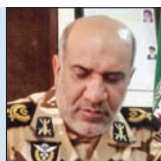




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Off the beaten path: Fun and non-touristy experiences in Iran

TEHRAN — While many countries in the world are facing overtourism, there are countries like Iran, with a vast untapped tourism potential, that are actually in need of more travelers.

If you are planning to traverse Iran and want to experience the ancient land in a non-touristy way, there are recommendations for areas where you can step out and enjoy your off the beaten path.

Below is a select of sites and recommendations rounded up by the Culture Trip:

Discover zurkhaneh

Literally "house of strength," the Iranian zurkhaneh is an ancient gym where men practice what can be described as martial arts meets yoga.

This centuries-old tradition is based on battle and warfare, with much of its equipment resembling such. Standing in a circular pit, ➔8

17 new petrochemical plants to go operational by March 2021

TEHRAN — Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said 17 new petrochemical plants are planned to be inaugurated across the country during the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2021), Tasnim news agency reported.

Speaking in a meeting of the surge in production headquarters on Wednesday, Zanganeh noted that the implementation of the new projects is going to bring the country \$6 million of revenues every year.

The current Iranian calendar year (beginning on March 20) is named as the year of "Pick up in Production" by the Leader of Islamic Revolution Seyed Ali Khamenei.

Considering the undeniable significance of the petrochemical industry in Iran's resilient economy in the sanctions era, the Iranian Oil Ministry and the country's National Petrochemical Company (NPC) have been taking major steps to facilitate further development of this industry in recent years. ➔4

U.S. occupation destroyed Iraqi state structure: Kadhim

By staff & agencies

Iraq's Prime Minister-designate Mustafa al-Kadhim said the 2003 U.S. occupation of Iraq destroyed the country's "structure".

"The U.S. occupation of the country succeeded in destroying the structure of the Iraqi state without setting up a correct rebuilding process," al-Kadhim said in a gathering on Tuesday with a number

of Iraqi journalists and writers.

"The problems and crises that we are now facing are the result of a wrong set-up for the political process post 2003," he said, according to Asharq al-Awsat.

He also said his cabinet lineup was ready and he would discuss it with the different political blocs to submit the list to Parliament for approval. ➔10



ARTICLE

Salman Parviz
Journalist

Theories on origins of COVID-19 disease

There are many theories about the exact origins of the novel coronavirus, designated "nCoV-2019" by World Health Organization or commonly referred to as COVID-19 disease, also called SARS-CoV-2 because it is related to SARS pathogen. Theories about the missing link for transmission of the new coronavirus from bats to humans abound.

Questions abound whether climate change may lead to more zoonotic diseases like COVID-19 or if urbanization and deforestation in the future will result in more pandemics. Today scientists are racing to find a vaccine for the virus. In order to fully understand the nature of this pandemic it is important to know its origins.

On December 30, 2019 at around 7 p.m., the Wuhan Center of Disease Control and Prevention detected a novel coronavirus in two hospital patients with atypical pneumonia — the virus belongs to the same family of bat-borne viruses as the one that caused SARS, a disease that plagued 8,100 people and killed 800 between 2002 and 2003.

Initially 84 percent of the infections occurred in Hubei Province, of which Wuhan is capital, the "ground-zero" of coronavirus pandemic.

This article attempts to explore whether COVID-19 was genetically engineered or has evolved naturally. Detailed understanding of how an animal virus jumped species boundaries to infect humans so productively will help in prevention of future zoonotic events.

More scientific data could swing the balance of evidence to favor one hypothesis over another.

COVID-19 bioengineered?

One theory is that the COVID-19 was created in a laboratory as a potential bioweapon. American author and researcher, Eugene Michael Jones during an interview with Tasnim news agency in March said that "U.S. has outsourced its bioweapons development program in part to China" and "until the source of the pandemic becomes clear, Iran should be very suspicious" of any help from America. ➔9

UK arms giant sold £15bn in weapons to Saudi Arabia during Yemen war

Britain's leading arms manufacturer is found to have sold above £15 billion (\$18.9) worth of arms to Saudi Arabia since the kingdom started a brutal war against Yemen, the Arab world's most impoverished nation.

The Guardian carried a news article on Tuesday, citing data obtained from the BAE (British Aerospace) Systems' most recent annual report that has also been newly analyzed by Britain's Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT).

