



Post-coronavirus: Iran formulating action plan to return tourism to normal **8**



League of Historical Cities concerned over Iran sanctions amid COVID-19 **9**



Lionel Messi thanks Iranian wonderkid Arat **11**



Publishers organize online exhibitions to fill in for Tehran Intl. Book Fair **12**

Plasma therapy cuts coronavirus deaths by 40%

Iran reports lowest death toll since outbreak



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American analyst: Iran's performance at containing COVID-19 'truly amazing'

By M.A.Saki

TEHRAN — A senior American political analyst tells the Tehran Times that despite U.S. "economic assaults" on Iran efforts by Tehran to contain the coronavirus pandemic have been "truly amazing".

Yuram Abdullah Weiler also casts doubt about the number of coronavirus victims given by western countries.

"It could be that the western powers are not doing enough testing, or are not reporting the true numbers," Weiler opines.

The analyst also censures Donald Trump for his handling of the deadly COVID-19 in the U.S., saying "this dangerously demented dilettante should be indicted for negligent homicide."

Following is the text of the interview:

Reportedly, people are queuing up in the U.S. to get free food. If true, what does this suggest?

Answer: Over 15 years ago when I volunteered at a food bank in the relatively prosperous city of Denver, → **3**

'Govt. should establish health protocol with neighbors to spur exports'

By Ebrahim Fallahi

TEHRAN — Over three months into the pandemic, the world continues to wrestle with the notorious COVID-19 and many economies have been hit hard as the virus is choking off world's trade relations just like the people on hospital beds.

Like its neighbors, Iran is also grappling with both the social and economic aspects of the pandemic as production

is mostly halted, export revenues have fallen significantly and people are also urged to stay in home quarantine.

However, unlike most of its neighbors, the situation for the Islamic Republic is unique in the sense that the country is also facing the economic pressures imposed by the U.S. sanctions and the country's oil revenues have also been severely affected by the Washington hostility. → **4**

IRGC forms center to aid 3.5m families affected by coronavirus

TEHRAN — The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has formed a headquarters to direct aid efforts to 3.5 million Iranian families most affected by the coronavirus outbreak.

The formation of the headquarters, called the Imam Hassan headquarters, came days after Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called for helping the needy ahead of the holy

month of Ramadan.

In a Tuesday meeting, IRGC Chief Major General Hossein Salami convened the heads of a number of governmental bodies to discuss a nationwide scheme to help Iranian families in need, according to Tasnim.

Salami proposed the idea of forming a charity foundation to coordinate plans for aid programs. → **3**



PERSPECTIVE

Afshin Majlesi
Tehran Times Journalist

Ubiquitous coronavirus: Do travel blockades work?

Over the past couple of weeks, many countries, including Iran, have imposed travel restrictions to help curb the spread of novel coronavirus. In this line, incoming and outgoing flights have been suspended, and road travels restricted to a great extent.

Iran on Sunday declared it is set to lift intercity travel bans on April 20, a decision which could inflame a divide in public opinion.

The scheme was announced days after President Hassan Rouhani unveiled a "Smart Social Distancing Initiative" as a new phase of measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus. Under the initiative, low-risk businesses are allowed to return to work if they meet strict protocols introduced by the Health Ministry. However, the plan has drawn skepticism from some experts.

Iran medical council on Sunday warned the coronavirus crisis may be developing under the initiative, saying it may waste all the previous efforts. "Though the resumption of economic activities has been the main goal of the plan, efforts of all people, officials and medical staff would be wasted without considering scientific and executive equipment, and there will be serious threats to the recurrence of the disease."

Avoiding to touch the face, washing hands, social isolation, and cancellation of travel plans are the most frequent recommendations nowadays we hear for lessening the likelihood of being infected by the virus. The latter is still puzzling because public health experts are expressing a great deal of skepticism about, noting once a disease has started circulating within a community, banning outsiders is mostly useless.

Now, a tricky question is how effective travel blockades could be, while the virus may be traced almost everywhere. There are different opinions. Many authorities emphasize the need for enforcing travel bans, believing that such restrictions could be successful in briefly delaying the spread of coronavirus just for a few days, not in stopping it entirely. Researchers say it could be a strategy in terms of buying time for governments, healthcare professionals, and communities to prepare. → **8**

Annual steel ingot output to rise 3.2m tons

TEHRAN — Iran's annual steel ingot production is planned to increase 3.2 million tons in the current Iranian calendar year, which began on March 20, according to Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO).

IMIDRO has put the value of the projects to boost the steel ingot output in the present year at \$793 million.

Iran's major steel companies have produced over 18.5 million tons of steel ingots during the 11-month period from March 21, 2019 to February 19, 2020, registering a four-percent growth from the figure for the same period in the previous year.

Iran has defined 16 development projects in the steel sector which are aimed to

boost the country's output of steel products by 17.3 million tons in a course of five years.

These projects are for constructing production units each with the capacity of 600,000 tons, while some other projects have been also defined to set up some units with under 500,000-ton capacity that together with the 600,000-ton capacity units will add 19.1 million tons to the country's annual steel products output.

In its latest report, the World Steel Association (WSA) has announced that Iran's crude steel production increased by 30 percent in 2019 while the average global growth in this sector stood at 3.5 percent.

Based on the WSA report, Iran produced

31.9 million tons of the mentioned commodity during 2019 compared to the last year's nearly 24 million tons.

In early May 2019, Washington imposed new sanctions on Iran's metals and minerals sectors in an attempt to [as the U.S. president Trump put it] "choke off the country's largest non-petroleum related sources of export revenue".

While at the first glance [considering Trump's comments], this might seem to be a heavy hit to Iran's economy in the near future but a close look into the country's export data could reveal Trump's great miscalculations. In fact, this could even be considered a "blessing in disguise" for the country's minerals and metal industry.

EAEU confirms commitment to cooperate on COVID-19 response

MOSCOW (Sputnik) — The member states of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) confirmed on Tuesday their commitment to pool efforts to counter COVID-19, stressing the need to support citizens and the economy.

«As part of the COVID-19 response, we are committed to continue providing each other with needed assistance, strengthening health care systems, conducting joint scientific research for developing means to prevent, diagnose and treat infections, and improving algorithms of cooperation on reacting to epidemics,» the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council members said in a joint statement after their meeting, held in the video conference format.

EAEU member states have tasked national governments, central banks and the Eurasian Economic Commission with implementing coordinated measures to maintain domestic markets stability and support businesses.

«We task the governments and the central banks of the EAEU and the Eurasian Economic Commission member states with implementing coordinated measures for preventing the spreading of COVID-19, strengthening our economic cooperation, maintaining stability of domestic markets, including food markets, supporting our countries' citizens and businesses for overcoming the negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic,» the statement read on.

The leaders said goods, especially necessities, medical equipment and medicines, should continue to flow freely across the five-member union, and called for an end to all trade wars, armed conflicts and unilateral sanctions globally.

«We urge all countries to maintain international cooperation, build trust, end armed conflicts, trade wars, unilateral financial and economic sanctions and abide strictly by international rules,» the statement read.

The leaders also expressed hope that restrictions imposed around the globe to slow down the spread of the coronavirus were temporary and would not stay in place longer than needed to protect people's health and lives.



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Army to unveil five achievements

TEHRAN — The Army will unveil five new achievements on Wednesday, the commander of the Army ground forces announced on Tuesday.

Two achievements are in the area of diagnosis and three in disinfection. Kiomars Heidari told a press conference.

The commander made the announcement as Iran, one of the countries worst hit by the coronavirus, is making hard efforts to contain the highly transmissible disease.

The commander also explained about the Army's actions in the struggle against the coronavirus pandemic.

"We have gained good experiences in fighting the coronavirus and we are ready to transfer them to other countries," the brigadier general pointed out. → **2**



REPORT

Faranak Bakhtiari
Tehran Times journalist

Iran climate: wet spell or still short of rain?

While some experts claim that Iran has entered a period of wet spell after experiencing dry spells over the past few decades, some others highly reject the claim implying that the country faced lack of rain by 50mm over the past 5 decades.

Rainfall extremes over the past three years slowly questioned the conception that Iran is experiencing a long-term drought and some of the experts announced that wet spell will embrace the country.

Referring to the country's three-year continued rainfall, Hossein Ardakanian, a meteorologist told Mehr that the country entered a period of heavier downpours and wet spells.

Iran's rainfall in these years has met normal and above normal levels, he noted.

The meteorologist criticized the lack of accurate information about the change in the normality of rainfall in the country, saying that the improvement in rainfall has led to Iran's entry into the wet spells.

Noting that the spring rains will continue until the middle of June this year, he said that with this amount of rainfall, the country's dams and reservoirs are in good condition and we should think about collecting the runoff for the coming years.

According to the meteorologist, the rains could cause damages to the western, northwestern and northeastern gardens of the country in the coming days.

Although statistics show that Iran's weather patterns are changing toward entering a period of consecutive rainy days, but given the country's climate characteristic constantly experiencing intense wet and dry spells, it cannot be accurate to claim that drought is over.

Inquired whether the country will be having a wet spell, Sadeq Ziaeian, head of the director of the national center for drought and crisis management, affiliated to Iran Meteorological Organization, said explained that over the past 50 years, the annual rainfall has decreased by about 1.2 millimeters, and in total, more than 50 millimeters of the country's average rainfall has dropped; these are very high figures for an arid and semi-arid country, he explained. → **9**

Luxembourg court officially turns down U.S. request to seize Iranian assets

(Press TV) — A top court in Luxembourg has officially blocked a long-running request by the U.S. administration to seize \$1.6 billion worth of Iranian cash assets as compensation for alleged terror victims of the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States.



The Luxembourg Court of Cassation announced in an official statement on Monday that the appeals court has found the U.S. seizure demand “inadmissible” and in violation of the Luxembourg’s national law since the type of account, in which the cash is held in the European country, is “unseizable.”

The funds are currently kept in the Clearstream clearing house, a financial company owned by Deutsche Boerse based in Luxembourg.

The statement added that a Luxembourg district judge had blocked the transfer of funds and ruled that Clearstream would be subject to a daily fine of \$1.09 million if it moved the money.

This came after Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said a day earlier that the country had won a legal “victory” over the assets that had long been frozen on a U.S. request in Luxembourg.

“\$1.6 billion of our money was in Luxembourg and the Americans had put their hands on it,” Rouhani said, adding that after trying for months, “We succeeded some and freed this money from the Americans’ grasp.”

Back in 2012, a New York court claimed there was evidence to show that Iran provided “material support and resources” to al-Qaeda operatives that carried out the terrorist attacks in the US in 2001.

The New York court awarded the plaintiffs damages of over \$7 billion.

Iran has denied any links to al-Qaeda or any involvement in the 9/11 attacks.

Tensions have escalated between Washingtonian and Tehran particularly after President Donald Trump reinstated US sanctions on Iran in May 2018 after he unilaterally left the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), signed between Iran and major world powers.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) — known as the World Court — has ordered the US to lift the sanctions it has illegally re-imposed on humanitarian supplies to Iran.

U.S. at highest level of vulnerability: Rahim Safavi

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — The strategic dilemmas that the US is facing in the world and Washington’s dysfunctional policies coupled with the coronavirus crisis have put the U.S. at the highest level of vulnerability and erosion, a senior Iranian commander said.



In remarks at a meeting on Tuesday, Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi, a top military aide to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, said the U.S. has decided to intensify the policy of psychological and virtual warfare because of its aggravating conditions.

“At present, the U.S. is at the highest level of vulnerability, passiveness and erosion,” the ranking general said, adding that such conditions are a result of the strategic dilemmas that the U.S. is facing in the regional and international sphere and its failure in the international arena compared to other powers in the wake of outbreak of the coronavirus.

Not only is the U.S. facing serious problems with the management of the coronavirus crisis in its own country, but it is suffering from a crippling shock in the military sphere and in implementing security and military policies, the Iranian commander said.

He highlighted the futility of the U.S.’ strategy to establish military bases in Southwest and East Asia, saying those bases are turning into a weak point and a threat for the Americans.

The number of coronavirus deaths in the U.S. has exceeded 23,600 while number of confirmed cases surpasses 587,000.

Army to unveil five achievements

➔ According to Fars news agency, General Heidari announced last month that the military body would use three types of home-made vehicles to disinfect and sanitize public places in big cities across the country to further contribute to the national campaign against the new coronavirus outbreak.

Also, late in March, the Army launched a medical center with 2,000 beds at the Tehran International Permanent Fairground special to the coronavirus patients who are recovering from the deadly disease.

In his Tuesday remarks, the Army ground forces chief also said military equipment like Kian-500, Kian-600 and Kian-700 vehicles and anti-armor missiles will be also unveiled on Wednesday.

Tunisian activists condemn U.S. sanctions on Iran

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — A number of Tunisian political activists and jurists have condemned the United States sanctions on Iran when the country is fighting the coronavirus.

The activists and jurists have urged the U.S. to immediately remove sanctions on Iran given the dangers of the coronavirus pandemic, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

Khalid Shaikat, a Tunisian political activist, told Al-Ahed news website that the U.S. sanctions violate the human rights and are unacceptable.

“The danger of the coronavirus pandemic must make the humanity united and lead superpowers to stop adopting inhuman policies and pressure, because such policies impede the fight against the coronavirus,” he said. As of Tuesday, April 14, the total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran reached 74,877, of whom 4,683 have died and 48,129 recovered.

Salah al-Dawoody, a researcher and university professor, told Al-Ahed that sanctions in coronavirus pandemic have revealed the U.S. “ugly image” in Donald Trump’s presidential term and have also revealed Washington’s “brutal and criminal” nature.

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

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

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

“Today, the world is changing and im-



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

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

It is very unfortunate that despite international pressure the U.S. has not lifted sanctions it has imposed on Iran, IRNA quoted her as saying on April 8.

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

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

Chris Murphy, U.S. senator from Connecti-

cut, has said Iranians are dying of coronavirus partly because of U.S. sanctions.

“Innocent civilians are dying there in part because our sanctions are limiting humanitarian aid during coronavirus,” Murphy wrote on his Twitter page on April 6.

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

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

“The United States can reduce restrictions and facilitate Iran’s access to medicine, however, the government of the United States does not prioritize this issue which is regrettable,” Rowlands told ILNA in an interview published on April 6.

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

Analyst says Ashraf Ghani should reach an agreement with Abdullah Abdullah

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Nozar Shafiei, an expert on international affairs, has said that Ashraf Ghani has no way but to reach an agreement with Abdullah Abdullah.

“If he [Ghani] does not understand this situation, continuation of developments will be harmful to him,” he told ISNA in an interview published on Tuesday.

He said that situation in Afghanistan is volatile and peace process in the country has been endangered.

Pointing to Abdullah’s plan to end political crisis in the country, he said that Ghani should not consider himself as an undisputed power.

“Afghanistan is a country in which there are ethnic competition and entering the world of politics in such a society is like moving on razor’s edge,” he said.

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.

According to Tolo News, sources close to Abdullah said that he has made his final decisions about ending the political crisis and that he is preparing the final draft of his plan.

The sources added that Abdullah is seeking a decision-making leadership role in the peace process, but he wants all decisions regarding peace to be made collectively within the reconciliation council.

Abdullah’s aides will hold their final discussions to finalize

Abdullah’s proposed plan, according to sources.

Officials from the Presidential Palace and the Sapidar Palace are optimistic that the political tension may end soon.

“It will be a nice step if Mr. Abdullah works on the peace process. We see it as a good omen. It will be in the country’s favor if President Ghani reaches an agreement with the Stability and Convergence team,” said Mohammad Karim Azimi, an analyst.

The sources also said that Abdullah has asked for a 50% share in the cabinet and for the authority to appoint governors in provinces where he had more votes in last year’s presidential elections.

Abdullah will propose the deal as a political agreement, the sources said.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif 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 Haneef Atmar, Zarif highlighted the necessity of unity among various Afghan groups.

Also, in separate phone conversations with Ghani and 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 country’s 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 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.

Rouhani says U.S. imperialism is ‘more dangerous’ than coronavirus

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said late on Monday that the United States imperialism is a virus that is “more dangerous than the coronavirus” for the international community.

Rouhani made the remarks in a phone conversation with Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

The president said, “The excessive demands and bullying of the United States statesmen have always put pressure against the inde-

pendent and freedom-seeking nations such as Iran and Venezuela.”

Rouhani added, “Iran and Venezuela have resisted the United States’ aggressive and old virus through solidarity and expansion of co-operation.”

Elsewhere, he pointed to Iran’s actions in fighting the coronavirus and success in producing diagnostic kits and medical equipment and said that Iran is ready to transfer its ex-

periences to Venezuela.

For his part, Maduro said an international fight against the coronavirus is underway, noting that cooperation are required to contain the virus.

The Venezuelan leader also said that Iran and Venezuela have always been in a united front against the U.S. imperialism.

Maduro added that the U.S. has not succeeded in preventing the freedom-seeking countries to make advances.

