributed to the global climate crisis this year, according to Rystad.

The analysts also expected a slump in electricity use and heavy industry to drive demand for gas and coal down by about 2.3% each, erasing carbon emissions from each fossil fuel by 200m tonnes and 500m tonnes respectively.

Erik Holm Reiso, a senior partner at Rystad, said: “The coronavirus pandemic is an unprecedented event for energy markets, which will have a substantial impact on the world's total carbon emissions.

“The last time demand for oil contracted, during the financial crisis in 2008 to 2009, demand fell by 1.3m barrels of oil a day. But Covid-19 could cause oil demand to fall by more than five times as much.”

The unprecedented drop in oil demand will emerge in large part due to the global aviation industry, he said. Typically there are about 99,700 commercial flights per day but the crackdown on non-essential travel to curb the spread of the virus could see air traffic fall by an average of almost a quarter over the year.

Fewer cars on the road will also dent demand for petrol and diesel by an average of 9.4% over the year, shrinking oil demand in 2020 by an average of 2.6m barrels of oil a day.

The analysts say the use of transport fuels may start recovering in the second half of the year, but found demand would lag the figures recorded last year.

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 Taleban 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)

Iranian charity organization provides food, medical items to help combat coronavirus

SOCIETY TEHRAN — The Endowments and Charity Affairs Organization has distributed food, medical items and self-protection products among people in medical centers and holy shrines, IRNA reported on Monday.

Some 2.181 million face masks have so far been made and provided to the people, Gholam Reza Adel, deputy head of the Organization announced.

Pointing out that distribution of essential items of people and medical centers started last month by benefactors and charitable organizations, he added that out of the total number of masks produced, 1.867 million were provided to the people and the rest distributed in hospitals and universities of medical sciences.

He further emphasized that during this period, 15,541 scrubs were made and handed out free of charge to hospitals,



adding that 157,000 food packages plus 202,000 snacks were cooked and provided to the hospitals.

During this period, 5,921 blankets with about 132,000 liters of disinfectant, about 90 percent of which were provided by donors, were distributed free of charge in hospitals, he noted.

Adel also stated that 7,451 shrines and other places have been disinfected during this period, he added.

Over 70,000 food packages worth 170 billion rials (nearly \$4 million) have been prepared for the underprivileged, he concluded.

The total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran reached 73,303 on Monday, of whom 4,585 have died and 45,983 recovered.

Meanwhile, 1,617 new patients have been identified over the past 24 hours, Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said.

High winds kill thousands of migrating birds in ‘disaster’ over Greece

Thousands of swallows and swifts migrating from Africa to Europe have been left dead by high winds battering Greece, bird watchers say.

The birds have been found in the streets of Athens, on apartment balconies in the capital, in the north, on Aegean islands and around a lake close to the seaport of Nauplia in the Peloponnese.

“It's a major disaster,” Maria Ganoti of the wildlife protection group Anima told AFP on Thursday.

“Over the last three days because of high winds in the north and over the Aegean Sea, thousands of small birds have been found dead or gravely injured,” she said.

The Greek ornithologist association said: “The night of April 5-6 was disastrous for migrating birds due to strong winds, low temperatures and rain in some regions.

“Southerly winds pushed flocks of birds from north Africa into air currents

from the north of the Aegean Sea and particularly the islands.

“To escape, exhausted birds, mainly swallows and swifts, which catch flying insects for food, headed for the Greek mainland.”

The association urged people to take care in the street, where exhausted birds often land after covering thousands of kilometres, The Guardian reported.

Greece is on the flight path for hundreds of thousands of birds which migrate north in spring and south in autumn.



ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

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 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 برون شهری 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.

Palestinian campaigners call on Israel to protect Palestinian prisoners amid coronavirus pandemic

Palestinian campaigners have launched a campaign to mount pressure on Israeli authorities to provide adequate health care services to the Palestinian prisoners who are languishing in the regime's jails amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Jameel Sa'adeh, head of the legal department at the Palestinian Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs Commission, said on Sunday that the Palestinian inmates were more vulnerable now with the absence of vital preventive measures during the pandemic, Press TV reported.

Adnan Hamarsha, an ex-detainee said during a radio show that Palestinian prisoners are subjected to deliberate and systematic negligence by the Israel Prison Service (IPS), which puts their lives at risk.

In recent weeks, several countries and international organizations have called for the release of prisoners with health problems as well as children, women and elders in Israeli prisons.