The sum includes £2.5 billion in revenues that the company received from Saudi arms sales in 2019.

The sales came despite a ruling by Britain's Court of Appeal in June last year that all British arms exports that could be used against Yemen were to be halted.

Andrew Smith of the CAAT, meanwhile, said,

"The last five years have seen a brutal humanitarian crisis for the people of Yemen, but for BAE it's been business as usual. The war has only been possible because of arms companies and complicit governments willing to support it."

The data further showed that the true value of the UK's arms sales to Saudi Arabia is far greater than the £5.3bn total value of the country's export licenses since March 2015, when Riyadh and a coalition of its allies launched the military campaign.

The gap has been due to the fact that arms have also been sold to the Saudi kingdom under open licenses, which authorize the sales without recording the cost under the official export total.

"These figures expose the cozy relationship between the Saudi regime and BAE. But they also imply that the value of UK arms sales is far greater than government figures show," Smith added.

Riyadh is BAE's third biggest buyer. The company maintains and supplies Tornado warplanes to the kingdom and provides "operational capability" to its Air Force and Navy.

According to Press TV, Saudi Arabia and its allies have been staging indiscriminate attacks against Yemen since March 2015 to put the country's former Saudi-allied officials back in the saddle.

The war — which has the support of the UK, the US and other Western states — has killed tens of thousands of Yemenis and rendered at least 80 percent of Yemen's 28-million-strong population dependent on aid for survival.

The UK government has been under fire for keeping up arms sales to the Saudi regime despite widespread reports that the weapons are being used against Yemeni civilians and non-military infrastructure. ➔10

Academy of Medical Sciences makes fasting recommendations in midst of coronavirus disease

TEHRAN — The Iranian Academy of Medical Sciences has issued a set of recommendations for fasting during the holy month of Ramadan as Muslims, like other communities in the world, are grappling with the coronavirus predicament.

The ninth month of the Islamic calendar, Ramadan is a time when Muslims around the world abstain from eating, drinking or smoking between sunrise and sunset.

For most Muslims fasting is one of the major obligations. In recent years studies undertaken by scientists have discovered that it has some very important medical advantages in terms of regenerating the body's immune system.

Amid the coronavirus outbreak, the Iranian Academy of Medical Sciences has said all healthy

people over 65 years of age can practice fasting observing health protocols of social distancing, washing hands regularly, drinking 8-10 glasses of water between dawn and dusk, and reducing the consumption of tea and coffee while increasing the consumption of vegetables and fruits.

It should be noted that the elderly are more susceptible to the coronavirus infection due to high blood sugar and blood pressure, cardiac and pulmonary diseases. However, many of them are unaware of their diseases.

Therefore, considering that infection with the coronavirus may be more dangerous among the elderly, it is recommended that those who are not assured that fasting is not harmful to them not to practice fasting.

Moreover, those people who are suffering from underweight or overweight are recommended to observe social distancing more strictly.

They should also note that people with diabetes may be more vulnerable to coronavirus. So, it is recommended that those people who are suffering from diabetes are allowed for fasting if they are below 65 years of age. Meanwhile, patients who are suffering from high blood pressure should be checked up regularly every day.

People who have undergone organ transplantation are not allowed for fasting. Finally, patients who have recovered from the coronavirus are recommended not to embark on fasting for at least six weeks.



© IRNA / Hamed Gholami

Sistan-Baluchestan under wheat, barley cultivation

Over the past couple of years, farmers in northern parts of Sistan-Baluchestan province have been cultivating wheat and barley.

The region has experienced more than 20 years of drought, but in recent years floods are heading from Helmand River in Afghanistan toward the province.



ARTICLE

Mohammad Jafari
Tehran Times journalist

COVID-19 pandemic can hit Israeli regime harder than expected

Military-spying character of the Israeli regime coupled with costly occupation and blockade of the Palestinian territories will certainly narrow down its economic capabilities as COVID-19 outbreak has reduced Tel Aviv's incomes remarkably, a political science expert said.

Adnan Abu Amer, the head of the Political Science Department at the University of the Ummah in Gaza, underlined in his article published by the Middle East Monitor that Israel is possibly one of the few regimes in the world that carries out regular military and security drills to check its readiness to face threats and challenges, including natural disasters and epidemics. Nevertheless, its performance so far in the face of the coronavirus crisis has been disappointing; its health sector was simply not prepared enough.