Chinese envoy: Tehran, Beijing partners in dire situations

TEHRAN (FNA) —Chinese Ambassador tin Tehran Chang Hua stressed strategic partnership of Tehran and Beijing as they have stood by each other during tough times.

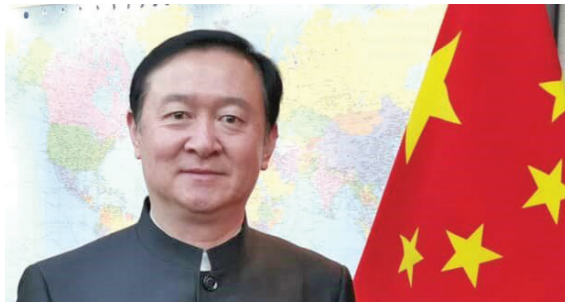
“We are in the same boat and traveling in the same direction,” Chang Hua reiterated on Tuesday.

Emphasizing that China has made strenuous efforts to prevent and control coronavirus successfully, he added that Iran sympathized with China soon after the outbreak and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif expressed support for China in battling the virus.

He said the motto “Be strong China. Be strong Wuhan” cried by Mohammad-Javad Zarif indicates honest friendship between the two nations. “These things will never be forgotten,” the Chinese official stated.

“China will never forget Iran’s generous assistance to send masks and medical equipment to China. Iran is under strict US sanctions; yet, they spared no effort to help,” Chang added.

“Video-mapping of Azadi Tower in Tehran, the 10-thousand signature letter, video messages from the Iranian people, including children ... all show vast support of China from Iranian people,” he said.



He also said that an Iranian youth stayed in Wuhan during the quarantine time and served coffee for the medical staff, encouraging them to fight the virus strongly.

Referring to the message sent to President Rouhani by Chinese President Xi Jinping, he said upon the viral outbreak in Iran, the Chinese government sent medical aid and a medical team to help Iranians prevent and control the virus and treat patients.

Chang stressed that Iran and China have had good relations for the past 2,000 years and these good ties will

not be affected by temporary challenges.

Iranian health ministry announced on Tuesday that 1,574 more cases of coronavirus infection have been identified in the country, adding that the virus has killed 4,683 people so far.

“1,574 more patients infected with COVID-19 virus have been identified in the country since yesterday, increasing the total number of coronavirus patients in Iran to 74,887 people” Iranian Health Ministry Spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Monday.

He added that 4,683 people have lost their lives due to infection to the virus, including 98 in the past 24 hours.

Jahanpour, meantime, said that 48,129 infected people have been treated and dismissed from hospital, wishing rapid recovery for 3,691 patients who are in critical conditions.

He noted that 287,359 coronavirus diagnosis tests have been carried out in the country so far.

The coronavirus COVID-19 is affecting approximately all countries and territories around the world. The virus was first reported in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year. It has so far killed more than 120,000 people and infected over 1.93 million others globally.

Zarif: Significant progress made in coronavirus fight despite sanctions

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says Iran has made significant progress in fighting the coronavirus outbreak in spite of the United States' sanctions.

"Despite US sanctions, Iran has made significant progress in fighting the pandemic, thanks to its human & scientific resources, and friends abroad," Zarif tweeted on Tuesday night.

"#Covid19 was opportunity for US to kick its addiction to sanctions. Instead, it will now live in infamy in the memory of our people," he added.

Last week, Zarif ruled out what he called charity from U.S. President Donald Trump.

"Iran is rich in human & natural resources. We don't need charity from @realDonaldTrump — who's forced to buy ventilators from sources he's sanctioned," he said via Twitter.

Zarif, however, emphasized that "What we want is for him to STOP preventing Iran from selling oil & other products, buying its needs & making & receiving payments."

Iran was initially among the countries hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic. But Western countries soon overtook Iran due to the virus's exponential growth in the West, as opposed to its linear growth in Iran.

However, The United States' illegal sanctions — which were put in place after



Trump withdrew the U.S. from the Iran nuclear deal — have been described as one of the greatest obstacles impeding Iran's full containment of the deadly disease.

In line with his "maximum pressure" campaign on Tehran, Trump has introduced a total ban on Iran's oil export, the country's

main source of income. The oil embargo was intended to choke off the Iranian economy.

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

"We had a sanctions virus, to which the

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

In the struggle to contain the deadly disease, the Iranian people have also resisted well and assisted each other, the president remarked.

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

Also on Sunday, Iran's permanent mission to the United Nations said in a message 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 read.

The U.S. sanctions are drastically hindering Iran's efforts to identify and treat patients and effectively prevent the spread of the virus, it said.

"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 statement added.

American analyst: Iran's performance at containing COVID-19 'truly amazing'

Trump has shown a complete lack of leadership in coronavirus crisis

1→ Colorado, people were already lining up to get free food. This was before the global financial meltdown of 2008 and I can only imagine what it must be like there now with the coronavirus pandemic, which has brought most of the U.S. economy to a halt.

Since the presidency of Ronald Reagan and his philosophy of "government is the problem," the social safety nets set up under the Franklin Roosevelt administration during the Great Depression of the 1930s have been gradually and persistently dismantled. As a result, private organizations, often in partnership with local governments have tried to fill the gaps, but without consistent, adequate funding, these programs are at best stop-gap measures in lieu of support at the national level.

With the ascendancy of Trump, who has done his best to gut any remaining social programs, we see the culmination of the neoliberal agenda. In February at the height of the stock market when the Dow Jones index was around 29500, this little man, who really should be tried for negligent homicide, proposed more budget cuts to the Centers for Disease Control after having eliminated 80 percent of the agency's capabilities to respond to a global outbreak like we are seeing now.

Are these things the consequences of capitalism in which a very small percentage, or better to say "one percent", keeps everything in its possession to the extent that when a crisis, such as the Covid-19 emerges, the people are pushed to near starvation.

"In Europe, there seems to have been a lack of coordinated leadership, so each country acted more or less independently, much like the individual states in the U.S. have done."

A: Absolutely. The neoliberal ideologues see the free market as the solution to all social problems, and when applied to healthcare, housing and food distribution, the results are exactly what we are witnessing now in the United States: millions of people lack access to healthcare, cannot find affordable housing and are food insecure.

Don't you think that the weaknesses of capitalism are being laid bare more evidently in such situations?

A: Definitely. One of the consequences of the free market is the lack of robustness in the healthcare delivery system. The free market approach dictates profit maximization, so healthcare deliverers concentrate on what is profitable, such as elective surgeries or other boutique services, which only the one percent, as you put it, can afford. There is absolutely no incentive for a corporate healthcare provider to plan for a "black swan" event like the COVID-19 epidemic. For a large health care conglomerate to provide hospital beds and to stockpile masks and other supplies would be considered a breach of fiduciary trust.

And this is precisely the problem with applying the for-profit model to the healthcare system. If a hospital system only uses 85 percent of its beds on average, then eliminating the unused 15 percent would make the system more profitable by reducing unnecessary costs. The end result of this process, which has been going on in the U.S. for at least 40 years, is a bare-bones healthcare system that functions efficiently, but has no robustness to cope with a pandemic, a hurricane, an earthquake or any other unusual calamity.

Socialism is being constantly attacked by the capitalists. However, in a country in which avaricious capitalism does not talk first, the public should enjoy minimum standards of living, having a home (no matter how small it is) and have access to free healthcare. In view of such realities, don't you think that capitalism must be controlled?

A: As for myself, I have long held that public control of an enterprise must be in direct proportion to the amount of capital invested. I suppose a corollary of this would be that all essential public services, such as healthcare and public transportation, should be nationalized. Certainly, public housing should be expanded on a national level, as currently the local public-private partnerships building "affordable housing" suffer from an inability to meet the demand.

Recalling the Iranian experience, Imam Khomeini (ra) instituted a Construction Jihad following the victory of the

"Millions of people (in the U.S.) lack access to healthcare and are food insecure."

Islamic Revolution. While it would be too much to expect a similar national program in America, even in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, still there is historical precedent: President Franklin Roosevelt took dramatic action during the Great Depression to revitalize the economy. So, if after the COVID-19 outbreak subsides American policymakers are still too arrogant and ideologically challenged to use Iran as a model for rebuilding their country, then they can look back 80 years to Roosevelt's actions for guidance.

Also, do you think that the statistics given by the U.S. about Covid-19 victims are true, especially as officials in Washington keep accusing Iran of covering up the extent of the crisis at home?

A: Ask an old mathematician a statistical question, and... Well, no, frankly I believe the U.S. numbers reported are low. There is a theorem in statistics called the Law of Large Numbers. Basically, the idea is that given a set of random samples, the averages of each should converge to the same value as sample size increases. Now looking at the attack rates, that is, the cumulative number of confirmed cases per 100,000 persons, the range is from 0 (Yemen) to almost 1000 (San Marino) with 500 (Iceland) in the middle. The U.S. is around 150 in the middle of the other major western powers, ranging from 100 to 200. To me, this seems like an incredible spread. It could be that the western powers are not doing enough testing, or are not reporting the true numbers.

Do you also believe that the world in general failed to contain the virus?

A: If we accept the hypothesis that the virus had its origins in Wuhan, then, based on reported cases and deaths in comparison to Europe and America, China has done a spectacular job of containing the pandemic. Likewise Iran's efforts at containing the outbreak have been truly amazing, especially given that the country remains under an economic assault by the United

"I maintain this dangerously demented dilettante (Trump) should be indicted for negligent homicide."

States, and can't even purchase all the necessary medical and humanitarian supplies for its population.

What is your assessment of the handling of the virus by the Trump administration?

A: Honestly, I would have to say at best, the current U.S. president has shown a complete lack of leadership, leaving individual state governors to cope with the outbreak as best as they can. Here in New Mexico, we are fortunate enough to have a governor, Michelle Lujan Grisham, who saw the danger coming, marshalled the necessary resources and issued a state-wide stay-at-home order to reduce the spread of the virus.

Forgive my bluntness, but had the culpable clown in the White House taken the pandemic seriously when first informed of it in his daily security briefings in December 2019, and acted decisively upon the warnings, there would have been fewer than the 23,000 deaths as of this moment. Medical supplies could have been allocated from federal stockpiles; a national task force of medical professionals could have been formed; responses, testing methods and strategies could have been developed; and, international lines of communication made ready.

But no, the bigoted buffoon in residence chose to pretend, at least publicly, that there was no danger, everything was under control, and the coronavirus would die out. Worse yet, this criminal con man claimed hydroxychloroquine was a cure, and several people have died as a result. That's why I maintain this dangerously demented dilettante should be indicted for negligent homicide. So now, Americans are faced with a raging pandemic that also happens to be causing an economic crisis, which portends to be greater than the Great Depression.

It seems that East Asian countries, such as Japan and South Korea, have been acting more successfully in containing the virus than the U.S. and European countries. What are the reasons?

A: The number one reason for Japan and South Korea's success in combatting COVID-19 is effective leadership. Both

countries' leaders recognized and acknowledged the threat, informed the public of the danger, and initiated a vigorous program of mass testing and quarantine. The opposite happened in the U.S., with Trump being more interested in keeping stock prices high for his billionaire buddies than in the wellbeing of his fellow Americans. In Europe, there seems to have been a lack of coordinated leadership, so each country acted more or less independently, much like the individual states in the U.S. have done.

How do you see the post-Coronavirus world?

A: Whether or not one believes the coronavirus was engineered, it is clear that the one-percenters had contingency plans in place to activate during such a calamity. For example, the speed with which the U.S. Federal Reserve responded was astounding. On March 3, long before Trump fully acknowledged the severity of COVID-19, the FED lowered the federal funds rate to 0 to 0.25 percent, which represents an extremely drastic 1.5 percent reduction, in response to falling stock prices. In addition, the FED has returned to the policy of quantitative easing (QE), purchasing treasury and mortgage-backed securities, as it did during the 2008 global financial crisis. The greatest activity is in the so-called repo market, where the FED has gone from loaning \$100 billion overnight to \$1 trillion to keep credit markets afloat, and even is offering \$500 billion for up to three months.

On March 24, the FED appointed Larry Fink, CEO of BlackRock to oversee its corporate debt purchase program, which was passed by Congress as part of the coronavirus relief package. Previously involved with the 2001 post 9/11 bailout and again in the 2008 bailout, Fink is potentially managing some \$27 trillion in assets, making him perhaps the most powerful man in the world, at least financially speaking, and now he is effectively overseeing both the Federal Reserve and the U.S. Treasury. The current FED chairman, Jerome Powell was warned about the danger of making BlackRock into such a critical part of the U.S., and hence, global financial system.

The immediate problem for U.S. small businesses is staying afloat until the pandemic passes. While loans are available from the FED through banks, problems have already arisen. Wells Fargo was to process loans because of additional reserve requirements imposed as a result of past behavior involving fraudulent accounts. Additionally, navigating the bureaucracy requires legal help that most small businesses do not have nor can afford. Furthermore, with their customers lacking sufficient disposable income to buy goods and services, many small businesses will undoubtedly go under.

As far as the aftermath of U.S. healthcare, I really don't see major changes coming despite the shocks now taking place. With privatization so engrained in the minds of policymakers,

"Had the culpable clown in the White House taken the pandemic seriously when first informed of it in his daily security briefings in December 2019, and acted decisively upon the warnings, there would have been fewer than the 23,000 deaths as of this moment."

it is almost inconceivable that, in the wake of COVID-19, there would be a logical and rational shift towards nationalized healthcare. In addition, Americans react negatively to any hint of socialized medicine, or threats to their imagined and nonexistent freedom of choice when it comes to medical care. I would expect at most in the post-coronavirus world that Medicare might be expanded by lowering the eligible age to 60, and the so-called ObamaCare, the Affordable Care Act, might be amended to provide a greater choice of coverages.

It is harder to predict what the post-corona virus American society will look like. Following the relaxation of social distancing and a resumption of daily schedules, people will undoubtedly feel the residual effect of COVID-19 for years to come. The only similar event with respect to profound impact would have been the 9/11 attacks, and it was years before daily life returned to a semblance of normality. With the coronavirus, I doubt that life in America will ever be the same. It will be interesting to see what happens next.

IRGC forms center to aid 3.5m families affected by coronavirus

1→ The participants — including Head of Mostazafan Foundation Parviz Fattah, Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani, Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation Director Mohammad Mokhber and Basij Chief Gholamreza Soleimani — agreed to participate in the formation of the Imam Hassan Headquarters.

During the meeting, General Salami said while the entire world is dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, the Iranian nation is faced with other viruses at the same time, such as the U.S. sanctions, hostile psychological operations, and even the enemy's threat of military action.

He also lauded the governmental bodies for taking part in the Imam Hassan Headquarters, saying around 3.5 million families will benefit from the relief efforts.



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 commanders have taken part in a countrywide exercise launched by Basij, called "Devout Help", following the Leader's call to help the needy.

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

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.mcsls.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 Tuesday, the total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran reached 74,877, of whom 4,683 have died and 48,129 recovered.

Judiciary chief hails IRGC efforts for public welfare

TEHRAN (MNA) — Iran's Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi on Tuesday lauded the great efforts made by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) in different fields to alleviate the challenges the public is facing in these hard times.



"The Guards is people's refuge in difficult situations," Raisi said during a visit to the IRGC's biological defense and environmental disinfecting drill in Tehran.

Describing the developments of the elite force in different sectors, including the healthcare, the judiciary chief said that such capabilities have given great hope to our nation, and, at the same time, have been a thorn in the eyes of the enemies.

"Our armed forces capability to turn the threats, such as the new pandemic, into opportunities are all the results of the Islamic Revolution," he added.

Raisi expressed gratitude to all commanders and personnel of the IRGC, as well as other forces, who have selflessly been trying to tackle the challenges created by the coronavirus pandemic in the country.

The IRGC, Basij and Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation, as well as other volunteer forces, have been active in establishing hospitals, providing medical supplies and also helping the needy from the very first day of the pandemic outbreak in Iran.

The IRGC has initiated the formation of a headquarters to organize aid programs and support around 3.5 million Iranian families affected by the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

Moreover, IRGC Spokesperson General Ramezan Sharif said on Sunday that the IRGC commanders have decided to donate 20% of their salaries to coronavirus relief efforts.

Rouhani outlines details of corona rescue package

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's President Hassan Rouhani, on Tuesday, announced the government's one-quadrillion rials (about \$23.8 billion at the official rate of 42,000 rials per dollar) rescue package is going to be spent on health care equipment and funding unemployment insurances.



Speaking in a cabinet economic meeting, Rouhani said this package has been provisioned to help low-income households and struggling businesses that have been affected by the economic consequences of the pandemic over the past two months.

According to Rouhani, as part of this package, 10,000,000-rial (about \$238) loans are going to be paid to low-income households, which are currently receiving government's cash subsidies, before the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan (April 25).