Defense for Children International-Palestine (DCIP) has repeatedly called on the Israeli authorities to take immediate action to release all Palestinian child detainees.

There have been growing calls from regional and international rights groups, including the Europol Forum, to put pressure on the Israeli regime to provide Palestinian prisoners with enough protection against the COVID-19 pandemic.

U.S. reconnaissance aircraft spy on PMU positions in Iraq

U.S. reconnaissance aircraft have flown over the positions of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) across the country, an Iraqi security source says.

The unnamed Iraqi source was quoted by Arabic-language al-Maalomah news agency that U.S. aircraft conducted sorties over locations close to the small town of Jurfal-Nasr, about 60 kilometers southwest of Baghdad, Press TV reported.

Reconnaissance aircraft also flew over PMU positions in Razzaza region, which is located a few miles west of the city of Karbala, the source said, adding that the reconnaissance operations were not limited to those areas and that U.S. aircraft also spied on PMU positions in the western province of Anbar.

On March 27, the New York Times reported that the Pentagon had ordered a secret directive, which called on U.S. military commanders to prepare a campaign against Kata'ib Hezbollah, which is part of the PMU.

Later on, the United States' top commander in Iraq warned that such a campaign could be bloody and counterproductive.

Japan minister: Paris accord under threat if coronavirus trumps climate change

Japanese Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi warned on Monday that the Paris climate accord could face death if steps to fight global warming were put on the backburner to facilitate the economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

Many economists and policymakers are forecasting a steep global recession this year as countries are forced into lockdowns to contain the spread of the coronavirus, curtailing business activity in a major blow to jobs and incomes< Reuters reported.

"It would virtually mean the death of the Paris accord if we gave priority unconditionally to economic recovery, while neglecting the environment," Koizumi told Reuters in an interview.

Under the landmark 2015 Paris accord, nearly 200 nations agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a bid to prevent catastrophic planetary warming.

"No one at the environment ministry disagrees that the economy is important. We just would like to behave in a way that ensures the environment will never be left behind," said Koizumi.

'Social unrest' warning as Modi looks to extend India's lockdown

Key industries are warning of social unrest unless India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi makes concessions when he announces any extension Tuesday to a three-week pandemic-lockdown for the country's 1.3 billion people.

The lockdown ends at midnight Tuesday, but several state chief ministers have already said they plan to extend it for at least two more weeks.

With time running out, the government has not laid out any national plan.

Modi, who is to make a nationwide address at 0430 GMT Tuesday, is caught between growing fears over the pandemic -- cases have surged in recent days to more than 9,150 with 308 deaths -- and the need to get the economy moving again.

Reserve Bank of India governor Shaktikanta Das called the coronavirus an "invisible assassin" that could cause havoc with the economy.

The national restaurants association, which said its members employed seven million people, warned Monday there could be "social unrest" if it did not receive financial relief.

The government is considering making people stay at home in Delhi, Mumbai and other major cities while opening up rural parts of the country that have so far been relatively untainted by coronavirus, according to some reports.

Media have predicted it would be relaxed for key sectors such as agriculture.

With thousands of trucks carrying food and other essential produce being stuck at internal borders, the home ministry has already sent out new orders to states calling for better movement of essentials.

(Source: AFP)

'Biggest worry now is people dying of hunger'

Pakistani PM calls for coronavirus relief package for developing world

Noting that Islamabad, as much of the developing world, is facing the dilemma of either losing people to hunger from lockdowns or letting the virus ravage the population, Pakistan's Imran Khan has called for global relief fund.

Khan made an appeal to world leaders, global financial institutions and the UN secretary general "to ditch out a stimulus package for the developing world to help them through this economic downturn" on Sunday, as the number of Covid-19 cases in the country reached 5,230, with 91 fatalities.

The PM highlighted the income gap between well-off developed countries that may inject a lump sum into their economies, under strain due to lockdowns, and the developing world which is effectively trapped between a rock and a hard place with its lack of resources.

Pakistan, which is home to some 220 million people, was able to issue a relief package worth \$8 billion, on condition that it can be further expanded when more resources are



at hand. Khan drew a comparison between what Islamabad had to offer and the mammoth \$2 trillion US coronavirus relief bill, as well as equally generous relief plans by European powerhouse Germany, and Japan.

Pakistan, on the other hand, is facing an impossible choice between "starvation from lockdown or the coronavirus," Khan said. Arguing that the world is heading into a "recession worse than the Great Depression," the PM said that the spread of the virus on a global scale won't be stopped without "a strong, coordinated and well-crafted global response."