A full month and more after the virus was detected in Israel, with the health and economic crises continuing to get worse, the more obvious it becomes that the state lacks a single authority to manage the economy and other sectors in such an emergency. This is dangerous, as there seems to be no coordination between government agencies, which exacerbates the problems. Moreover, there was no need for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to appear every night to present the latest developments in the virus crisis and task the Mossad spy agency with obtaining respirators.

The problems that the regime is experiencing could be solved by having an emergency command room that operates according to recommendations from the Prime Minister and his cabinet. Netanyahu, though, seems to be doing this on his own, which is less than satisfactory.

Israel's management of the crisis has been confused from the beginning, revealing a lot of finger-pointing and power play between different ministries. The Ministries of Finance and Health can't agree, while Defense argues about buying more ventilators, to the chagrin of Health officials, whose task this is. ➔10

Army has so far set up 14 field hospitals

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Amir Nozar Nemati, the deputy commander of the Army ground forces, said in Shiraz on Wednesday that the Army has so far established 14 field hospitals in cities across the country to cope with the outbreak of the coronavirus.

Nemati said the Army has the capacity to set up more such hospitals.



In late March, the Army established 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. The center was established in 24 hours.

The Armed Forces, including the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, have also produced medical equipment including test kits used for diagnosing the coronavirus disease.

The volunteer Basij forces have also rushed to the help of the Health Ministry to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

Defense Minister Amir Hatami also said on Wednesday that Army strongly supports the people, reaffirming that the Army is prepared to counter any threat.

Hatami made the remarks ahead of Army Day, which falls on April 17.

"Today, Iran's Army is one of the most prepared armies in the world. It has been practically proven and we have witnessed it during the past 41 years," he said.

The brigadier general also said that the Army has always stood beside the people in times of crises.

Foreign media portrait of Iran is phony: Rouhani

'Iran proud of its medical staff in COVID-19 fight'

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that foreign media outlets are presenting a "dark situation" of Iran which is "false and unrealistic".

"We have problems caused by sanctions and the coronavirus, however the dark situation portrayed by foreign media to make people fearful is totally false and unrealistic," he said during a cabinet meeting.

Despite all the problems, "we will have an acceptable and good situation," the president remarked.

Rouhani also praised efforts made by health workers in the struggle against the coronavirus pandemic.

"Our medical team is very proud. We are proud. From the first day of this crisis, there has been no sick person who has gone to a hospital and faced a closed door," he stated.

There has been no shortage of hospital bed since the outbreak of the coronavirus, he added.

Elsewhere, he said, "Today, the most important concern and issue is the people's health and livelihood. We have to fight the (coronavirus) disease and unemployment at the same time."

He said that it is important to fight the coronavirus and make efforts to improve the economic situation as well.

The president expressed hope that the situation would be "favorable" for the people.

Ambassador says Iran expects India, world to stand up against sanctions

The Iranian ambassador to New Delhi has said the Islamic Republic expects India and the rest of the international community to stand against the "unjust" U.S. sanctions that are hurting millions of Iranians amid the Covid-19 crisis.

In an interview with Hindustan Times published on Tuesday, Ali Chegeni also talked about India-Iran cooperation to tackle the pandemic and the steps being taken to help the 255 Indians who tested positive for Covid-19 in the holy city of Qom and the 5,000-odd Indians stranded in different parts of Iran.

Chegeni said, "Both countries, in a close and warm contact, have worked together to evacuate their stranded nationals and until now, eight batches of Indian nationals were transferred to India by seven Iranian airliners and one aircraft of the Indian Air Force, and the local authorities and Indian missions in Iran are providing all possible humanitarian assistance to the remaining Indians, including pilgrims, students and fisherman."

The diplomat also said those Indians who tested positive for Covid-19 are being treated in Qom and Tehran.

"They have been accommodated in some good hotels and guesthouse advised by Qom governorate under supervision and credit of Indian embassy in Tehran. Those who have tested positive, have been immediately hospitalized and offered the necessary medical treatment free of charge by Iran's government. The Indian embassy is following their situation closely."