The government had previously announced that about 230 trillion rials (\$5.4 billion as per official exchange rate) will be offered as loans with 12-percent interest rates to small and medium enterprises and low-income households.

It was decided in the meeting that the government would shoulder the interest rates and loans will be offered without any interest, the president announced.

Rouhani went on saying that 520 trillion rials (about \$12.3 billion) is also going to be offered in the form of loans to 10 prioritized business and production categories which have been affected the most from the coronavirus outbreak.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the official mentioned the acceleration of the process of clearing goods from the country's customs and said: "Of the four million tons of basic goods which have been deposited in the customs, one million have been already cleared."

We are taking all necessary measures for clearing all of the deposited goods in the upcoming weeks, he said.

Stocks rise gains on China trade data, easing pandemic fears

World stocks gained on Tuesday after Chinese trade data came in better than expected and some countries tried to restart their economy by partly lifting restrictions aimed at containing the coronavirus outbreak.

European stock markets opened stronger, with the pan-European STOXX 600 index rising 0.6% to its highest since March 11.

Analysts said the threat of a much deeper and prolonged downturn was starting to dissipate as new coronavirus cases declined in major economies and a raft of monetary and fiscal stimulus took effect globally.

Spanish shares .IBEX gained 1.5% as some businesses re-opened, although shops, bars and public spaces were set to stay closed until at least April 26.



"Although further slowdown in the pandemic's spreading may keep sentiment supported, we are still reluctant to trust a long-lasting recovery, and we prefer to take things day by day," said Charalambos Pissouras, analyst at JFD Group.

Market sentiment was boosted by data showing China's exports fell only 6.6% in March from a year ago, less than the expected 14% plunge. Imports fell 0.9% compared with expectations for a 9.5% drop.

The gains in Europe took MSCI's All-Country World Index .MIWD00000PUS, which tracks shares across 49 countries, up 0.5%.

Chinese shares gained, with the blue-chip index .CSI300 up 1.2%. Australian shares were up 1.7% and Japan's Nikkei .N225 rose 2.8%. Hong Kong's Hang Seng .HSI was up 0.9%.

MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares excluding Japan .MIAPJ00000PUS rose 1.3% to its highest in a month, up 20% from a four-year low on March 19.

Investors are now eyeing the easing of virus-related restrictions in some regions for further trading cues.

In Europe, thousands of shops across Austria are set to re-open on Tuesday. Spain recorded its smallest proportional daily rise in the number of deaths and new infections since early March and let some businesses return to work on Monday.

In the United States, which has recorded the highest number of casualties from the virus in the world, President Donald Trump said on Monday his administration was close to completing a plan to re-open the U.S. economy. However, some state governors say the decision to restart businesses lies with them.

Wall Street indexes ended mixed on Monday. The Dow and S&P 500 fell, but a 6.2% gain in Amazon shares helped the Nasdaq end higher.

"The pullback in US equities should come as no surprise in light of last week's historic rally," said Mark Haeefe, chief investment officer at UBS Wealth Management, noting the S&P 500 posting its best weekly performance since 1974.

"Sentiment will zigzag until there is more clarity on formal measures to reopen major economies. More broadly, even though global markets have rebounded, it is difficult to say with any certainty whether the bottom has been reached."

Oil prices rose around 1% after the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) predicted shale output in the world's biggest crude producer would fall by a record amount in April, adding to cuts from other major producers.

U.S. crude CLC1 was up 0.85% at \$22.55 a barrel, compared with a January peak of \$63.27. Brent LCOc1 rose 1.3% to \$32.16 a barrel.

Gold prices XAU= clung to highs not seen in more than seven years at \$1,720.1 an ounce.

In currencies, the dollar extended losses on the back of the U.S. Federal Reserve's massive new lending program. It weakened against the Japanese yen JPY= to 107.7. The euro EUR= was up 0.2% at \$1.0929. The risk-sensitive Australian dollar AUD=D3 jumped 0.6% to \$0.6420.

(Source: Reuters)

'Govt. should establish health protocol with neighbors to spur exports'

1 → so any disruption in the country's non-oil exports to its neighbors would impose a much greater burden on Iran's economy compared to other developing nations in the region.

In this regard, the Tehran Times conducted an interview with the Energy Expert Hamid-Reza Salehi, who is the Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA)'s Energy Committee, in which we discussed the issue.

What follows is a summary of this interview.

■ Moving toward a non-oil economy

Asked about the economic impacts of the coronavirus outbreak in the country, Salehi noted that currently, the disruption in the non-oil exports to the neighbors could be pointed out as the most significant effect of the crisis along with the costs which the pandemic have imposed on the economy.

"In the energy sector, almost all of our trade activities including the exports of gasoline and technical and engineering services have severely been affected as a result of the spread of this deadly virus," he said.

According to the official, since Iran has been taking serious steps toward a less-oil-reliant



Hamid-Reza Salehi, the head of ICCIMA's Energy Committee

economy in the face of the U.S. sanctions, and non-oil exports, especially the exports of petrochemical and oil products to the neighboring countries like Iraq, Turkey, and Afghanistan, have been playing a significant role in this process, the long-term disruption of trade with the neighbors could cause drastic issues for the country in the future.

Divesting state-owned shares seriously pursued by Finance Ministry

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's Finance and Economic Affairs Ministry announced that the process of transferring the shares of state-owned companies to the private sector is seriously followed up by this ministry, IRNA reported.

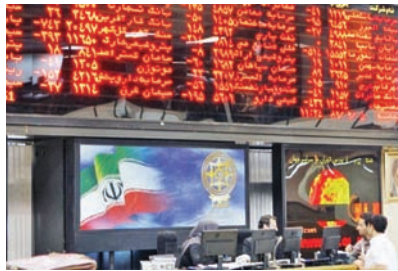
It is while last week President Hassan Rouhani had instructed Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejjasand that this process should be expedited and the proper ground should be rapidly laid in the stock market to this end.

The current Iranian calendar year (began on March 20) is named the year of "Surge in Production" by the Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei.

One of the areas which can play a significant role in surging domestic production is privatization, something that has been under the spotlight in the country over the past decade, aiming at more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in the domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden on the government.

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

Although since then, the privatization process has been facing several challenges in the country, and has fallen behind schedule, drawing attention to the fact that urgent



action should be done in this due.

Last year, Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejjasand had announced that offering the shares of state-owned companies, which were planned to be privatized, would be sped up.

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

While downsizing the government has been on the agenda, now "Surge in Production", which requires a strong presence of the private sector in all production areas, makes paying attention to privatization more vital.

The government should take the necessary measures as soon as possible to remove all hurdles in the way of privatization, the process should be amended, and the condition for offering shares should be improved.

In fact, as many economists believe, if the government wants a surge in production, privatization if done correctly is one of the main ways to reach it.

250 water, electricity projects to be inaugurated by March 2021

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Following a program called "A-B-Iran", the Iranian Energy Ministry is going to inaugurate 250 major water and electricity projects worth 500 trillion rials (about \$11.9 billion) during the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2021), IRIB quoted Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian as saying on Monday.

According to Ardakanian, in the water sector, the mentioned projects include nine major dams, implementation of modern irrigation systems in 54,000 hectares of land, 20 water, and wastewater treatment plants and supplying drinkable water through pipeline to more than 1400 rural areas across the country.

As for the power projects, inauguration of 12 thermal power plants with a total capacity of 2,100 megawatts (MW) as well as hundreds of solar and wind farms and other small scale power stations are on the agenda.

The official further pointed to the electricity exchange with neighboring countries and the establishment of joint committees and consortiums with Russia, Afghanistan, Armenia, Tajikistan and Qatar as other programs of the ministry for this year.

Mentioning the A-B-Iran scheme [the acronyms A and B stand for water, electricity in Persian], under which the ministry inaugurates some water, electricity projects across the country every

to re-establish the trade channels with the neighboring countries.

The government should support the private sector and non-oil exporters, as many of our neighbors like Turkey are doing so, not only in the current situation but in general, he stressed.

According to the official, to remedy the current situation the government needs to negotiate the establishment of a health-security protocol with the neighboring countries to ensure the safety of trade and to normalize the situation.

Under the current circumstances, establishing such a protocol could facilitate the country's trade and business activities with the neighbors and this can also be generalized to other countries as well, he highlighted.

Salehi further emphasized that "this situation is not only for Iran, many production units in other countries and especially in our neighbors, need raw materials and their production has been halted so it is essential that all countries, which are grappling with this virus, to cooperate in setting up a taskforce for supporting the industry and economy sectors."



week, Ardakanian noted that the program has been already commenced and four projects are scheduled to be inaugurated this week in Tehran.

In early March, Ardakanian had announced that 5,931 energy projects worth 8.84 quadrillion rials (about \$210.4 billion) are underway across the country.

Speaking on the occasion of finishing the A-B-Iran program on March 11, the official said during this program 227 major projects with a total investment of 335.6 trillion rials (about \$7.99 billion) went operational across the country.

According to the minister, during the 20 weeks of the mentioned program in the previous year, the minister made 31 trips to various provinces for inaugurating energy projects.

The official also announced that three power plants and 40 new projects worth 60 trillion rials (about \$1.4 billion) will be inaugurated during the first quarter of the current calendar year.

Surviving Covid-19, the Swiss economy's strengths and weaknesses

By Armando Mombelli

The current pandemic will plunge the world economy into recession, at least in the first part of the year. What tools does Switzerland have to minimize the economic and social damage of this crisis? And what factors could jeopardize the prospects for an economic recovery?

The CHF10 billion (\$10.3 billion) in emergency aid announced by the Swiss government on March 13 was increased to CHF40 billion on March 20 and then to CHF60 billion on April 3. With this money, which is far from final, the government intends to implement measures to stem the economic and social consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. In particular, they will serve to provide liquidity for companies, prevent redundancies as far as possible and cover the loss of earnings of employees.

The coronavirus pandemic has fundamentally changed the economic outlook for Switzerland, with Swiss CFOs more pessimistic than ever before.

This is the largest aid package ever agreed by the Swiss government. The CHF60 billion planned so far corresponds almost to what the government spends in one year (CHF71 billion in 2019) and is 8.5% of gross domestic product (GDP). But it will probably not be enough to cope with the economic repercussions of the pandemic. According to various estimates, the Swiss economy is losing CHF4-5 billion a week, which is likely to increase considerably if the current situation continues and many companies close down.

Switzerland overcame the 2008 crisis better than many other European countries, although the crisis had directly hit one of the pillars of its economy, the banking sector. It has at least three strengths to deal with this historic challenge, but just as many weaknesses.

■ Moderate public debt

The G20 countries external link, which provide 85% of global economic output, have said they will earmark \$5 trillion to minimize the economic and social damage of the pandemic, boost growth and maintain market stability. Several other governments intend to inject huge amounts of money into their economies. These contributions are essential to deal with the current emergency, but they will further burden an increasingly unsustainable public debt for many countries.

According to OECD data, in 2018 the debt burden was already overwhelming for Japan (240% of GDP), Italy (147%), the United States (136%), France (122%), (Britain 117%) and Spain (115%), to name but a few countries. In Switzerland, public debt (government, cantons and municipalities) amounts to just 27% of GDP.

This low share is linked in particular to the debt brake ex-



ternal link, a mechanism introduced by the government since 2003 to prevent structural financial imbalances and to put an end to the persistent deficits accumulated since the 1990s. Since 2006, government accounts have almost systematically recorded surpluses, which are used to relieve debt. The debt brake, which has also been adopted by the cantons, now gives Switzerland good financial leeway to alleviate the repercussions of the inevitable economic recession.

■ Compensation for short-term work

Another important tool to ease the economic and social consequences of the pandemic is compensation for short-time work, set up to cope with temporary declines in business activities and to safeguard jobs. In times of crisis, instead of making people redundant, companies can reduce working hours for a certain period of time and use this compensation to cover part of the wages.

Thanks to this, employers hold on to already trained employees who can quickly resume activities. For their part, employees don't end up unemployed and keep their social protection intact. In the United States in comparison some ten million workers have found themselves unemployed in the past three weeks.

Short-time work compensation has already been paid to thousands of companies in recent crises, but never at levels comparable to the current one. Since mid-March, benefits have been claimed for around 1.3 million employees – a quarter of the active workforce in Switzerland.

■ Own central bank

Under Mario Draghi, the European Central Bank played a key role in stabilizing the economic situation in the Eurozone after the international crisis of 2008. But the current disputes over whether to issue Eurobonds demonstrate once again the conflicting expectations of European states. The Swiss National Bank external link (SNB), however, can implement a monetary policy tailored to the specific needs of an individual economy.

Should the coronavirus crisis drain the government's resources, the SNB could intervene with large injections of money.

The idea of such interventions by the SNB has always horrified more liberal parties and economists. But it was primarily the SNB that saved the largest Swiss bank (UBS) in 2008. The pressure on the central bank, which posted a profit of CHF50 billion last year, would become quite strong in the event of major social imbalances.

■ Dependence on exports

Switzerland does not have a large domestic market like Germany or Japan and earns around one franc in two abroad. More than two-thirds of its exports are absorbed by the EU and the US. If these countries were to slide into a long and deep recession, Switzerland could not come out of it lightly either, as was the case after the collapse of the world economy in 2008.

■ Franc too strong

The strength of the Swiss franc has symbolized the stability of the Swiss economy for decades and helped attract investment in companies and capital into banks. However, since the introduction of the euro at the latest, the strong franc has also become one of Switzerland's weak points: any strengthening of the franc against the European currency weakens the competitiveness of the export industry and the tourism sector. Over the past fortnight the SNB has once again had to intervene on several occasions to prevent another surge in the franc, which is regarded as a safe haven in times of crisis. But even these interventions may not be enough in the event of new turbulence in the Eurozone.

■ Hazardous isolation

In the wake of the 2008 crisis, the United States and the main European countries were forced to finance enormous bank rescue and economic recovery measures which left behind a mountain of debt. In order to get money back into the state coffers, the governments of these countries decided to adopt a common strategy to eliminate loopholes used by companies and individuals to escape the tax authorities.

Under the aegis of the G20, the OECD and the EU, major international tax reforms have been introduced, leading to the automatic exchange of information on bank accounts and new rules on the taxation of transnational corporations. Switzerland, completely isolated, is among the countries that have been most affected by the new international standards.

A scenario that risks being repeated with this new crisis. The Swiss government, for example, will have little say in defending its interests in the ongoing negotiations at the G20 and the OECD on a new international corporate tax system. It should enable countries with a large market to get a much more substantial share of the taxes paid by web giants and other transnational corporations. According to initial estimates, the government risks losing CHF5 billion in tax revenue a year.

(Source: swissinfo.ch)

Reproduction from Iran's major gas storages up 33% yr/yr

ENERGY TEHRAN

Reproduction from Iran's Sarajeh and Shourijeh underground gas storages (UGS) in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19) increased by 33 percent compared to its preceding year, Ahmad Rajabi, director of technical affairs at the National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC), told Shana.

Referring to the importance of the mentioned storages, Rajabi said: "the storages supply gas to six northern and northeastern provinces that are far from the southern gas-rich regions, this has eliminated the need for importing gas from Turkmenistan giving these UGSs a special and strategic position."

According to the official during the previous year's first eight months (March 21–November 22, 2019), a total of 869 million cubic meters of gas was injected into the Sarajeh storage in the central province of Qom and 1.449 billion cubic meters were stored into the Shourijeh storage in the northeastern province of Khorasan Razavi.

Over 902 million cubic meters of gas were reproduced from the Sarajeh storage during



the cold season, an increase of 17 percent over the preceding year. The Shourijeh storage also reproduced 1.722 billion cubic meters

of gas, registering a 43-percent increase year on year.

As the first natural gas storage facility in

Iran and the Middle East, Sarajeh storage facility was officially inaugurated in January 2014 near Qom, 124km south of Tehran.

As one of the world's top gas producers, Iran is planning to expand its underground natural gas storage capacity to ensure that enough natural gas is available during peak demand periods to avoid electricity supply shortfalls in the future.

Back in November 2019, National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) announced that the company had awarded the development project of Shourijeh gas storage facility to an Iranian company based on a build-operate-transfer (BOT) contract.

In this regard, NIGC Head Hassan Montazer Torbati noted that following the development of the South Pars gas field and the increase in the country's gas production capacity, construction and development of the country's natural gas storage facilities has become a top priority.

Therefore, the capacity of the two storage facilities, Sarajeh and Shourijeh, is planned to increase to over seven billion cubic meters in the near future.

Oil slips as producer cuts fail to banish demand fears

Oil prices edged lower on Tuesday, with investors apparently unconvinced that record supply cuts could soon balance markets pummeled by the coronavirus pandemic, though a predicted plunge in U.S. shale output provided some support.

Brent futures fell 25 cents, or 0.8 percent, to \$31.49 a barrel by 0825 GMT after settling 0.8 percent higher on Monday. U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was down 22 cents, or 1 percent, at \$22.19, having dropped 1.5 percent in the previous session.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), along with Russia and other producing countries - a grouping known as OPEC+ - agreed over Easter to cut output by 9.7 million barrels per day (bpd) in May and June, equating to about 10 percent of global supply before the coronavirus outbreak.