The coronavirus outbreak in Pakistan has moved quickly since it was first detected in Quetta, located in the southwestern province of Balochistan, last month. The country has faced shortages of protective equipment and masks. The lack of gear sparked clashes between doctors and police in Quetta last week that led to dozens of medical professionals being arrested. (Source: RT)

U.S. envoy calls Afghan prisoner releasesan 'important step'

The U.S. special envoy who negotiated a deal with the Taliban said Monday that an initial prisoner exchange between the insurgents and the Afghan government was an "important step" toward peace.

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Taliban on Sunday released 20 Afghan security-force prisoners. The move came after the government last week released hundreds of insurgent captives, AP reported.

"The release of prisoners is an important step in the peace process and the reduction of violence," US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad said on Twitter.

"Both sides should accelerate efforts to meet targets specified in the US-Taliban agreement as soon as possible," he added, noting the exchange was more important than ever with prison populations threatened by coronavirus outbreaks.

Khalilzad and the Taliban signed a deal February 29 that paves the way for US and other foreign forces to quit Afghanistan in return for various commitments



from the insurgents.

The deal said the Afghan government would release 5,000 Taliban prisoners while the insurgents would free 1,000 Afghan security force personnel.

Russian border becomes China's frontline in fight against second virus wave

China's northeastern border with Russia has become a frontline in the fight against a resurgence of the coronavirus epidemic as new daily cases rose to the highest in nearly six weeks - with more than 90% involving people coming from abroad.

Having largely stamped out domestic transmission of the disease, China has been slowly easing curbs on movement as it tries to get its economy back on track, but there are fears that a rise in imported cases could

spark a second wave of COVID-19.

A total of 108 new coronavirus cases were reported in mainland China on Sunday, up from 99 a day earlier, marking the highest daily tally since March 5.

Imported cases accounted for a record 98. Half involved Chinese nationals returning from Russia's Far Eastern Federal District, home to the city of Vladivostok, who re-entered China through border crossings in Heilongjiang province.

"Our little town here, we thought it was the safest place," said a resident of the border city of Suifenhe, who only gave his surname as Zhu.

"Some Chinese citizens - they want to come back, but it's not very sensible, what are you doing coming here for?"

The border is closed, except to Chinese nationals, and the land route through the city had become one of few options available for people trying to return home after

Russia stopped flights to China except for those evacuating people.

Streets in Suifenhe were virtually empty on Sunday evening due to restrictions on movement and gatherings announced last week, when authorities took preventative measures similar to those imposed in Wuhan, the central Chinese city where the pandemic ripping round the world first emerged late last year. (Source: Reuters)

N. Korea's Kim in major reshuffle as country steps up virus fight

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has carried out a major reshuffle of his State Affairs Commission, official media reported on Monday, replacing more than a third of its members.

Kim has cemented his grip over the country since coming to power in 2011 and is chairman of the SAC - the North's highest decision-making body, al Jazeera reported.

At a rare meeting of the country's Supreme People's Assembly on Sunday, five of the SAC's 13 other members were replaced, official news agency KCNA reported.

The rubber-stamp parliament met a day after Kim presided over a governing party politburo meeting where he called for strict measures to prevent an outbreak of the new coronavirus.

A cabinet report submitted to the assembly reiterated the North's insistence that "not a single case" of coronavirus has been reported in the country.

"State emergency anti-epidemic campaign will continue to be intensified to prevent the spread of COVID-19," the cabinet report said.

Photos released by state news agency KCNA on Monday showed hundreds of legislators sitting in close proximity to each other with no masks or other visible measures to



protect themselves from the disease.

There was no mention on KCNA of Kim presiding over the meeting himself, and he did not appear in photos of it.

North Korea has said it has tested at least 700 people and has put more than 500 in quarantine, but has no confirmed case of the new coronavirus, the World Health Organization (WHO) told Reuters news agency last week.

"The state emergency anti-epidemic campaign will con-

Spain death toll falls as some sectors go back to work

Workers in Spain's construction and manufacturing sectors cautiously returned to work Monday as the daily death toll resumed its downward trend and new infections fell to the lowest level in three weeks.

Spain is one of the worst-hit countries in the world, and saw the daily death rate fall for three consecutive days last week, only to

rise again on Sunday, AFP reported.

But on Monday it fell again, with 517 deaths in 24 hours, putting the overall death toll at 17,489 with the number of cases now standing at 169,496.