Additional output cuts by the United States, the world's biggest producer, and other nations outside the OPEC+ group will take the estimated total reduction to about 19.5 million bpd.

Yet oil prices remain down by more than 50 percent this year.

"OPEC+ cut volumes are too small to counter the peak impact coming from the demand side," JBC Energy said in a note.

Inventories, where available, are expected to fill up fast even as some countries among the G20 group of nations agreed to buy oil for their national reserves.

Rystad Energy's head of oil markets, Bjornar Tonhaugen, noted that implementing the unprecedented



international deal would be a logistical challenge requiring weeks at least.

"Reducing upstream supply is not just turning off the tap or pushing a button. We would be surprised to see overall OPEC+ compliance at 50 percent through May," he said.

Still, U.S. production is falling in tandem with a drop in prices and there are signs that the coronavirus outbreak may have peaked in some areas of the world.

In China, where the virus started and is now largely under control, demand appears to be returning, data shows that crude oil imports rose 12 percent in March from a year earlier.

Supporting prices, U.S. shale oil output is expected to register the biggest monthly drop on record this month, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) said on Monday.

Production has been sliding for several months, but the declines are expected to accelerate sharply in April with a loss of nearly 200,000 bpd of production, the EIA said.

(Source: Reuters)

India plans to fill strategic oil storage by the third week of May

India plans to completely fill its strategic petroleum reserve (SPR) by the third week of May by moving about 19 million barrels into the sites by then, the managing director of the country's SPR said on Tuesday.

India is moving the oil to the SPR to help the country's refineries reduce their excess crude as the lockdown to contain the outbreak of COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the new coronavirus, has dented transportation and industrial fuel consumption in Asia's third-largest economy.

India's fuel demand in March declined by 17.8 percent, the lowest in over two decades. India will be diverting cargoes for loading in April already bought by refiners Indian Oil Corp, Bharat Petroleum, Hindustan Petroleum and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd. The refiners cut their crude processing after local fuel demand collapsed and are unable to store the excess oil themselves.

"As of now the plan is to fill the caverns by (the third week of May), before the arrival monsoon rains. We are buying oil from state refiners," H.P.S. Ahuja, the managing director of the Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd (ISPRL) said. ISPRL is responsible for building and filling of SPR sites.

ISPRL wants to receive the cargoes before India's monsoon begins in May as the single point mooring system that can unload very large crude carriers (VLCC) at the port of Mangalore, which will feed two SPR sites, is shut during the three-month



rainy season.

Reuters last month reported India planned to buy oil from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia to fill its SPR to gain from low prices.

"We are taking advantage of low oil prices," he said, adding most of these cargoes are linked to official selling prices (OSP) for April.

Saudi Arabia drastically cut its OSPs for April to boost its oil sales after major producers failed to agree to extend a supply curtailment agreement that expired at the end of March.

Ahuja said ISPRL hopes to receive the last oil cargo on May 21, while IOC supplied a VLCC containing oil from the UAE on Monday.

The SPR is divided between three locations in southern India and can store about 37 million barrels of oil, equivalent to about 9.5 days of India's oil demand. A portion of the SPR is already filled.

The federal government has allocated about 38 billion rupees (\$498.18 million) for the oil purchases, he said.

(Source: Reuters)

Saudi Arabia may tap debt market as oil output cuts hit revenues: sources

Saudi Arabia is likely to sell new international bonds soon as Sunday's historic deal to cut oil output among major producers puts further pressure on revenues already hurt by the collapse in crude prices, four banking sources said.

Riyadh increased its debt ceiling to 50 percent of GDP from a previous 30 percent in March. Neighbours Qatar and Abu Dhabi emirate successfully sold a combined \$17 billion of bonds last week.

"It's the logical next step (for Saudi to issue after Qatar and Abu Dhabi) ... they may wait a bit for the oil market to react to the cuts as their name is more closely associated with oil," said a debt banker.

A spokesman for the Saudi finance ministry did not immediately respond to a Reuters query on debt issuance plans.

Cuts pledged by Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, under Sunday's pact could wipe nearly \$40 billion from state revenues this year, according to one analyst who based that projection on an average oil price of \$40 a barrel.

Government coffers have already been strained by the oil price plunge and the impact of measures to stop the spread of the new coronavirus, including imposing curfews and closing most public venues across the kingdom.

To stabilise oil markets, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies led by Russia, a grouping known as OPEC+, agreed to cut output in May and June by 9.7 million barrels per day, or around 10 percent of global supply.

But the upside for crude prices could be limited even



after those record cuts.

"We believe that OPEC+'s proposed 9.7 million b/d reduction for May and June will not be sufficient to counter the sharp drop in global demand caused by the pandemic," Monica Malik, chief economist at Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank, said in a research note. "We estimate that Saudi Arabia's oil sector will contract by circa 6.1 percent in 2020."

Goldman Sachs said it expected oil prices would continue to fall in coming weeks.

Spending cuts

Saudi Arabia's 2020 budget projected oil revenues of 513 billion riyals (\$136.47 billion). Riyadh does not disclose the oil price it bases its budget on, but some analysts estimated it at \$55 per barrel.

Saudi bank Al Rajhi Capital said Saudi Arabia's 2020 oil

revenues would be 342 billion riyals given the newly agreed oil output levels and an assumed average crude price of \$40.

That compares with an initial forecast of 487 billion riyals by Al Rajhi, which also cut its estimate of non-oil revenues from 346 billion riyals to 276 billion riyals after taxes were postponed and government fees waived to shield businesses from the impact of the coronavirus.

"While we expect revenues to decline, we don't have an estimate on the expected budget deficit because we don't know how much more the government will cut in spending," Mazen Al Sudairi, head of research at Al Rajhi Capital, told Reuters.

"There is room to cut spending further and we expect the government to do so."

Riyadh announced last month a nearly 5 percent cut in the 2020 government budget and said it would reassess expenditure according to developments in oil markets and the pandemic.

Sudairi said he expected money generated by the Public Investment Fund, Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, and proceeds from last year's \$29 billion initial public offering of Saudi oil giant Aramco, to be channelled into the local economy.

"It is essential to keep this money in the local economy to maintain banking system stability. The Aramco IPO proceeds have kept the deposit and money supply stable over the past few months," he said.

(Source: Reuters)

LNG woes in spotlight as junior's cash runs out

Last weekend's landmark but inadequate deal by the OPEC-plus alliance to rein in production appears to have locked in a looming plunge in LNG prices over the next few months, pointing to a sharp drop in revenues for ASX-listed producers Woodside Petroleum, Santos, Oil Search and Origin Energy.

The gloomy outlook for the LNG sector was underscored by news on Tuesday that Liquefied Natural Gas Ltd, an aspiring exporter from the U.S., has only enough cash to last until May and "urgently" needs to secure additional funding after a takeover deal with a Singapore-based suitor collapsed.

The U.S. LNG exporters are at the front line of the glut in the sector, with some experts forecasting the temporary shutdown of export terminals there.



Shares in ASX-listed LNG Ltd, which has been trying for years to develop an export terminal in Louisiana, plunged 31 percent to 7.9c.

Analysts are agreed that Sunday's deal between OPEC and Russia to reduce production by 9.7 million barrels a day in May and June may only go halfway to compensating for the drop in oil demand due to COVID-19.

Reports of a loose agreement for G20 countries to potentially add 3.7 million barrels per day of cuts remain uncertain.

Oil prices are expected to tumble further if member countries of the OPEC, chiefly Middle Eastern oil exporters, cannot agree to cut at least 1 million barrels per day to help arrest a further supply glut that is putting downward pressure on prices.

That sets oil prices on a course of weakness for several more months, with LNG contract prices to follow about three months later given the lag between changes in crude prices flowing through to LNG.

Santos chief executive Kevin Gallagher said on Tuesday the deal "will help with the supply-side challenge, but with supply chains full and demand suppressed while economies around the world are in hibernation as we fight COVID-19, we must focus on what we can control – our costs and our portfolio".

Mr Gallagher said Santos was set up to be resilient to low oil prices, pointing out that fixed-price gas sales contracts would make up 35 percent of sales volumes this year, while 30 percent of the company's remaining oil price exposure is hedged at an average floor price of \$43 a barrel.

Meanwhile, Citigroup added to the pessimism around the gas outlook, forecasting only a modest recovery in spot LNG prices this year and next. It also warned of a "subdued" longer-term outlook for global gas, "partly because China will likely no longer be as robust a growth driver for global LNG demand as before".

For crude oil, analysts are warning of persistent weakness for the next few months.

All eyes on quarterly reports

FACTS Global Energy said that while the OPEC-plus deal had helped take the worst-case scenarios off the table, the "wild ride will continue", with Brent crude likely to average \$20-\$25 a barrel in May-June, but with regular dips below \$20.

While FGE is predicting prices will return to \$40 a barrel by the end of the year, it is cautioning that oil demand remains at the mercy of COVID-19, with risks skewed to the downside.

Wood Mackenzie is more optimistic, estimating that even a 5 million barrels a day supply would maintain crude prices in the low \$30s a barrel.

Brent crude was holding at about \$32.20 a barrel at midday on Tuesday, up about 1.4 percent. The share prices of major ASX-listed producers closed between 1.1 percent lower and 21.9 percent higher.

FACTS Global Energy's Fereidun Fesharaki expects some U.S. LNG export capacity to shut down in 2020 due to low prices.

Initial evidence of the impact of the price drop on oil company revenues will emerge this week, with Woodside and Senex Energy kicking off the March quarterly reports, followed by Oil Search and Santos next week.

Consultancy EnergyQuest noted that lower LNG prices were already evident in the producers' December quarter reports after oil prices softened last year, and it expects that trend to accelerate.

Woodside, Santos and Oil Search have already deferred tens of billions of dollars of new LNG investments over the past month.

LNG Ltd was having difficulty locking in customers for its proposed Magnolia LNG export terminal in Louisiana even before the March plunge in oil prices. A bridge funding deal with First Wall Street Capital Corp collapsed last month, leading to the decision by Singapore-based LNG9 to withdraw a takeover bid valuing LNG Ltd at \$75 million (\$117 million), or 19.8c a share.

Executive chairman Greg Vesey said LNG Ltd was working on "strategic alternatives" that supplement cash on hand.

"LNG's existing cash reserves are sufficient to meet all the company's commitments until May 2020, and LNG Ltd must secure additional meaningful funding urgency to continue operating beyond then," the company said.

(Source: Financial Review)

Japan revises down emission figures cut by renewables, nuclear

Japan revised lower its latest greenhouse gas emissions figures, which it had already reported as the least since records began in 1990.

Emissions fell 3.9 percent from a year earlier, data Tuesday from the environment ministry showed, a bigger drop than the 3.6 percent estimate in November. The figures, for the year through March 2019, are the latest available.

The decline, which is the biggest since fiscal 2009-10, was mainly due to an expansion of solar and wind power, as well as restarts of nuclear reactors suspended after the Fukushima disaster, the ministry said. Mild weather and efficiency gains also contributed.

Japan, one of the world's biggest polluters, aims for emissions in 2030 to be 26% below 2013 levels, part of its commitments under the Paris climate accords. Pressure has mounted to set more aggressive targets amid warnings that governments aren't doing enough to keep global temperature increases capped at 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit), a level of warming that's seen avoiding some of the most destructive results of climate change.

Japan's greenhouse gas output fell for a fifth year to 1.240 billion tons, according to the revised data, slightly less than the 1.244 billion estimated in November. Emissions were down 12% from the 2013-14 fiscal year, the ministry said.

(Source: Bloomberg)

U.S. shale production to drop by record amount in April

The EIA expects U.S. shale oil production to drop next month to 8,526 million barrels per day in the seven most prolific shale basins in the United States, according to new data published on Monday.

The forecast for May for a 182,673-average barrel per day drop in oil production is expected to be the second largest drop according to EIA data dating back to 2007. The largest drop in oil production, according to the EIA, should

be this month, down 193,625 barrels per day from March.

The Drilling Productivity Report shows six weeks of sizeable declines, shedding more than a half a million barrels per day—546,622 barrels—since December 2019.

Nevertheless, oil production across those seven basins are still trending sharply upward overall over the last decade.

And year over year, oil production is still

up, despite the sharp declines over the last few weeks.

Oil demand and oil prices have declined sharply in recent months, with global oil demand destruction thought to be somewhere near 30-35 million bpd. Meanwhile, oil prices have been particularly volatile, with WTI trading under \$30 for almost a month.

The EIA expects the Permian basin, responsible for more than half of the reported

shale production, will see a dip of 75,700 bpd in May, to 4.5 million barrels per day. The second largest basin, the Eagle Ford, should see a drop of 34,790 barrels per day, to 1.3 million bpd. All basins are expected to see a production drop for May, according to the EIA.

And it's not just oil that's being hit; natural gas production, too, is expected to decline next month.

(Source: oilprice.com)

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

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

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How handling coronavirus crisis helps Trump defeat a surging Biden in 2020 election!

By Mohammad Jafari

A senior advisor to former President Bill Clinton says that defeating COVID-19 outbreak and its negative impacts on economy can gift Donald Trump a new chance to remain in power till 2024 yearend but failing to do so will enable a surging Joe Biden to walk on the path towards the White House.

Douglas Schoen, who served as an advisor to President Bill Clinton and as a consultant to the campaign of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, wrote a newly-published analytic report in the Hill that with Bernie Sanders ending his campaign, the path is clear for a general election battle between Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic nominee, and Donald Trump. As the race stands, Biden holds a strong statistical advantage over Trump in many recent general election polls.

Schoen, whose latest book is "Collapse: A World in Crisis and the Urgency of American Leadership," added that Biden has an advantage of 6 points over Trump, leading by 49 percent to 43 percent in a general election matchup, according to Real Clear Politics. Biden has an advantage of 8 points over Trump, leading by 49 percent to 41 percent, according to a Quinnipiac University poll. Though Biden leads in several critical swing states that went for Trump in 2016, some of these states indeed remain toss ups as the campaign season rolls on.

In Florida, a critical swing state that went for Trump in 2016, Biden leads by 6 points at 46 percent to 40 percent, a University of North Florida poll found. The survey also shows a majority of Florida voters at 53 percent disapprove of how Trump is handling the coronavirus, while only 46 percent approve. In Michigan, a swing state that also went for Trump in 2016, Biden leads the president by only 3 points at 48 percent to 45 percent, according to a Public Policy Polling survey.

In Wisconsin, a state that Trump won by less than 1 point, Biden also leads by 3 points at 48 percent to 45 percent, a Marquette Law School survey finds. However, in Pennsylvania, where Trump won by a razor thin margin in 2016, he has an advantage of 2 points over



Biden at 46 percent to 44 percent, according to a Baldwin Wallace University, Ohio Northern University, Oakland University poll. The survey also shows a notable 9 percent of respondents have yet to make up their minds.

Though Biden holds a considerable lead in most general election polls, many of the states that will decide the outcome of 2020 remain in play, and it is clear that the former vice president faces obstacles that will make his path to the White House a challenge. Biden clinched the Democratic nomination by positioning himself as a steady and tested leader with the experience to lead during a national crisis. This contrasted with Sanders, who ran on the promise of a revolution and the implementation of sweeping programs such as Medicare for All. While Sanders was propelled by enthusiasm, Biden still faces a serious deficit of enthusiasm.

As Biden works to build a diverse coalition of voters, he faces the challenge of building excitement for his candidacy within the party, which will involve appealing to Sanders supporters and the progressive wing. This presents a great obstacle for Biden as a traditional retail politician, given that he is unable

to campaign in person. In response to the effects of the coronavirus on the economy, and in what is clearly an attempt to reach Sanders supporters, Biden proposed lowering the age of eligibility for Medicare to 60, a proposal which Sanders supporters are already decrying as not going far enough.

However, arguably the most important and immediate way that Biden can generate enthusiasm within the party will be with the selection of his running mate. Biden has already committed to picking a woman and reportedly told donors that his team has discussed naming a choice ahead of the Democratic convention in August. Given that Biden would be the oldest American president if elected and is running in the midst of a global pandemic, the decision regarding his running mate is critically important, and will be a balancing act of choosing someone who can motivate an increasingly diverse party and who is also ready to be president in an instant.

But given the crisis and unprecedented circumstances, Biden may take a backseat to how Trump is handling the coronavirus. Given the public health emergency, financial crash, and impending depression, Trump is facing

one of the greatest challenges of any modern day president that will also make or break his chances for reelection. His approval rating last month reached 48 percent, according to a Washington Post poll, but his approval rating is now at 43 percent, according to a recent Morning Consult poll. The drop is likely a result of his uneven response, coupled with the significant toll the coronavirus is taking on the public and the economy, as well as the uncertainty over the length of the lockdowns.