Confirmed cases also rose by 3,477 -- the lowest daily figure since March 20 -- as Spain began reopening parts of its economy after

a two-week "economic hibernation" period.

Although health chiefs say the outbreak in Spain has peaked, they have urged the population to keep observing a strict national lockdown imposed on March 14 to slow the spread of the virus.

The restrictions were further tightened on March 30 when all non-essential activities were frozen for two weeks -- largely targeting

the construction and manufacturing sectors.

But those restrictions were lifted Monday, and train stations were staffed with police and Red Cross volunteers handing out face masks for those returning to work.

At Madrid's Atocha station, commuters took the masks from officers at arm's length to avoid getting too close.

Ansarullah says Saudi-led coalition's ceasefire merely aimed at misleading world

➔ On April 9, the senior Ansarullah official reiterated in an exclusive interview with the Qatar-based al-Jazeera television news network that the announced ceasefire was a publicity stunt.

"The ceasefire announcement by Saudi Arabia is a ploy indeed as it is pressing ahead with raids on Yemen, and conducts operations on various fronts, including areas where there were no clashes at all."

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

■ Army, allies thwart Saudi mercenaries' attacks in central Yemen



Separately, the Spokesman for the Yemeni Armed Forces Brigadier General Yahya Saree said army troops and allied fighters from the Popular Committees had fought off three

armed attacks launched by militiamen loyal to Yemen's former president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, in the central provinces of Ma'rib and Bayda.

Saree said in a brief statement that the mercenaries carried out two attacks against Yemeni army lines in the Qaniya district of Baydha, triggering hours of intense fighting in the area.

He added that another group of the Saudi-paid militiamen attempted to attack Yemeni army troops and their allies in the Sirwah district of Ma'rib.

Riyadh and its allies have been widely criticized for the high civilian death toll resulted from their bombing campaign in Yemen since early 2015.

At least 80 percent of the 28 million-strong population of Yemen is reliant on aid to survive in what the United Nations has called the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Health more important than cup: Golmohammadi

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis' football team head coach Yahya Golmohammadi says that the public health is far more important than concluding the current campaign but they deserve to win the title.

The Iranian sports events are postponed until the further notice due to novel coronavirus.

Persepolis lead the Iran league by 10 points before football was brought to a halt by the spread of the covid-19 in Iran.

"The health of people is more important than everything. The matches will have to resume if things are 100% safe. If we have to wait a little longer, we must do so but I don't know why some people are in a hurry to finish the league. I recommend them let FIFA and AFC decide about the competition," Golmohammadi said.

"Our fans are the most important thing and no title is worth risking a single life, no questions asked. We are not going to lift a metal cup and our priority is to satisfy our fans, this is what we want and it is more valuable than winning 10 titles," he added.

"Persepolis deserve to win the title but we wait for what the Committee of Coronavirus Combat and Prevention Headquarters decides about the competitions," Golmohammadi concluded.

Persepolis are seeking to win Iran Profes-



sional League for the fourth time in a row. Iran's total death toll from the new coronavirus outbreak rose to 4,474 on Sunday with

117 lives lost in the past 24 hours, according to a health ministry spokesman. More than 43,800 coronavirus pos-

itive cases in the country have fully recovered from the disease, the spokesman said.

Sardar Azmoun not for sale: official

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Zenit football club sporting director Javier Ribalta says that they don't want to sell Sardar Azmoun.

Italian media have reported that Napoli are monitoring the situation of Azmoun, who has scored eleven goals and five assists so far this season. However, Ribalta says the team's striker is going nowhere.

"I read about the issue in the newspapers but we have not yet received any offer. Sardar is a complete player and has a lot of experience playing in Russia and in the Iran national team. He is physically strong and fast and

attacks very well. Sardar also fits well into spaces. He has scored many goals and is a very important player for us," he said in an interview with Napolisoccer.net.

"We are not in a hurry to sell him. Zenit don't face a financial difficulty and I think it doesn't change too much for Zenit in the transfer window," he added.

"Hopefully we will go back to normal life in six months after the coronavirus pandemic but Zenit are not going to sell Azmoun and if someone shows interest in signing him or others, it might not be so simple," Ribalta concluded.



AFC lauds Iranian doctor Zohreh Haratian



The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) today pays special tribute to the AFC doctors and medical practitioners who continue to risk their lives to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in this latest #BreakTheChain series.

More than 100 Asian icons have joined the public awareness campaign and the spotlight shifts to the true heroes - battling bravely and selflessly in the front lines to ensure that their communities and loved ones remain protected and safe.