The country is in uncharted waters and faces an unprecedented degree of peril. Levels of concern are high, and Americans are looking to their elected officials, particularly in the federal government, for leadership and direction now more than ever. If Trump is able to adeptly navigate this crisis from a communications standpoint while setting the economy on a noticeable path toward recovery, it is likely that no Democratic candidate, not even a surging Biden, would be able to defeat him this fall.

Last week, the Vermont senator and democratic socialist Bernie Sanders suspended his campaign for president, saying he couldn't see a path to the nomination. Sanders, who reshaped American politics with his youth-led movement for sweeping social change, was Biden's last rival in the field, which leaves the former vice-president, under Barack Obama, as the de facto Democratic candidate to challenge Trump.

The presidential vote is due to take place on 3 November. The date is set by federal law and Donald Trump has no power to delay it alone. That would require legislation enacted by Congress and signed by the president.

The number of coronavirus cases in the U.S. passed 556,000 on Sunday, April 12, a day when millions of Americans were forced to observe the Easter holiday in the shadow of the pandemic.

The country has recorded at least 22,073 deaths and 556,044 cases so far during the pandemic, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

All 50 states are under a federal disaster declaration for the first time in U.S. history.

Law experts necessitate legal reforms in Afghanistan to develop a strong legislative framework

Three senior lawyers, in a joint article, have said that Afghanistan legal system requires crucial and comprehensive legal reform to enable the country to overcome a range of deficits and problems to pave the ground for sustainable growth in various arenas.

In their joint article published by Pajhwok News Agency, Shaheer Momeni, Pason Sadozai and Tamim Momeni have opined that legal reform in Afghanistan is a necessity, adding that the laws of a nation are its foundational pillars and should be at the forefront of the government's agenda.

The article reads that the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (the Government) and various national and international organizations have made continuous efforts since 2002 to reform the country's obsolete laws. However, the reform process has been sluggish and inefficient and, in many instances, the reforms introduced are incoherent and inadequate.

The lawyers added this has been principally due to the absence of a coherent reform program and the lack of effective coordination and consultation between Government agencies and relevant national and international stakeholders, as well as the lack of institutional capacity.

This has resulted in the enactment of defective legislation - such as the laws and regulations governing company and contractual matters - as well as legal and regulatory gaps in crucial areas of law. The impact of the pervasive deficiencies in Afghanistan's legal regime is amplified by the inadequate legal knowledge and expertise of Government agencies to implement commercial laws and the lack of capacity of judges to effectively interpret and apply commercial laws where disputes arise.

Legal reform is crucial to achieving development in Afghanistan and should be at the forefront of the Government's agenda. The establishment of a law commission as set out in this paper (the Commission) would replace the current legislative procedure with one in which a single independent and competent body with the requisite legal expertise and competence leads a comprehensive program of legislative reform. This would mark a vital stride towards addressing the pervasive deficiencies in Afghanistan's legislative regime and the development of a robust legislative framework, which is an indispensable factor for the rule of law, tackling corruption, economic development and attracting foreign direct investment.

Current legislative practice generally involves a relevant government agency drafting a proposed law for submission to the Ministry of Justice for review. The Ministry of Justice, in turn, submits the draft law for approval to the Council of Ministers. Subsequently, the draft is sent to Parliament for review and approval. There is generally limited or no meaningful consultation with relevant stakeholders as part of this process.

The inadequacies inherent in the current legislative process are twofold. Firstly, the relevant government agencies do not possess the requisite expertise and resources to draft legislation in line with international standards and in a manner that is suitable for effective implementation and enforcement in the context of Afghanistan's specific circumstances and judicial framework. The Commission would address this by availing adequate resources and expertise to effectively meet these challenges.

Secondly, the current approach elicits questions of conflict of interest as the relevant government agency drafting a particular law is often also its 'custodian' and principal implementing body. This may incentivize the relevant government agency to draft legislation in a manner that grants it the maximum possible control and authority, notwithstanding that this may jeopardize the effectiveness of the relevant legislation.



The establishment of the Commission would circumvent such conflicts of interest as the Commission would draft legislation but would have no direct role in its implementation. In addition, the Commission would independently evaluate all relevant views and interests to ensure that draft laws address, in a balanced manner, the needs and concerns of all stakeholders.

As an independent body, the Commission would keep the law under review with the overriding objective of ensuring that the law is fair, effective, concise and simple. It would conduct extensive review and consultation in order to formulate a comprehensive program of law reform, which may be reviewed and amended as necessary from time to time. Prior to taking forward a particular project, the Commission would consult all stakeholders - including relevant government agencies, judges, lawyers, academics, non-governmental organizations and the private sector - to ensure that their interests and views are given due consideration.

The Commission would recommend reform where required or upon receiving a proposal or invitation for reform from a government agency or other stakeholder. In particular, the Commission would review areas where gaps are apparent, areas which are unduly complicated or outdated, or areas where reform is otherwise necessary to enhance the effectiveness of the relevant legislation. Following a comprehensive process of research and consultation, the Commission would make recommendations for reform of the relevant law to the relevant government agencies and the Parliament.

The role of the Commission would comprise of drafting and proposing new legislation to fill gaps in the legislative regime; for example, among other key laws, there are currently no specific laws governing torts (such as negligence) or trusts in Afghanistan. To ensure the maintenance of an effective legal framework, the Commission would also facilitate the repeal and amendment of existing legislation. This would allow obsolete or unnecessary laws - such as certain outdated laws based on the Egyptian civil code and are no longer applicable or suitable - to be repealed to avoid confusion and improve accessibility.

In addition, the Commission would recommend amendments to existing legislation as necessary; for example, the laws currently governing arbitration, company, partnership, insurance, contract and public-private partnership matters require significant amendments to be brought in line with international best practice.

Moreover, in order to increase accessibility and modernize existing legislation, the Commission would facilitate the consolidation of existing legislation by bringing together, where possible, existing provisions located in separate legislation.

Ten Commissioners, each of whom may serve for up to two consecutive terms, would be appointed on a full-time basis for a period of two years. The Commissioners may undertake other relevant activities during their incumbency, including the provision of training and the delivery of relevant

presentations and workshops to government agencies and members of the judiciary. This would assist, in particular, with keeping relevant stakeholders abreast of complex legislation and their practical application.

The Commissioners would be aided by up to ten staff members, which will include a Parliamentary Counsel who would liaise with Parliament, a team of up to five research assistants who should be experienced lawyers, as well as an appropriate number of administrative staff depending on the workload of the Commission. The Commission would engage independent consultants where external expertise is required.

The Commission would consult widely, as mentioned above, to formulate a comprehensive program of law reform, which would be shared with Parliament, the Ministry of Justice and other relevant government agencies for review and comment. Prior to project selection, the Commission would consult, amongst others, the Judiciary, relevant government agencies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

The Commission would consider whether to review an area of law for reform on the basis of the following criteria: (i) importance, i.e. the extent to which the relevant law is ineffective and the potential benefits of reform; (ii) suitability, i.e. whether the Commission is the most suitable body to conduct the review; and (iii) resources, i.e. whether the Commissioners have adequate expertise to conduct the review and sufficient funding for the project.

Once the Commission has decided to review an area of law, the scope of the project would be decided in conjunction with the relevant government agencies and a study of the relevant area of law would be undertaken to identify all defects. The Commission would publish a consultation paper detailing the existing law and its defects and the arguments for and against the available options for reform. The consultation paper would be circulated widely to all relevant stakeholders for their review and comment.

Following the expiry of the specified consultation period and the review of responses, a final recommendation paper would be produced by the Commission and submitted to Parliament and relevant government agencies, including the Ministry of Justice, for consideration. Where necessary, the Commission would submit the draft law(s) reflecting its recommendations together with the relevant recommendation paper.

The Commission would make recommendations for legal form, but the enactment, amendment, repeal or consolidation of laws would be implemented by Parliament or pursuant to an executive order in accordance with the subsisting legislative process and framework.

Law reform is crucial to achieving Afghanistan's development objectives as envisioned in, amongst other notable policy and strategy documents, The Afghanistan National Development Strategy, and should be at the forefront of the government's agenda.

However, progress with legislative reform thus far has been sluggish and inefficient and, in many instances, the reforms introduced are patchy and incoherent. This has been attributed to, amongst other factors, the inadequacy of the technical legal expertise and institutional capacity of government agencies and existing legislative bodies.

The proposed Commission would be ideally placed to undertake the challenge of transforming Afghanistan's legal framework to one that reflects international best practice and its establishment is imperative to meeting Afghanistan's development objectives at this critical juncture as the country strives for economic independence.

Law professor warns of normalization of racism acts against Asian Americans in United States

Flames of racism toward Asian Americans, fueled by terms like "Chinese virus", have made any wise person in the United States to start getting worried, an American law professor said, noting that such acts must be stopped immediately otherwise they will be normalized ending in uncontrollable widespread racial violence.

Sahar Aziz, a professor of law and Chancellor's Social Justice Scholar at Rutgers Law School, wrote in her article published by Al Jazeera that the Asian American communities, especially the Chinese residents in US, have been facing a wide range of racism behaviors since COVID-19 first emerged in China early in January.

She further warned that the US must not repeat the same mistake it made after 9/11 by allowing the scapegoating of a whole minority population.

The scapegoating of an ethnic group during a national emergency has begun, Aziz went on to say.

Rumors are circulating that Chinese people are spreading the coronavirus in America. School children are bullied for being of Chinese origin. Racial slurs are hurled at people who "look Chinese". Chinese culture is increasingly represented as backward and as a threat to America.



The predictable consequence is an upsurge in racial violence.

In the most egregious hate crime thus far, an Asian American family, including a two-year-old girl, was stabbed at a Sam's Club Store in Midland, Texas. The attacker admitted to police that he tried to kill them because he believed they were Chinese people infecting Americans with the coronavirus.

We have seen this script before.

Almost two decades ago, Muslims and Arabs were blamed for the worst terrorist attacks on US soil. In those early months of the national crisis, we failed to thwart anti-Muslim racism before it became mainstream.

During the subsequent "war on terror", Muslim doctors and small business owners who had served their communities for years became targets of boycott campaigns and vandalism. Students whose names were Mohamed, Osama, Hussain, etc were physically assaulted and taunted for months. Women wearing headscarves became afraid of being in public spaces as hate crimes against Muslims skyrocketed. Cab drivers and gas station owners were murdered, some of whom were Sikhs mistaken for being Muslim.

Some Americans either joined in blaming Muslims or excused Islamophobia as a rational response to a national emergency. Too many remained silent. The few who condemned anti-Muslim bigotry mistakenly believed it was a temporary backlash that would eventually wane.

It was not until January 2017 when Trump issued the Muslim Ban that a critical mass of Americans finally rose up at airports across the country to protest against anti-Muslim racism. But by then, Islamophobia had been normalized.

Just as Muslim and Arab Americans were scapegoated for 9/11, Chinese and Asian Americans are being collectively blamed for the coronavirus pandemic.

As early as February, Asian Americans started reporting an increasing number of hate crimes. On February 1, a man in Los Angeles verbally accosted a Thai American woman, calling Chinese people "disgusting".

On February 14, a 16-year-old boy in San Fernando Valley in California was physically assaulted by other teenagers who accused him of having the coronavirus solely on account of his Asian American identity.

By the end of March, xenophobic incidents had occurred across the country, according to a report by the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council. Of the 673 cases of anti-Asian discrimination reported on its website between March 19 and 25, 67 percent were in the form of verbal harassment, 23 percent were shunning, and 10 percent were physical assaults.

A Korean American standing in line at a local grocery store, for instance, heard a shopper tell her child they had to move to another line, or they would get sick. A 51-year-old Asian woman at a bus stop in the Bronx was verbally assaulted and hit in the head with an umbrella by three teenage girls as they allegedly shouted: "You caused the coronavirus, b***h."

Sadly, blaming Asians for public health crises has a long history in the US. The undercurrent of anti-Asian racism has always lingered in the backdrop of US national security practices.

Referred to as the "yellow peril", Chinese and other Asians were lawfully excluded from entering the United States starting with the 1872 Chinese Exclusion Act. Asians living in the US could not naturalize as US citizens until 1943.

When the Trump administration refers to COVID-19 as the Chinese Virus, Wuhan Coronavirus, or Kung Flu, these racist framings are not accidental. They aim to distract us from the federal government's failures to prepare for and mitigate this pandemic.

The same happened after 9/11 when the Bush administration's portrayal of Muslims as terrorists redirected the public's anger at a vulnerable minority rather than a government whose foreign policy had produced instability and violence in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Americans after the 9/11 terrorist attacks were scared. They sought an easy scapegoat to make sense of an unprecedented national crisis; as they do today.

If the months following the attacks are to teach us anything, it is that anti-Chinese racism and xenophobia will increase with time if we do not confront it head on now.

We must immediately adopt a no-tolerance policy. Not after a few months or a year as the hate crimes escalate, but today.

Just like we have to act early to fight the spread of the coronavirus, we must act now to fight anti-Asian hate before it can no longer be contained.

As of April 14, number of people infected with the novel coronavirus in the United States reached 587,155, according to the data released by coronavirus research centers.

Death toll was over 23,644.

More than 36,000 patients recovered.

The U.S. was leading in the world in terms of the largest number of infected people.

Golestan tourist sites available online

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — Over 420 tourist attractions in the northern province of Golestan can be visited online, said provincial tourism chief Ahmad Tajari, CHTN reported on Tuesday.



Golestan Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Department has produced several videos, photos and video clips to introduce the province's historical sites, natural sights and handicrafts, he added.

He also said that the project aims at promoting virtual trips to people who are in home quarantine over the coronavirus outbreak in the country.

Golestan is reportedly embracing some 2,500 historical and natural sites, with UNESCO-registered Gonbad-e Qabus — a one-millennium-old brick tower — amongst its most famous.

Narratives say the tower has influenced various subsequent designers of tomb towers and other cylindrical commemorative structures both in the region and beyond. The UNESCO comments that tower bears testimony to the cultural exchange between Central Asian nomads and the ancient civilization of Iran.

Over 860 historical objects seized in Zanjan

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Iranian authorities have confiscated 865 historical objects in northwestern Zanjan province, during the past Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended March 20).



File photo depicts various types of excavation equipment seized by Iranian police.

About 50 people were also detained in this regard, provincial tourism chief Amir Arjmand announced on Tuesday, CHTN reported.

Zanjan is one of the cities founded by Sassanid King Ardashir I (180-242 CE). The province makes a base for wider explorations with the architectural wonder of Soltaniyeh, the subterranean delights of the Katala-Khor caves, colorful mountains and the UNESCO-registered Takht-e Soleiman ruins are nearby.

Travelogue: Trip to Iran in October 2019

By Anna Carotenuto

(Part 2/2)

And yet the cheerful colors of the majolica of mosques and mausoleums, the thrill of sharing in them a sense of belonging to a single God who is always the same but can be worshiped in different ways.

We cannot forget Persepolis who is there to remind us of the greatness of ancient Persia and the imposing past of one of the first great empires of history; the unique spectacle of the tomb of Cyrus the Great at Pasargadae and of Darius and Xerxes in the Naqsh-e Rostane necropolis will remain in our memories.

We were wearing scarfs as our passing experience, with creativity and joy, competing to change it and tie it in new and original shapes.

The cult of the Iranians for their poets is unimaginable: their verses are engraved on the walls, they adorn the mosaics of the mosques, they are printed on clothes, scarves, and they are present in the most disparate public places. It is moving to see so many people visiting the tombs of the great ones where they rediscover the meaning of their history and rediscover their identity. Our



File photo depicts Menar Jonban, a 14th-century monument in Isfahan, central Iran

Middle Ages were the most fertile period for Persian poetry: the greatest names are those of Ferdowsi, the Persian Dante and Hafez, a mystical poet author of a famous songbook.

We had the honor of meeting in Tehran one of the greatest living masters of rug art, Seyed Mousavi Sirat. An expert in figurative art, he created a precious work that depicts "the last days of Pompeii" which required thirteen years of careful work due to the complexity of the subject and the texture made of imperceptible shades of colors and reflections.

In Isfahan and Tehran it seemed to us to be in one of the many European cities rich in greenery, bold architecture, wide and relaxing avenues but also impossible traffic. Here we saw a lively and welcoming youth who quivers the desire to live and participate in the great changes of the contemporary world.

Some problems: the exhausts of car engines, the obligation of cash for purchases.

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

Post-coronavirus: Iran formulating action plan to return tourism to normal

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — Iran's tourism has announced it is developing an action plan to get the country's travel back on track after the threat of novel coronavirus is over. Like many other countries, Iran's travel industry has suffered huge losses in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Very good plans have been made in this regard for the time after the containment of the coronavirus, and I am confident that we will once again see a boom in the tourism industry and compensate the losses, Vali Teymouri, the deputy tourism minister, said on Tuesday.