AFC Medical Officer and CEO of the FIFA/AFC Medical Centre of Excellence, Dr. Zohreh Haratian, who works at the Iran Mall Sports Medicine Centre which was converted into a field hospital equipped with 3,000 beds, helped patients affected by the coronavirus even after her own father was tested positive.

"I couldn't visit my father but kept in touch with him through technology. I, myself, suffered from symptoms and was quarantined but was immediately back in action when my test results returned negative.

"My colleagues and I did our best to help fight back against the virus while also creating a campaign titled #football_1_0 Corona. Together with reputed professional footballers we advised people to take care of their health and informed them of how important it is to stay at home.

"We the medical team? are working together like a football team doing our best to win the fight against COVID-19. Everyone around the world are cheering and praying and crossing their fingers for us to win. We shouldn't let them down," she said.

(Source: the-afc)

Volleyball federation in no hurry to appoint new coach of Team Melli



MNA — An Iran Volleyball Federation official on Sunday talked about the latest status of choosing a new coach for Team Melli.

"We are in no hurry to select Team Melli's new coach and we will decide on the new coach based on our past experiences and views of the experts," said Milad Taghavi, Acting Secretary of Iranian Volleyball Federation.

He noted that the federation decided to terminate Igor Kolakovic's contract with mutual consent due to the postponement of major volleyball events in 2020, adding, "I seize this opportunity, on behalf of the Iranian volleyball community, to appreciate the efforts of Kolakovic during his tenure."

"Contrary to reports of different media, the federation is not considering any specific candidate for the post," he highlighted.

The remark came as some reports indicated that three Italian coaches namely

Trentino coach Angelo Lorenzetti, Volley Lube trainer Ferdinando De Giorgi and Allianz Powervolley Milano coach Roberto Piazza have been nominated to take Team Melli's hot seat.

"We will certainly study various Iranian and foreign coaches and take the best decision according to current conditions," added Taghavi.

Last week, Iran volleyball team director Amir Khoshkhabar suggested that the team's aim is to shine in the Olympics. "Iran is determined to make a splash at the Games, so the Iranian federation would prefer a foreign coach, however, an Iranian coach could be chosen," the Tehran Times quoted him as saying.

The team will take on Japan, Poland, Italy, Canada, and Venezuela in Pool A at the postponed Olympic Games.

are considering a flexible approach to transfers to allow teams to buy and sell players at different times.

At present, teams are permitted to sign players in two windows, in summer and winter but that now seems likely to change as a result of the pandemic.

FIFA's director of football regulations said: 'We could see the opening of a third transfer window,' to German TV channel ARD Sportschau.

A third transfer window would enable teams who have been badly hit financially to offload players and recoup some of their losses.

On Sunday, Sportsmail revealed that Tottenham are willing to sanction a world-record £200 million sale of Harry Kane to Manchester United to balance the books.

Spurs chairman Daniel Levy is concerned that the club's dip in income could have disastrous consequences as they continue to pay back a loan they took out to build their £1 billion stadium.

(Source: Daily Mail)



and end on very different dates.

If some leagues continue well into the year then FIFA

Most decorated Iranian Olympian welcomes breaking of his records by young talents

MNA — Hadi Saei, former Iranian taekwondo practitioner, said that he will be happy if other Iranian athletes could break his record in the Olympics.

Saei is Iran's most decorated Olympian with one bronze and two gold medals.

"Some of the young talented athletes can attain such a record. Every athlete should have a long-term plan for the Olympics. I will be glad if somebody could reach or even break my record," he told Varzesh3 website on Sunday.

Asked about the possibility of breaking his record by lifter Kianoush Rostami or wrestler Hassan Yazdani, he said "We have good athletes that have this chance; as I said, I will be glad to see their success either it is Kianoush or Hassan."

Kianoush Rostami has one gold and one silver Olympics medal in his collection while his quota for the Tokyo 2020 has not been yet secured.

Hassan Yazdani, 25, snatched a gold medal in Rio 2016 and he is one of the main hopefuls in the upcoming Olympics although he is still recovering from an injury. The one-year postponement of the Olympics may be in favor of him and some other injured Iranian athletes such as wrestler Alireza Karimi and karateka Hamideh Abbasali.

Saket Elhami extends Tractor contract

TASNIM — Tractor coach Saket Elhami penned a one-year extension with the Iranian top-flight football team.