"The virus has targeted travels and communication, and the [global] tourism industry has suffered the most from the virus to such an extent that never happened since World War II," CHTN quoted Teymouri as saying on Tuesday.

"The damage was more severe for our country because we faced this problem at the high season of our domestic trip," he said.

"In other words, we witnessed the outbreak of this virus during the golden time of Nowruz, which is (traditionally) the heyday of our domestic and foreign tourism."

The official, however, didn't provide further detail on the ministry's plan to jumpstart tourism.

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) Director Gloria Guevara told El Mundo announced late in February that the global outbreak of the new coronavirus, known as COVID-19, will cost world tourism at least \$22 billion owing to a drop in spending by Chinese tourists.

Earlier this month, Iran tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan proposed the government to announce days off after the country overcomes the virus crisis in a bid to help the battered sector.

The country's tourism suffered several times



File photo depicts foreign nationals looking at intricate tilework that covers interior spaces of the Imam Mosque, one of the must-see travel destinations in Isfahan, central Iran.

over the past year Persian year (ended March 20) from various upheavals including the U.S. sanctions aimed to cripple Iran's economy, flash floods in March 2019, the [mistakenly] downing of a Ukrainian jetliner in January, and ultimately the coronavirus pandemic in the country.

Some 6.7 million foreign nationals visited

Iran during the first nine months of the past Iranian calendar year, started March 21, 2019, according to data announced by the Foreign Ministry's visa and passport department. Iran welcomed some 7.8 million foreign nationals a year earlier, achieving a 52.5 percent increase year on year.

The ancient land embraces hundreds of

historical sites such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which 22 being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, the country aims to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025.

Ubiquitous coronavirus: Do travel blockades work?

➔ 1 Effects of travel restrictions in China's Wuhan, the ground zero of the virus, have been recently investigated in a recent study conducted by an international group from institutions including Northeastern University in Boston, MA, the Bruno Kessler Foundation and the ISI Foundation in Italy, the Fogarty International Center at NIH, Fudan University in Shanghai, China, the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, the University of Washington in Seattle, WA, and the University of Florida.

The work was published last month in Science Magazine in an article titled, "The effect of travel restrictions on the spread of the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak."

The researchers of the study used computer simulations to examine the impact of restricting movement. They found



A traffic police officer wears a protective face mask and gloves, amid fear of coronavirus disease, as he walks in Tehran, March 26, 2020. (Credit: REUTERS - WANA NEWS AGENCY)

that the travel ban introduced in Wuhan on January 23 delayed progression of the epidemic throughout Mainland China by three to five days because the virus had already made its way to other major Chinese cities by the time the restrictions were put in place.

The authors, however, suggest that the greatest benefit to mitigating the epidemic will come from public health interventions and behavioral changes; factors like early detection, isolation, and handwashing.

Regarding travel limits, it is worthy to remind that epidemiologists have long observed the failure of travel restrictions to contain other infectious diseases, such as influenza.

You might say coronavirus knows no borders, however, borders may be the first thing that a majority of world leaders and policymakers know.

700 craft businesses created in Kerman



HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Some 700 job opportunities in the field of handicrafts were created in southeastern Kerman province over the past Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended March 20).

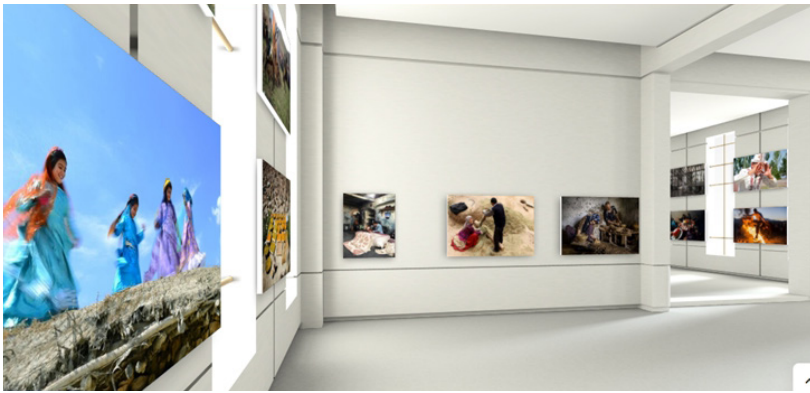
Most of the businesses were created in deprived areas of the province, said provincial tourism chief Kazem Hosseinzadeh, CHTN reported on Tuesday.

Baloch embroidery, hand-woven klim carpets, wicker works, pateh, and precious

and semi-precious gemstones are among handicrafts being produced in Kerman province.

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

Tehran ICH Center launches virtual photo exhibit



TOURISM **TEHRAN** — Tehran Intangible Cultural Heritage Center has launched an online photo exhibition due to coronavirus outbreak in the country, acting director of the center Reza Sojudi announced on Tuesday, CHTN reported.

The exhibit displays photos on intangible cultural heritages in West and Central Asia by photographers from Iran, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Interested individuals can refer to the official website of the center for further information.

In 2006, Iran joined the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and on April 28, 2010 the agreement regarding the establishment of Tehran ICH Center was signed by Iran and UNESCO. The Center was officially inaugurated in November 2012.

IKAC utilizing disinfection machines in combat with coronavirus



TOURISM **TEHRAN** — Imam Khomeini Airport City (IKAC), which comprises Imam Khomeini International Airport, has started using various disinfection machines for passengers, baggages and cargos to help combat the coronavirus, IKAC News reported on Tuesday.

"Since COVID-19 has spread in our country, we have decided to disinfect passengers and transit areas every day. In this regard, we have bought three disinfecting machines for passengers, baggages and cargos in cooperation with Iranian knowledge-based companies as part of a set of measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus at Imam Khomeini International Airport," IKAC CEO Mohammad Mahdi Karbalaee said.

Every time that passengers want to travel by plane, they should pass check-in queues which are now being designed to provide a 1.5-meter distance between people at all times. Then they pass the disinfecting machines. This is the first time disinfecting machines are being used in Iranian airports.

"Though many carriers have temporarily stopped flights or suspended routes to affected regions due to decline in demand, our airlines have started to adopt measures to help curb the spread of the virus through global travels by introducing measures like limiting in-flight services, disinfecting aircraft, equipping crew with face masks, and conducting temperature checks before allowing passengers



to board planes."

Located 30 kilometers southwest of the Iranian capital, IKAC is one of the two major commercial airports serving Tehran. It is also the busiest international air passenger gateway to the country.

Plasma therapy reduces coronavirus deaths in Iran by 40%

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Plasma therapy has so far reduced coronavirus deaths in Iran by 40 percent as experts in the country have discovered a life-saving method for those recovering from COVID-19.

Convalescent plasma therapy allows someone who has recovered from a coronavirus infection to donate their blood plasma to someone who is critically ill.

"We started plasma therapy some 40 days ago and to date, 300 persons have donated their blood plasma, and the result was a 40 percent decline in the number of deaths due to coronavirus," said Dr. Hassan Abolqasemi who leads the plasma therapy project.

The fact is that when we face a pandemic, no one is prepared [to deal with it], but the medical staff's priority is to save the lives of critically ill patients, he explained, Mehr reported on Tuesday.



According to him, plasma therapy had proved to be effective in treatment of other diseases such as SARS, MERS-CoV and Ebola, however, international organizations had not expressed their points of view in this regard.

"The United States started working on plasma therapy three weeks after us. Later on, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and some other European countries started the work and requested us to share our experience."

"It is probable that we manage to produce an antibody exclusively," he noted.

Over the past 24 hours, 1,547 new cases of coronavirus were reported and the total death toll rose to 4,683, the health ministry's spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Tuesday.

The number of officially confirmed cases climbed to 74,877. There were 3,691 people in intensive care. Of those originally infected, 48,129 were declared recovered.

League of Historical Cities concerned over Iran sanctions amid COVID-19



SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Daisako Kadokava, Kyoto mayor and the president of League of Historical Cities, has expressed concern over U.S. sanctions against Iran amid dealing with coronavirus epidemic.

In a letter to the mayor of Shiraz, Kadokava also expressed his concern about the COVID-19 outbreak in the southern Iranian city and called for the end of inhuman sanctions imposed on Iran at the time of the coronavirus outbreak.

The letter came in response to correspondence by Shiraz mayor Heidar Eskandarpour.

"I have duly received your letter. Knowing about the current situation in Iran due to the COVID-19 outbreak through the media, I am very concerned about it. I would like to show my respect to everyone who has been working tirelessly at medical institutions to treat those infected days and nights.

"Here in Kyoto, the number of infected patients is also increasing day

by day and we cannot foresee how our situation will change. We have been taking every measure to protect our citizens' lives and prevent the public medical system breakdown.

Reading your letter to know that the people in Shiraz are not able to get enough supplies in difficult circumstances, I deeply sympathize with their serious situation. I imagine that your officials are also working hard to carry out measures to get the people through the situation. My thoughts are with all the people of Shiraz.

Let us fight COVID-19 together and get it under control as soon as possible to let people in the world go back to normal life without having any fear," the letter reads.

The mayor of Shiraz sent a message to the mayors of the friendly and sister cities on April 10, urging the heads and secretary generals of the international community to voice over sanctions imposed on Iran in the advent of coronavirus outbreak.

Iranian province to follow South Korea in coronavirus combat



SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Experts in Iran's northern Mazandaran province have prepared a plan based on a successful model implemented in South Korea to counter the coronavirus epidemic.

Amir Taha Khalatbari, head of Mazandaran passive defense scientific association, explained that through the first phase of the plan all the cities and villages will be screened, which means those far-fetched areas will be monitored and disinfected, pointing to the seven phases of the plan, ISNA news agency reported on Tuesday.

Regarding the second phase of the plan on self-reliance to health, he emphasized that in this phase, physicians in the province will inform the people about the necessary health instructions against the coronavirus through phone conversation.

He went on to note that the third phase identifies shops for providing online services to their customers, and connect them to the country's transportation system and online shopping system, so that access to medicine and food will be made easier for people.

The fourth measure is to identify in-

fectured areas and cemeteries in the cities and disinfect to prevent the spread of the disease, he added.

If the burials of coronavirus victims are unscientific, the disease will be transmitted to the soil, and later will have come up with dire consequences, so that we have to prevent such happenings, he lamented.

Khalatbari highlighted that the fifth phase of the plan will integrate the province's media to jointly release educational content and raise people's awareness, stressing that many people who run news channel will be connected to a reliable news source in the country, and information will be provided accurately and purposefully.

Launching an interactive application is also another measure, he added.

"With the implementation of the plan we expect to contain the disease by 25 to 30 percent, and then help government agencies," he stated.

"Unfortunately, the government is involved in the think tank, while in universities we have thinkers whose capacity is not being used well," he concluded.



Iran climate: wet spell or still short of rain?

➔ As long as, the country's average rainfall rate is 60 percent above the world's rainfall, and now a 50 mm decrease in that amount makes the situation unsatisfactory, he lamented.

Still long-term drought

Ziaeean went on to point out that recent heavy rains and even floods could be said to have pushed Iran into a period of wet spells.

Forecasting rainfall for the whole country in the coming decades demonstrates a decreasing trend, but we may have a few years of heavy downpours in this period, but in general, the number of years with drought is more.

He went on to emphasize that experiencing two or

three consecutive years of rainy days cannot ensure that drought no longer hits the country, but then it may enter a multi-year drought.

Since the beginning of the current crop year (September 23, 2019), the whole country has received some 248.6 millimeters of precipitation which demonstrates a 29.7 percent increase compared to its long term mean of 191.7 mm, according to the statistic published by the meteorological organization.

This is while, the country is 9.8 percent short of rain compared to the previous year.

The meteorological organization estimates the long term mean for the past 30 years.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Flood responsible for 61% of natural disasters

Flood is the leading natural disaster being responsible for 61 percent of the total natural disasters happened in the country, according to studies conducted over the past four decades in Iran.

Natural disasters in the country affect about 40 million people accounting for half of the country's population, Mohammad Esmaeil Motlag, director general for risk management at the Ministry of Health has said.

After flood, 28 percent of the hazards in the country are related to earthquakes, 3 percent to storm, and landslides and forest wildfires constitute 3 percent of the disaster, he added, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

سیل عامل ۶۱ درصد مخاطرات کشور است

سیل عامل ۶۱ درصد مخاطرات کشور بر اساس مطالعات انجام شده در چهار دهه گذشته ایران، بوده است.

محمد اسماعیل مطلق مدیرکل مدیریت خطر بلایا و زارت بهداشت، درمان و آموزش پزشکی گفت: ۴۰ میلیون نفر از ۸۰ میلیون جمعیت ایران زیر تاثیر مخاطرات و بلایا هستند.

به گزارش روز چهارشنبه ایرنا مطلق افزود: پس از سیل، ۲۸ درصد مخاطرات در ایران را زمین لرزه، سه درصد توفان و سه درصد دیگر خطرهای ناشی از رانش زمین و آتش سوزی جنگل ها شامل می شود.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-ic, -ics”

■ **Meaning:** of or pertaining to

■ **For example:** Some fruit juices taste a bit **acidic**.

PHRASAL VERB

Hive something off

■ **Meaning:** to sell one part of a business

■ **For example:** It is part of a growing trend for television contractors to hive off their advertising sales.

IDIOM

Bury your head in the sand

■ **Explanation:** to refuse to face the unpleasant reality by pretending that the situation doesn't exist

■ **For example:** It's no good burying your head in the sand. We've got a problem on our hands.

Iran reports lowest coronavirus death toll since outbreak

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Deaths from the COVID-19 epidemic in Iran hit a record low on Tuesday as 98 new deaths were registered over the past 24 hours, the lowest since the virus outbreak in the country.



Over the past 24 hours, 1,547 new cases of coronavirus were reported and the total death toll rose to 4,683, the health ministry's spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said.

The number of officially confirmed cases climbed to 74,877. There were 3,691 people in intensive care. Of those originally infected, 48,129 were declared recovered.

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

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

Relief foundation generates 174,000 jobs for the deprived

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation created 174,000 jobs to facilitate income generation for the deprived over the past Iranian calendar year (ended March 20).

Last year, a total of 46 trillion rials (nearly \$1 billion at an official rate of 42,000 rials) allocated to employment facilities and 174,000 job opportunities were created for those financially struggling families, Hossein Samsami, deputy director of the Foundation said.

The process of empowering the underprivileged families is redesigned with a new approach, he stated, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

Although very good measures have been taken so far for the employment in deprived areas, considering the economic problems of the country and financially struggling families, we need more effective programs to improve this process, he said.

He went on to point out that some 2,400,000 families in the country are currently supported by the Foundation; empowering these families is one of our main goals.

Samsami added that in addition to empowerment, other services such as building or buying housing, cultural services, medical services and other facilities are provided, for example, in the field of treatment, more than 80,000 patients of incurable diseases are currently under the Foundation's coverage.



WORDS IN THE NEWS

Brazilian president visits Washington

(June 20, 2003)

Brazil's President, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, is being welcomed on his visit to Washington despite his opposition to the Iraq war. US officials say President Bush is anxious to strengthen ties with the second most populous country in the Americas. This report from Tom Gibb:

When Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, a **former union boss** and founder of the left-wing Workers Party, was elected Brazil's president last year, many were predicting a stormy relationship with Washington. But quite the opposite. US officials have heaped praise on the Brazilian president's **tightly controlled economic policies** and largely ignored his opposition to the Iraq war. However, the two presidents **do not see eye to eye** on the main topic due to be discussed - free trade. Washington wants to try to stick to a **hemisphere-wide commitment** to create a **free trade area** from Alaska to Patagonia by 2005.

Lula, as the Brazilian president is known, wants to slow the process down and has been busy **rustling up** support amongst other Latin American leaders to stick together over such **thorny issues** as **US farm and steel subsidies**. Lula also wants to prioritise Latin American trade and **integration** on the model of the European Union before making close deals with Washington. But despite such differences, there's little doubt that the two countries **look set** to enjoy a much closer relationship under two extremely different leaders than most would have predicted a year ago.

Words

■ **former union boss:** he used to be head of a trade union
 ■ **tightly controlled economic policies:** plans for the economy under which money is spent carefully
 ■ **do not see eye to eye on:** do not agree about
 ■ **hemisphere-wide commitment:** here, agreements involving countries in North and South America
 ■ **free trade area:** a region where goods are bought and sold without taxes
 ■ **rustling up:** gathering
 ■ **thorny issues:** difficult subjects
 ■ **US farm and steel subsidies:** financial support from the US government to farmers and steel producers
 ■ **integration:** more closely
 ■ **look set:** will probably

(Source: BBC)

India extends world's biggest lockdown as coronavirus cases cross 10,000

India extended on Tuesday a nationwide lockdown for its 1.3 billion people until May 3 as its prime minister warned of economic sacrifices to save lives as the number of coronavirus cases crossed 10,000.