Elhami replaced Mustafa Denizli in the Tabriz-based football team in January until the end of the season but his deal has been extended following good results.

Under leadership of Elhami, Tractor sit third in the Iran Professional League (IPL), 10 points behind leaders Persepolis.

With nine matches remaining, Tractor still have a chance of winning the IPL title for the first time.

Para athlete Mohammad Yari diagnosed with coronavirus

IRNA — Iranian para athlete Ali Mohammad Yari has tested positive for the novel coronavirus.

The discus thrower will self-quarantine for two weeks at home after tested positive.

Rouhollah Rostami, who won a gold medal in Rio 2016 powerlifting event, is another Iranian Paralympic athlete who has tested positive for the coronavirus.

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

Iran's total death toll from the new coronavirus outbreak rose to 4,474 on Sunday with 117 lives lost in the past 24 hours, according to a health ministry spokesman.

More than 43,800 coronavirus positive cases in the country have fully recovered from the disease, the spokesman said.

Ex-Iran coach Wilmots linked with Fenerbahce

Former Iran national football team coach Marc Wilmots has been reportedly linked with a move to Turkish giant Fenerbahce.

Fenerbahce, who have parted company with Ersun Yanal, are going to hire the Belgian tactician.

The 51-year-old coach had been also linked with Belgian top-flight team Antwerp but has rejected the team's offer.

Former Belgium coach Wilmots was named as head coach of Iran in last year's May but stepped down from his role just six months in charge.

Under tutelage of Wilmots, Iran beat Hong Kong and Cambodia at the 2022 World Cup qualification but lost to Iraq and Bahrain.

(Source: Fanatik)

Ronaldo and Portugal squad give amateur clubs financial boost

Cristiano Ronaldo and his Portugal teammates have donated half of their bonus for qualifying for the Euro 2020 finals to help amateur football in the country that has been hit by the coronavirus shutdown.

The Portuguese football federation said on Monday the money would go towards a fund that it hopes will reach 4.7 million euros (\$5.1 million) to help amateur clubs survive the crisis.

The federation last week decided to end the already-suspended amateur season with immediate effect, declaring the season null and void without champions, promotion or relegation.

No decision has been taken on resuming professional football but the president of the Portuguese league said in late March he was determined the season should be completed.

"It is fundamental that the championships end because it would allow some sort of normality to be restored and we could prepare for next season knowing who has qualified for international competitions, who the champions are and who is relegated," Pedro Proenca said.

Portugal shocked host nation France to win Euro 2016 but Ronaldo and his teammates will have to wait another year to defend their title as Euro 2020 has been postponed by 12 months because of the coronavirus pandemic.

(Source: AFP)

‘We could see the opening of a third transfer window’ - FIFA

FIFA could introduce a third transfer window to help clubs to recover when football resumes after the coronavirus crisis.

All of Europe's major divisions were suspended indefinitely after measures were put in place by governments to halt the global spread of the virus.

With no income from ticket sales and matchday revenue, many clubs have had to furlough staff and ask players to take pay cuts to balance the books.

Meanwhile, summer transfer activity has been put on hold as clubs wait to see how badly they will be affected by the loss of income.

But there has been some good news for the world of football, after several Bundesliga sides returned to training last week.

The German top flight appears set to resume in early May, with the campaign concluding in June, though games are likely to be behind closed doors.

Other major leagues across Europe are hoping to follow suit but there is a strong likelihood that divisions will resume

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Patience is a fitting cover, and wisdom is a sharp sword. So cover your ugly conduct with patience, and kill carnal desires with wisdom.

Imam Ali (AS)

Iran's intl. coronavirus cartoon contest receives 4200 submissions

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran's We Defeat Coronavirus International Cartoon Contest has received 4200 submissions from cartoonists from 88 countries.

"Out of all the submissions, about 2000 cartoons were



A cartoon by Syrian artist Wissam Asaad.

showcased for 28 days at irancartoon.ir, which has been visited by 1,340,000 people," said Masud Shojaei-Tabatabai, the director of the Art Bureau's Visual Arts Office that launched the competition 40 days ago.

The cartoons are also on view on the website of the Institute of Contemporary Visual Arts.

Iran participated in the contest with 436 cartoonists standing on the top. Turkey came next with 82 artists, and then India with 75, Indonesia with 70, Brazil with 48, and Russia with 30.

The contest was organized by Iran's Art Bureau in collaboration with the Health Ministry.