Sharp downward revisions to economic growth forecasts in the wake of the pandemic point toward sickening levels of unemployment, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged Indians to maintain the discipline shown in the first three weeks of the country's lockdown, Reuters reported.

"That means until May 3, each and every one of us will have to remain in the lockdown," Modi said in a televised address to the nation.

"From an economic only point of view, it undoubtedly looks costly right now; but measured against the lives of Indian citizens, there is no comparison itself."

India's neighbor, Pakistan, is also due to take a decision on its lockdown ending on Wednesday.

Modi spoke as latest government data showed the number of people infected with coronavirus in India had reached 10,363, with 339 deaths.

Although the numbers are small compared with hard-hit Western nations, health experts fear that is because of India's low levels of testing, and actual infection levels could be far higher.

Lacking testing kits and protective gear for medical workers, India has only tested 137 per million of its population, compared with 15,935 per million in Italy, and 8,138 in the United States.

Health experts have warned that widespread contagion could be disastrous in a country where millions live in dense slums and the health care system is overstretched.

So far, more than three-quarters of India's cases are concentrated in about 80 of the country's more than 700 districts, including the two big cities, New Delhi and Mumbai.

Hamas dismisses as 'untrue' reports of prisoner swap deal with Israel

A senior official with the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has categorically dismissed as "untrue" reports that it will soon reach a deal to swap prisoners with Israel.

Moussa Dodin, member of Hamas' political bureau, made the comment in a press release on Monday and added that the resistance movement had not yet seen any serious steps on the part of the Israeli regime in dealing with the issue of exchanging inmates.

Dodin, however, said Hamas would welcome any mediation efforts to pave the way for a prisoner swap, and renewed an initiative recently made by Yahya Sinwar, the movement's leader in the besieged Gaza Strip, about making some concessions on a new deal on the condition that Tel Aviv would take practical steps on the issue.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office announced last week that the regime was interested in "immediate" indirect prisoner exchange negotiations with the resistance movement, which runs Gaza.

(Source: Press TV)

Spain and Austria ease lockdowns but WHO warns virus 'has not peaked'

Spain and Austria allowed partial returns to work Tuesday but Britain, France and India extended coronavirus lockdowns to try to rein in the most serious pandemic in a century which the World Health Organization said had "certainly" not peaked.

Nearly 2 million people globally have been infected and more than 119,200 have died, according to a Reuters tally of official figures. The epicenter has moved from China, where the virus first emerged in December, to the United States which now has the highest death toll at 23,568.



World leaders, in considering easing curbs on movement, have to balance the risks to health and the economy, as the lockdowns strangled supply lines, especially in China, and brought economic activity to a virtual halt.

The World Health Organization said the number of new cases was easing in some parts of Europe, including Italy and Spain, but outbreaks were growing in Britain and Turkey.

"The overall world outbreak, 90 percent of cases are coming from Europe and the United States of America. So we are certainly not seeing the peak yet," WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris told a briefing in Geneva.

In Spain, restrictions have helped to slow a spiraling death rate that reached its peak in early April.

The overnight death toll from the coronavirus rose to 567 Tuesday from 517 a day earlier, but the country reported its lowest increase in new cases since March 18. Total deaths climbed to 18,056.

But some Spanish workers expressed concern that the relaxation of restrictions could trigger a new surge.

"I would have preferred to wait 15 more days confined to home or at least one more week and then come back," said Carlos Mogorron, a 27-year-old engineer from Extremadura in western Spain.

Some activities, including construction and manufacturing, were allowed to restart. Shops, bars and public spaces are to stay closed until at least April 26.

UN warns Saudi deportation of Ethiopian migrants to fuel coronavirus spread

The United Nations says Saudi Arabia's recent deportation of thousands of Ethiopian migrants will risk the spread of the new coronavirus, urging Riyadh to suspend the practice for the time being.

The UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM) said on Monday that Saudi Arabia has so far deported 2,870 Ethiopian migrants to Addis Ababa since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

An aid worker familiar with the deportations, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that "about 3,000" Ethiopian migrants have arrived from Saudi Arabia in the past 10 days.

"The expulsion and deportation of Ethiopian irregular migrants while their country's COVID-19 response is under-prepared puts them in harm's way," said Catherine Sozi, the UN humanitarian coordinator for Ethiopia.

"Large-scale migratory movements, which are not planned, make the transmission of the virus much more likely to continue. We are therefore calling for the temporary suspension of large-scale deportations," Sozi added.

According to Press TV, the deportations come as the health condition of the returnees is a concern for the Ethiopian government as it is unclear how thoroughly Saudi au-



thorities are screening them for coronavirus before their departure from the kingdom.

Sozi further said the Ethiopian government has requested that such deportations be stopped until it could set up 30 quarantine centers in the capital, Addis Ababa.

However, she said Riyadh has continued the deportations despite the fact that "only seven quarantine centers can host returnees" and Ethiopia is straining to accommodate the migrants.

The Saudi media ministry did not im-

mediately respond to a request for comment.

A humanitarian aid organization, which asked to remain anonymous, said it fears that the frequency of the flights and the large number of deportees involved could overwhelm Ethiopia's quarantine system.

"The quarantine measures currently in place need to be improved, and the current medical staff needs to be increased and better prepared and equipped to assist ... all newly arrived migrants," the aid group said.

"These migrants are very vulnerable. They have undertaken an extremely dangerous journey and many arrive in Ethiopia with high medical and mental health needs."

The new coronavirus, which causes a respiratory disease known as COVID-19, is believed to have emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan late last year.

The virus has so far infected 1,903,073 people worldwide, and over 118,362 have died, according to a running count by worldometers.info.

Saudi Arabia, which has around 30 million people, has so far reported 4,934 confirmed cases of coronavirus, with 65 deaths.

Ethiopia, with a population of 105 million, has so far reported only 74 coronavirus cases and three deaths.

U.S. election 2020: Bernie Sanders endorses ex-rival Joe Biden for president

Former U.S. presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders has endorsed Joe Biden's campaign to take on Donald Trump in November's election.

Senator Sanders pulled out of the contest to be the Democratic Party's nominee last week, leaving Biden as the only remaining candidate.

In a live split-screen webcast, former vice-president Biden thanked his former rival for the endorsement, BBC reported.

Senator Sanders urged all Americans to unite to defeat Trump.

He described him as "the most dangerous president in the modern history of this country".

"Today I am asking all Americans - I'm asking every Democrat, I'm asking every independent, I'm asking a lot of Republicans - to come together in this campaign to support your candidacy which I endorse," Sanders, 78, said.

"It's imperative that all of us work together."

Biden, 77, said he was "deeply grateful" for the endorsement and said he needed Sanders not just for the campaign, but to govern.



"You've put the interests of this nation and the need to beat Donald Trump above all else. As you say - 'Not me, us'," he said.

Addressing the Vermont senator's supporters, Biden added: "I see you, I hear you, I understand the urgency of

what it is that we have to get done in this country, and I hope you'll join us."

Biden said he and Sanders were setting up policy working groups to address issues including climate change, health care and college fees.

It emerged shortly afterwards that Biden had beaten Sanders in last week's Wisconsin's Democratic presidential primary - held amid controversy because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Senator Sanders, a self-described "Democratic socialist", ended his presidential campaign last week, telling supporters he could see no feasible path to get enough votes to win the nomination.

He became an early front-runner, popular with younger voters, and made healthcare and income inequalities key election issues.

However, he slipped behind Biden in recent weeks. Sanders, an Independent, had sought the Democratic presidential nomination before, losing out in 2016 to Hillary Clinton.

Haftar forces pound Libya capital after losing towns

The forces of Libyan military strongman Khalifa Haftar rained rockets on the capital Tripoli early Tuesday after being ousted by government loyalists from a string of towns to its west.

Salvo after salvo of rockets caused loud explosions throughout the night, AFP correspondents reported.

Several homes were hit around Mitiga airbase in the eastern suburbs, the capital's sole if intermittently functioning airport.

There was no immediate word on any casualties.

The U.N.-recognized Government of National Unity, which has been battling an offensive against the capital for just over a year, accused Haftar's forces of taking revenge against Tripoli's civilian population following their losses on Monday.

"The criminal militia and mercenaries have taken out their anger on residential neighborhoods of Tripoli

to avenge their defeat, firing dozens of rockets and missiles on the capital indiscriminately," spokesman Mohamad Gnounou said.

On Monday, the unity government recaptured the coastal cities of Sorman and Sabratha and several inland towns.

Sorman and Sabratha lie respectively 60 and 70 kilometers west of Tripoli, around half-way to the Tunisian border, and their loss is a major blow to Haftar's forces.

Libya has suffered almost a decade of conflict since longtime dictator Moamer Kadhafi was toppled and killed in a 2011 uprising backed by several Western powers.

The U.N. says hundreds of people have been killed and more than 200,000 displaced since Haftar launched his battle for Tripoli which quickly ground to a bloody stalemate.

N. Korea fires barrage of missiles from ground and air

A barrage of North Korean missiles fired from both the ground and fighter jets splashed down on the waters off the country's east coast Tuesday, South Korea's military said, a major show of force on the eve of a key state anniversary in the North and parliamentary elections in rival South Korea.

The back-to-back launches were the most high-profile among a series of weapons tests that North Korea has conducted recently amid stalled nuclear talks and outside worries about a possible coronavirus outbreak in the country.

North Korean troops based in the eastern coastal city of Munchon first launched several projectiles - presumed to be cruise missiles - Tuesday morning, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

The weapons flew more than 150 kilometers off the North's east coast, a South

Korean defense official said. If confirmed, it would be the North's first cruise missile launch since June 2017, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, citing department rules.

Later Tuesday, North Korea launched several Sukhoi-class fighter jets that fired an unspecified number of air-to-surface missiles toward the North's eastern waters, the defense official said.

The official said North Korea has recently appeared to be resuming its military drills that it had scaled back due to concerns about the coronavirus pandemic. He said other North Korean fighter jets also flew on patrol near the border with China on Tuesday.

In recent weeks, North Korea has test-launched a variety of missiles and other weapons amid deadlocked nuclear negotiations with the United States.

(Source: AP)

Gantz-Netanyahu miss coalition govt. deadline

Israeli President Reuven Rivlin has extended the mandate of centrist Blue and White party leader Benny Gantz to form a unity government as coalition talks with rightist rival, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, remain deadlocked.

Gantz had been given 28 days to clinch a power-sharing deal with Netanyahu, who heads the right-wing Likud party, after Israel's March 2 polls, Israel's third elections in a year.

The rival leaders, however, were unable to reach an agreement before a deadline passed at midnight Monday. They asked the Israeli president early on Tuesday to extend the deadline to form a joint coalition to midnight Wednesday.

Rivlin acceded to the 48-hour extension request "on the understanding that they are very close to reaching an agreement," according to a statement from his office.

Gantz and Netanyahu met overnight in a last-ditch effort to resolve differences and later issued a joint statement claiming that they had made "significant progress" in forming an emergency administration to end Israel's unprecedented political deadlock amid the coronavirus pandemic.



If the pair fails to clinch a deal, the Israeli parliament (Knesset) will have 21 days to come up with a candidate for prime minister endorsed by 61 members of the 120-seat legislature.

If that also fails, Israel could be headed for an extraordinary fourth straight election, sending people back to the ballot box in just over a year.

Just hours before the original deadline, both Netanyahu and Gantz delivered separate televised statements on Monday night and expressed their desire for a coalition administration, citing the emergency created by the coronavirus outbreak.

"We will keep making every effort to achieve the unity," Netanyahu said in a speech that began with his explanation of the latest restrictions imposed over the pandemic, which has so far infected 11,586 Israelis and killed 116.

"Benny, I'm waiting for you in the prime minister's residence in Jerusalem" al-Quds, he tweeted later. "Let's meet and sign even tonight on forming a national emergency government that will save lives and work for the citizens of Israel."

Gantz, an ex-military chief, urged Netanyahu to come to an agreement or risk dragging Israel into an unwanted election.

"Netanyahu, we have arrived at the moment of truth. The citizens of Israel expect us — both of us — to make difficult decisions," he said.

Trump threatens consequences for Beijing as Senate launches China-centered probe into Covid-19 origins

China will have to answer for allegedly misleading the world about coronavirus, President Donald Trump has signaled. His thinly-veiled threat comes as the U.S. Senate begins an investigation into the causes of the health crisis.

The U.S. president took a swipe at China — as well as CBS reporter Paula Reid — after the journalist asked him why there had been

no "consequences" for Beijing's "misinformation" during the pandemic.

"I wouldn't tell you. China will find out. Why would I tell you?" Trump fired back. "How do you know there are no consequences? You're going to find out."

His warning coincided with the launch of a Senate probe into the origins of and response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Ron Johnson said that the investigation would ask difficult questions about why the United States was not properly prepared to handle the health crisis. The inquiry will also put the World Health Organization (WHO) and China under the microscope.

"Where did this all start from? Was this

transferred animal to human? Was this from a lab in China? Might have been the best of intentions trying to come up with the different cures, with the different therapies for the coronavirus in general," Johnson said on Monday. "We need to know what role [the] WHO might have had in trying to cover this thing up."

(Source: RT)

Lionel Messi thanks Iranian wonderkid Arat

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Lionel Messi broke social networks after responding to the video of Arat Hosseini, who showed off his skills in a Barcelona shirt.

It was in Instagram where the Argentine star surprised Arat thanking the gesture he had.

Young Arat starts the video by saying 'Hi Lionel Messi, I love you' and then goes on to perform a series of keepie-uppies before unleashing a brilliant overhead kick straight into the goal which was kept behind him.

"Thanks Arat!! I see a lot of class there, impressive! Hug!!"

Barcelona's social media team also commended the young phenom, sharing his video on the team's official Instagram page.

Six-year-old Hosseini, who was born in northern Iran but now lives in Liverpool, has become an internet sensation due to a series of videos highlighting his incredible skills.

His Instagram account has accrued an astonishing 2.7million followers, including boxer Anthony Joshua, former Manchester United defender Rio Ferdinand and Liverpool Champions League winner Luis Garcia.

Arat's favorite sport is soccer, but also he has boasted of being very good in disciplines such as gymnastic, basketball and taekwondo.



AFC President offers condolences on death of Fariborz Esmaili



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Asian Football Confederation (AFC) president Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa has expressed his deepest condolences to the Iran Football Federation over death of Iran ex-forward Fariborz Esmaili.

Former Esteghlal and Iran national football team striker Esmaili passed away last week at the age of 80.

Esmaili represented Iran national football team at the 1964 Summer Olympics, where the Persians lost to Germany (4-0) and Romania (1-0) and drew 1-1 with Mexico.

He made 14 appearances for Iran national football team from 1964 to 1968 and scored four goals.

Esmaili also was a member of Iran national football team at the 1966 Asian Games and helped the Persians to win a silver medal.

Esmaili started his playing career at Taj (known as Esteghlal) and also played in Tehran based football clubs Oghab and Sho'a.

"I express my deepest condolences on passing of Esmaili. He will be remembered for his efforts by football family in Iran and AFC," Sheikh Salman said.

Iran extends postponement of competitions due to Covid-19



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran has extended the postponement of all sports activities until May 20 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In an announcement made by the Committee of Coronavirus Combat and Prevention Headquarters on Tuesday, the all sports activities are postponed until May 20.

The sportspersons are forced to conduct and monitor fitness sessions remotely, the announcement said.

Iran Sports Medicine Federation and Ministry of Sport and Youth had already called off sports activities until April 18.

Sporting activities across the world have

come to a grinding halt due to COVID-19 pandemic which has claimed more than 120,000 lives so far.

The health ministry said on Tuesday that the Islamic Republic's death toll had reached 4,683 among a total of 74,877 infected people.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) had already postponed all soccer games and competitions scheduled for May and June.

The AFC will also continue to engage and consult with the Participating Member Associations in the AFC Club Competitions and will explore all possible options in order to complete the 2020 AFC Champions League and AFC Cup Group Stages.

Iran's women national team improving with the help of the Women's Super League

Everyone knows how strong the Iranian national team is in the men's basketball scene with four FIBA Asia Cup triumphs and numerous appearances in the FIBA Basketball World Cup and the Olympics. It's a proven fact!

However, you might have to keep an eye out for Iran's women's national team as they are improving with a women's professional basketball league set in place.

■ The Iranian Women's Super League

The five-month league pits 12 professional clubs against each other, featuring the best talents in the country. The 12 clubs are separated into two groups - A and B - and play in a home-and-away format for 10 games per team. The top four from each group then advance to the playoffs.

These eight clubs clash in the best of three series up from the Quarter-Finals until a champion is crowned. The top two teams of this current season are Gorgan Women of Group A and Bahman Tehran of Group B, who played their way through to the Finals. Gorgan took only one loss the entire regular season and another in the Semi-Finals, led by national team star Edna Issaeian who has been averaging a double-double alongside lead guard Shadi Abdolvand. Bahman meanwhile are doing even better as they are undefeated in regular season play, armed with the trio of Delaram Vakili, Saeide Elli, and Golshid Omidian.



■ Professional standards

The standardized set of the league, whether it's the court, the scoreboard, the shot clock, the use of digital score sheet, and live stats, put the players and clubs in a position to develop and improve each other while competing.

The Iranian Women's Super League undoubtedly plays a significant role in the development of women's basketball in the country, but it's only one aspect of a growing program.

"It's really good," said Talin Tahmasian, head of competition and refereeing for IRIBF Women's Federation. "In Iran, we have five leagues for women, including the U16, U18, second Division, First Division, and the Super League." With this set in place, there is no surprise that women's basketball in Iran is slowly climbing and catching some attention.

■ National Team

Iran's U16 women's team played for the first time ever in the FIBA U16 Asian Championship in 2017 in Bengaluru, where they finished fourth. The U18 team followed suit in 2018, making their first appearance in the FIBA U18 Women's Asian Championship appearance since 1977. They won games against Singapore and Guam to finish fifth.

The senior women's national team are eyeing their way back onto the radar. It will be an uphill battle towards promotion to Division A, but they are already on a promising path.

Only last August, they made history in securing their first medal by finishing third at the WABA Women's Championship in Amman, Jordan.

The men's national team program for Iran has already firmly planted themselves as one of the best in Asia. Now it's time for the women to rise, slowly and steadily with the help of Women's Super League.

(Source: FIBA)

Usain Bolt goes viral with 'social distancing' Olympic photo

Retired track star Usain Bolt showed he's still a few steps ahead when he posted an AFP picture of him outstripping his rivals at the Beijing Olympics with the cheeky caption: "social distancing".

Bolt's post, featuring a picture by AFP photographer Nicolas Asfour of the 2008 Olympics 100m final, blew up on social media, drawing more than half a million likes and 90,000 retweets.

It showed the Jamaican crossing the finish line at the Bird's Nest stadium in a then-world record time of 9.69sec,

glancing round from lane four as his despairing competitors trail two paces behind.

"Savage", commented one Twitter user, while New York Times journalist Christopher Clarey posted another picture of Bolt out in front on his own, captioned "self isolation".

Bolt's chest-thumping celebration in Beijing added to a legend that grew further when he won the 200m in another world-record time. He retired in 2017 with eight Olympic gold medals and the

current 100m mark of 9.58sec, set in 2009.

Bolt, 33, has been encouraging Jamaicans to self-isolate during the coronavirus pandemic, posting videos of himself exercising at home and juggling footballs with a friend. He also helped promote a major fundraiser, Telethon Jamaica.

After retiring from athletics, Bolt, a Manchester United fan, attempted to launch a career in football, and had a trial with Australia's Central Coast Mariners before contract talks failed.

(Source: AFP)



Skocic calls for lifting of sanctions against Iran

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — The national football team head coach Dragan Skocic has urged the United States to lift sanctions on Iran immediately.

"Coronavirus is a worldwide threat, which needs worldwide collaboration. Sanctions against Iranian people is against this collaboration," the Iran coach tweeted.

Iran's death toll from the coronavirus outbreak has risen to 4,585, a health ministry official said on Monday, adding the total number of infected cases had reached 73,303 in the most-affected Middle Eastern country.

More than 43,800 coronavirus positive cases in the country have fully recovered from the disease, according to a health ministry spokesman.

AFC extends postponement of all matches and competitions

Following the continued preventive measures and travel restrictions put in place by several Governments, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has decided today to postpone all matches and competitions scheduled to take place in May and June until further notice.

As one of the first Confederations in world football to undertake precautionary measures in light of the COVID-19 outbreak, the latest decision reinforces the AFC's commitment to ensure the safety and wellbeing of players, participating teams, officials, fans and all stakeholders.

The AFC has been closely monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic and had earlier postponed its matches in March and April after holding a series of emergency meetings in Delhi, Doha, Dubai and Kuala Lumpur.

The AFC will also continue to engage and consult with the Participating Member Associations in the AFC Club Competitions and will explore all possible options in order to complete the 2020 AFC Champions League and AFC Cup Group Stages.

(Source: the-afc)

Yuri Matias terminates contract with Tractor

TASNIM — Jefferson Yuri de Sousa Matias has terminated his contract with Iranian football club Tractor.

The 25-year-old Brazilian defender joined Tractor in January but played just two matches for the Tabriz-based football team before the competitions were halted due to the novel coronavirus outbreak.

Matias had joined Tractor from Portuguese football team Academica.

Tractor sits third in the Iran Professional League (IPL) 10 points behind leader Persepolis.

Hadipour keeps fifth spot in world taekwondo ranking

IRNA — Iranian taekwondo athlete Armin Hadipour managed to keep his fifth rank in the world in the -58 weight category, said the head of Gilan Province taekwondo committee on Tuesday.

Mohsen Setorgi told IRNA that Hadipour gained 331.84 points in the latest ranking of World Karate Federation to maintain his fifth spot among top world karate players in -58 weight class.

Hadipour has previously secured a quota for Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.

About four months ago, Hadipour was named the best athlete of students of the world.

He went on to say that Farzan Ashourzadeh, another Iranian athlete, stood 30th in the ranking.

Sporting Lisbon eye Mehdi Taremi: report

Portuguese giant Sporting Lisbon have set their sight on Rio Ave forward Mehdi Taremi.

Sporting Lisbon are going to sign the player in the summer transfer window.

The Rio Ave striker has scored 11 goals in 27 games for his team this season.

Taremi, 27, arrived at Rio Ave from Al Gharafa of Qatar at the beginning of the season.

Porto and Benfica, other well-known Portuguese teams, had already shown interest in signing Taremi.

(Source: Record)

Jahanbakhsh reveals Ajax and Napoli interest

Alireza Jahanbakhsh says Ajax and Napoli were among the teams interested in him before he joined Brighton.

"Ajax's offer was actually the highest they had ever bid for a player but AZ management did not allow me to join another team in Holland, they even offered me a better deal to stay but I had already decided to move," Jahanbakhsh said.

"There were talks with Napoli, as well as a couple of serious and good offers from German teams whose names I would rather not mention," he added.

(Source: Persian Football)

INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

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

Tehrantimes79 Tehrantimesdaily

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

A trouble that saddens you is better than a blessing that rouses your selfishness and loses you God's favor; for, the former grinds your body like a rasp, and the latter burns your spirit little by little.

Imam Ali (AS)

Publishers organize online exhibitions to fill in for Tehran Intl. Book Fair



CULTURE **TEHRAN** — Dozens of Iranian publishers have showcased their latest offerings in a movement to fill in for the Tehran International Book Fair, which was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Books have been exhibited at special discounts on the publishers' websites in the movement entitled "We Bring the Book Fair into Your Homes".

Among the publishers are the Islamic Revolution Document Center and Islamic Revolution Publications, which is affiliated with the Institute for Preserving and Publishing the Works of Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

The online exhibitions were launched on Tuesday and will run until April 24.

The 33rd Tehran International Book Fair was scheduled to be held from April 14 to 24, but it was postponed to a time after the holy month of Ramadan due to the new virus epidemic. Ramadan will probably begin on April 24 and end on May 23.



Golestan Gallery launches painting competition for children in home quarantine

A R T **TEHRAN** — Golestan Gallery owner Lili Hosseini has launched a painting competition for children aged under 10 during the home quarantine.


"I have thought children under 10 enjoy stronger imagination and can produce more interesting works, and that is why I decided to work with little children," she said in a press release published on Tuesday.

"I was surprised to see this great number of paintings. I never thought the topic would be interesting for children and their families. And although this was a difficult task to do all alone, I enjoyed the experience and I am happy with it," she said.

"I have so far received about 450 works, out of which I have personally selected 180 works for the first stage," she said.

"I will later invite three painters who have previously worked with children to join me to judge and select the final works, and next I will publish the final works on the Instagram page of the gallery," she added.

"The winners will also be announced on the Instagram page," she concluded.



Japan TV show "Terrace House" halts production over coronavirus

TOKYO (Reuters) — Fans of Japanese reality TV show "Terrace House" will have to find new ways to pass the time in self-isolation after staff said on its Twitter account here that production of the latest season on Netflix was being halted due to the coronavirus outbreak.

"We are suspending the current production of Terrace House Tokyo 2019-2020, giving the safety and health of cast and staff top priority," they said.

The unscripted reality show featuring three men and three women living under the same roof has gained an international following since being streamed on Netflix from 2015.

The series originated on Japan's Fuji TV in 2012 and is now co-produced by Fuji and Netflix.

The latest series is shot in a luxury house in Tokyo, which has become the focus of Japan's coronavirus outbreak. Japan has declared a state of emergency for some regions including Tokyo, and the public are being encouraged to stay away from shared spaces.

Actor Mohammad-Ali Keshavarz celebrates 90th birthday by donating memorabilia to film museum

A R T **TEHRAN** — The legendary actor Mohammad-Ali Keshavarz donated memorabilia to the Film Museum of Iran on his 90th birthday anniversary on Tuesday, the museum has announced.

A handwritten letter from his late friend, stage director and playwright Hamid Samandarian, is a highlight of the collection.

Some of his certificates and the obituary of Shaban Ostadkhani (Ostokhuni), the villain whose role he played in Ali Hatami's acclaimed TV series "Hezardastan", are also among the donated items.

The contracts for several films and TV series in which he has acted, including "Mirza Noruz Shoes", "Dear Uncle Napoleon", "Sarbedaran" and "Sadeq Kordeh", are also in the collection.

Also included are his ring, pen, eyeglasses, fountain pen, hat and several other items.

A life-sized statue of the actor is due to be set up in the hall of the museum this year.

"What keeps hope and smiles alive in these hard days are the everlasting scenes of kindness and sympathy," he wrote in a statement for his birthday.

"The scenes are seen in every corner of this country and make the spirits fly. This sympathy, this kindness and this solidarity will help us get through this hard passage. There are better days to come," he added.

Born in 1930 in Isfahan, Keshavarz began his stage acting career in 1948 and entered the world of cinema with "Night of the Hunchback" by Farrokh Ghaffari in 1964.



Actor Mohammad-Ali Keshavarz poses for a photo with his 90th birthday cake.

He has so far acted in many famous hits including "Mother", "Hezardastan" "Kamalolmolk" and "Delshodegan" by Ali Hatami, as well as "Under the Olive Trees"

by Abbas Kiarostami.

Keshavarz also played the role of Shakkur in "Caravans", a 1978 Iranian-American film directed by James Fargo based on the novel by

James Michener. The movie was shot in Iran and the Mexican-American actor Anthony Quinn had acted in the movie, playing the role of Zulfikar.

Iranian musicians honored at Global Music Awards



Photo: Cover of vocalist Abdolhossein Mokhtab's album "Shadow of the Friend" that features his song "Az Sharm Dar Hejabam".

A R T **TEHRAN** — Three Iranian musicians have been honored at the Global Music Awards, the organizers have announced.

Vocalist Abdolhossein Mokhtab won a gold medal for his song "Az Sharm Dar Hejabam" ("I'm Acutely Embarrassed").

Composer Ahmad Mirmasumi received a silver medal for his album "Caressing the Moments" and musician Shahin Yusefzamani was awarded a bronze medal for his album "Morning".

"What the world needs now is love, sweet love," the organizers wrote in a statement after announcing the winners.

"Music is more important than ever; call your family members and friends and sing or play a tune. Music is love. Be safe; the world is beautiful," they added.

Eight other musicians were also awarded gold medals. Among them are American composer Douglas Knehans and American-Italian mezzo-soprano vocalist Benedetta Orsi.

Iranian Academy of Arts to release Qajar era albums online



A copy of a Qajar era disk.

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Academy of Arts plans to release eight albums recorded during the Qajar period (1789–1925) online on its website during the coronavirus pandemic.

The collections feature various Iranian singers and composers. In addition, a book titled "Voice of Honor", which reviews the basics and principles of Iranian songs compiled by experts Bahman Kazemi, Vahraz Purahmad and Mehdi Farahani, will be published at the same time.

The first album contains 116 songs by singers of the past century as well as songs by theater troupes and actors dating back to 1906.

The second album has been recorded in 1907 and contains the pieces composed by Mirza Hosseinqoli in his journey to Paris with several other Iranian musicians.

The third collection recorded in London in 1907 contains 113 compositions.

The collections containing 469 compositions will be gradually uploaded on the academy's website.

Colleague making doc about Iranologist Hassan Anusheh

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — Iranian scholar Seyyed Mehdi Hosseini, who collaborated in several research projects with Hassan Anusheh, has said that he is making a documentary about the outstanding Iranologist who died of cancer last week.

"The idea of making a documentary about master Anusheh flashed through my mind in 2016 when I, as a researcher, was collaborating with him on writing 'Mazandaran Encyclopedia'," Hosseini told the Persian service of IRNA on Monday.

"In my meetings with master Anusheh, in addition to what I learned from him about bibliography and writing an encyclopedia, I also genenned up on his life that was rarely similar to that of others", and his unique characteristics propelled me into the idea of making a documentary about him," he added.

Anusheh first agreed with Hosseini about his plan to make the documentary, but due to his humility, he repeatedly tried to dissuade him from making the film.

"Sometimes, he humbly asked me 'what is the moral of the film?' or 'who am I that you want to make a film about?'" Hosseini noted.



Celebrated Iranologist Hassan Anusheh (R) and scholar Seyyed Mehdi Hosseini in an undated photo.

"His unique methodology for research didn't allow the filming go ahead as usual," he added.

Nearly a year ago, Anusheh was diagnosed with cancer, and that brought the shooting to a halt.

"However, the illness could never stop him working on his research projects; he had dedicated himself to the history and culture of Iran," Hosseini mentioned.

"He was at peace in front of the camera... his unique lifestyle and the external and mental serenity coming from his coexistence with books can be the message of the documentary for audiences," he added.

Hosseini plans soon to complete the documentary, which is still untitled.

Anusheh's research contributed enormously to several Persian encyclopedias, including the "Shiism Encyclopedia".

He also translated dozens of books, including George G. Cameron's "History of Early Iran", Clifford Edmund Bosworth's "The Later Ghaznavids" and "The History of the Saffarids of Sistan and the Maliks of Nimruz", into Persian.

He was also the translator of "The Cambridge History of Iran" that has been authored by a number of scholars such as Ilya Gershevitch, Ehsan Yarshater and Richard N. Frye.

Quick-hit streaming service Quibi reports 1.7 million downloads in first week

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — About 1.7 million people downloaded the new entertainment streaming app Quibi during its first week on the market, Chief Executive Meg Whitman told CNBC television on Monday.

Quibi, which offers movies, reality shows and news in episodes of 10 minutes or less, launched on April 6 in the United States and Canada with a 90-day free-trial. The service is a gamble by Hollywood that it can carve out another category in the crowded streaming video landscape.

The initial downloads exceeded the company's expectations, Whitman said. The mobile-only service had been promoted for on-the-go viewing for times such as commutes or waiting in line.

Quibi executives decided to forge ahead

with the launch even though people were sheltering at home to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus.

"It turns out people have in-between moments at home," Whitman said. "We don't actually think it hurt us."

She also said 80% of people who started a show watched it through the first episode. Quibi features a large roster of A-list talent including LeBron James, Liam Hemsworth, Chance the Rapper and Reese Witherspoon. It was founded by Jeffrey Katzenberg and is backed by \$1.8 billion from Hollywood studios and other investors.

After the free trial, it will cost \$5 a month with ads, or \$8 a month without them. Some T-Mobile (TMUS.O) customers can get Quibi free for a year.

Fleming, Netrebko, Kaufmann headline Met Opera online gala

NEW YORK (AP) — Renée Fleming, Anna Netrebko, Jonas Kaufmann, Roberto Alagna and Bryn Terfel are among 38 opera stars in 13 nations scheduled for the Metropolitan Opera's At-Home gala, which will be streamed live on April 25 starting at 1 p.m. EDT.

Singers will perform live from their homes and transmit via Skype to All Mobile Video, whose equipment is used for the Met's high definition broadcasts to theaters during the season. The show is designed to be a fundraiser for the organization; there will be a donate button on the landing page of the website. The gala, expected to last about three hours, will air on the Met's website and will be available for replay until 6:30 p.m. EDT the next day.

"This is something that will be, I think, endearing as a live event," Met general manager Peter Gelb said Monday. "But it's truly subject to the quality of the individual Internet lines."

Some artists quarantined as couples will perform together: Netrebko and tenor Yusif Eyvazov in Vienna; Alagna and soprano Aleksandra Kurzak in Le Raincy, France; Terfel and Hannah Stone, former official harpist to Britain's Prince Charles, in Wales; tenor Stephen Costello and Met violinist Yoon Kwon Costello in New York; and soprano Nicole Car and bass-baritone Etienne Dupuis in Paris.

Singers include Diana Damrau, Javier Camarena, Elina Garan?a, René Pape and Piotr Beczala.