Iranian photog publishes travelogue of Asian countries

C U L T U R E d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian photographer Hamid Soltanabadian has recently published an account of his cycling adventure in 11 Asian countries in a book named "Bicycle Memories".

Soltanabadian embarked on his tour in 2011 in New Delhi, visiting Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, China, Tajikistan, Kirghizia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and arrived in Iran the next year.



A poster for photographer Hamid Soltanabadian's book "Memories of Bicycle".

"When I used to talk about my cycling journey with friends, they were so excited and wished to experience it themselves," Soltanabadian wrote in an introduction to the book published by Sureh-Mehr.

"This was also my own wish when I was younger. Photography was a reason to begin the tour, which was full of ups and downs and a wish that finally came true," he added.

Soltanabadian, who is also a photography instructor, is interested in making documentaries, as well.

The publisher gives a discount of 10 percent to online buyers of the book.

Tehran concert hall dedicated to charity group producing face masks

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Rudaki Foundation in Tehran has dedicated its Hafez Hall to a charity team producing face masks for health workers combatting the coronavirus outbreak.

The charity team was established over the few past days by a number of actors and musicians in collaboration with the foundation to promote the motto "We Defeat Coronavirus with Solidarity", actor Hamid Sharifzadeh, who is in charge of the team, told the Persian service of MNA on Sunday.

"Some of the employees of the foundation and the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance are also collaborating in the project as volunteers," he said.

"Our friends in the Art Bureau also announced their readiness to participate actively in the charity event, however, the number of sewing machines was too few," he added.

"A team of medical staff members under the supervision of the Health Ministry sterilized the hall and the products, and the workers were tested for some diseases beforehand," he noted.

"We are also watching the process of the sterilization and distribution [of masks] in Tehran, however, we are planning to dispatch the masks to other provinces such as Sistan and Baluchestan Province in southeastern Iran," he concluded.

The charity team has the potential to



Charity workers produce face masks during the coronavirus pandemic at Tehran's Hafez Hall on April 12, 2020.

produce about 10,000 masks a day.

In addition, a number of puppet makers and artists have begun producing face

shields designed to offer protection from the new virus.

The face shields are being produced

at the House of Dolls in Tehran and have been distributed in the remote areas of the country.

"Exodus" pirated after first online screening

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Owj Arts and Media Organization's latest movie "Exodus" was soon illegally uploaded on some websites and Telegram channels just hours after its first streaming on Sunday evening on Filimo and Avaname, major Iranian platforms for online movie screening, the Persian news media outlets announced on Monday.

Due to the shutdown of the movie theaters during the COVID-19 pandemic in Iran, Owj and director Ebrahim Hatamikia agreed last week to stream the controversial movie online.

The producers of "Exodus" have begun a serious attempt to get the film deleted from the websites and channels as well as to file a lawsuit against the culprits.

In a video released last week, Hatamikia called on

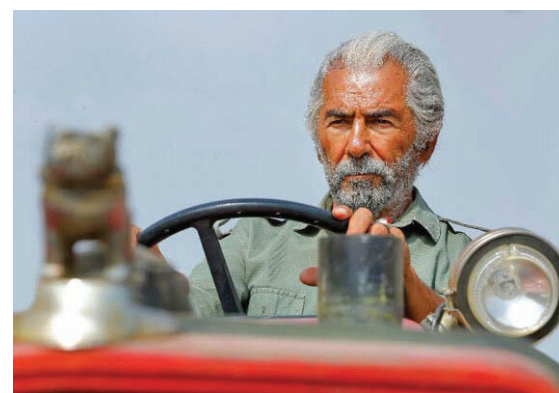
people to watch his film online and to avoid illegally downloading the movie.

Ali Sartipi, the distributor of "Exodus", who is also a producer, had said that if he was the producer of the film he would never dare to screen it online.

Starring Faramarz Gharibian and Pantea Panhiha, the film is about a group of cotton farmers who leave their farms to protest the local official's unfulfilled promises at the president's office in the capital.

The story of the film is set in a nowhere-land, where a peasant protest against the local authority that symbolically resembles President Hassan Rouhani's government.

It had its Iranian premiere during the 38th Fajr Film Festival in Tehran in February.



Faramarz Gharibian acts in scene from director Ebrahim Hatamikia's "Exodus".

Iran suffers over \$230 million cultural loss in coronavirus turmoil

C U L T U R E d e s k **TEHRAN** — Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi has said that the coronavirus outbreak in Iran will cause an estimated loss of over 9,700 billion rials (Over \$230 million) in the art and culture sectors by April 19, the end of the first month of the Iranian calendar year.

He made the remarks in a report sent on Monday to President Hassan Rouhani and several other high-ranking officials, including the head of the Planning and Budget Organization, asking urgent support for people working in numerous vulnerable jobs in the sectors.

The Economy Committee of the National Headquarters

for Fighting Coronavirus was scheduled to hold a meeting to decide plans to support people working in the art and culture sectors during shutdowns of the art and cultural centers during the virus pandemic.

"Those people working in the art and culture sectors are waiting to hear good news from the meeting," Salehi wrote in the report.

The Iranian House of Cinema, which is also known as the Iranian Alliance of Motion Picture Guilds, sent a letter on Sunday to Salehi and asked him for financial supports for its 5,000 members who have to stay at home following the cancelation of film projects due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Culture Minister Seyyed Abbas Salehi.

City Lights Bookstore launches successful GoFundMe campaign



In this March 13, 2020 file photo, people are reflected in the window of the City Lights Bookstore in North Beach as they walk along Columbus Avenue in San Francisco. (AP/Eric Risberg)

NEW YORK (AP) — One of the world's most famous independent booksellers, City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, was in dire financial shape because of the coronavirus outbreak and asked for help. Help quickly arrived.

Within days of starting a GoFundMe campaign last week seeking \$300,000, the store received more than \$400,000, from nearly 9,000 contributors.

"Knowing that City Lights is beloved is one thing, but to have that love manifest itself with such momentum and indomitable power, well, that's something I don't quite know how to find words for," City Lights CEO Elaine Katzenberger wrote in a recent posting on the store's website. "The fiscal support we're receiving here will help stabilize us for the next couple of months, and that will enable us to begin planning for the future."

Numerous stores around the country have been forced to shut down and have turned to GoFundMe campaigns to

survive. They include Posman Books in New York and Atlanta; Old Firehouse Books in Fort Collins, Colorado; and another San Francisco institution, Marcus Books, a black-owned store founded 60 years ago. At the same time, bestselling novelist James Patterson has launched a fundraising initiative for independent stores, and personal pledged \$500,000. The online bookstore www.bookshop.org has raised more than \$500,000 for independent sellers.

City Lights was co-founded in 1953 by the poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti and holds a special place in local and international literary history. The store and its publishing arm were essential in the careers of Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and other Beat writers and City Lights remains a favorite meeting place for progressive artists and thinkers.

After City Lights more than met its fundraising goal, Katzenberger visited with Ferlinghetti, who turned 101 last month.

Comedian Tim Brooke-Taylor of "The Goodies" dies with COVID-19



In this Nov. 28, 2011 file photo, Tim Brooke-Taylor holds his OBE after being presented it by Queen Elizabeth, outside Buckingham Palace in London. (AP/John Stillwell)

LONDON (AP) — British performer Tim Brooke-Taylor, a member of comedy trio The Goodies, has died after contracting the new coronavirus. He was 79.

Brooke-Taylor's agent says he died Sunday morning "from COVID-19."

Brooke-Taylor was part of Cambridge University's Footlights revue, the breeding ground of several generations of British comic talent. He broke into radio and television comedy in the 1960s alongside future Monty Python members John Cleese and Graham Chapman.

Brooke-Taylor went on to form The Goodies with Graeme Garden and Bill Oddie. The trio specialized in slightly surreal sketches incorporating visual incoherence, slapstick and songs. Their song "Funky Gibbon" even became a U.K. top 10 chart hit in 1975.

Their TV show, which ran throughout the 1970s, was a hit in Britain, Australia and New Zealand and developed a cult following in many other countries.

"The Goodies" formed part of a golden

era of British television comedy in the 1960s and 70s that included "Monty Python's Flying Circus" and "Not the Nine O'Clock News."

For more than 40 years, Brooke-Taylor was also a panelist on BBC radio's much loved comic quiz show "I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue."

Goodies co-star Garden said Brooke-Taylor was "a funny, sociable, generous man who was a delight to work with. Audiences found him not only hilarious but also adorable."

"His loss at this dreadful time is particularly hard to bear," Garden said.

Writer-performer Stephen Fry tweeted: "Just heard the devastating news of the death of Tim Brooke-Taylor. A hero for as long as I can remember, and - on a few golden occasions - a colleague and collaborator on I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue. Gentle, kind, funny, wise, warm, but piercingly witty when he chose to be. So sad."

Brooke-Taylor is survived by his wife, Christine, and two sons.