On the current situation in Iran with regard to the coronavirus, the ambassador said, "Despite the brutal and inhumane U.S. sanctions, our situation is relatively good in fighting the pandemic in comparison with some other countries. Keep in your mind, we could not take advantage of the experiences of others while Iran was among the countries hardest hit by the highly contagious virus in the first phase of spreading of Covid-19 across the globe. Now, hopefully the curve shows that the pandemic is falling [from] the peak as the number of new infection cases have dropped from 3,200 to 1,600 on a daily basis."

Ambassador Chegeni also said in cooperation with the Indian authorities, a majority of Iranian citizens in India have been evacuated.

"Still there are around 200 Iranian tourists and students who, at this stage, requested the embassy for their immediate return to Iran. We expect to send them back home by an Iran Air flight from Mumbai in the coming days."

Senator Murphy says if Iran fails to beat coronavirus, U.S. will fail too

Murphy says Trump could be responsible for death of innocents in Iran

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Chris Murphy, the U.S. senator from Connecticut, warned on Monday that the Trump administration could be partially responsible for "the death of innocent people" if it continues its current policies towards Iran amidst the coronavirus epidemic.

"If this epidemic continues to grow and spread in Iran it will...result in the death of innocent people, partially as a result of U.S. policy that does not accrue to the national security benefit of our country," he told reporters on the Monday conference call. The National Interest reported.

"Remember, if we don't beat it there, we don't beat it here. This virus doesn't respect borders," he added. "It's just good public health policy to help even our adversaries beat back this scourge."

The novel coronavirus disease, also known as COVID-19, hit Iran at a time when U.S.-Iranian tensions were at an all-time high. The Trump administration initially relaxed its "super maximum economic pressure" campaign in order to allow for humanitarian trade but has refused to budge any further, claiming that the current exemptions are enough. Murphy disagreed.

He had penned a March 26 letter, signed by ten other Democratic senators, asking the Trump administration to ensure that Iran and Venezuela can import medical supplies and other humanitarian goods to deal with the coronavirus outbreak.

Murphy wrote on his Twitter page on April



6 that 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," he tweeted.

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 deadly virus.

"The United States can reduce restrictions and facilitate Iran's access to medicine, howev-

er, 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.

On March 31, a UN human rights expert called for lifting international sanctions against countries ranging from Iran to North Korea and Venezuela in coronavirus crisis, according to Reuters.

"The continued imposition of crippling economic sanctions on Syria, Venezuela, Iran, Cuba, and, to a lesser degree, Zimbabwe, to

name the most prominent instances, severely undermines the ordinary citizens' fundamental right to sufficient and adequate food," Hilal Elver, UN special rapporteur on the right to food, said in a statement.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Analyst says Afghan leaders must take steps to settle political crisis

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Mohsen Rouhisefat, an expert on international affairs, has said that the Afghan leaders and political groups must take steps in settling the political crisis in their country.

In an interview with IRNA published on Wednesday, he said that cooperation among all the Afghan political groups is required to end the political deadlock in the country.

He noted that Iran supports such approach.

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

Nozar Shafiei, also an expert on international affairs, has said that Ghani has no way but to reach an agreement with 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.

Shafiei said that the situation in Afghanistan is volatile and security in the country is being endangered.

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

Why sanctions on Iran must end

By Yasir Ali Mirza

Iran is among the worst-hit countries affected by the novel Coronavirus pandemic. As per the World Health Organization's report, as of April 13, the COVID-19 confirmed cases have skyrocketed to 71,686 and death toll to 4,474 marks. The situation is very grim in the country and the next few days are very crucial in fighting against the global pandemic. Its statistics are trailing behind the United States, Italy, China, Spain, Germany and France so far. It's bearing the brunt of emergency health hazard coupled with crippling sanctions.

As Iran is struggling to come to grips with containing the deadly contagious disease, the United States stooped to new low and heaped new sanctions on the Islamic Republic in the last week of March. Instead of easing economic sanctions in the time of global humanitarian health crisis, the Trump administration amplified its punitive action by slapping its embargo on crisis-hit Iran. The renewed sanctions came after a report surfaced that former FBI agent Robert Levinson, who was allegedly being sent to Iran for espionage, has died while in custody in Iran.

On behalf of the categorical appeals of the Iranian president and the foreign minister, the international community has called upon the United States to lift the sanctions on humanitarian grounds. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in a tweet on March 17, "Unlawful U.S. sanctions drained Iran's economic resources, impairing ability to fight #Covid19. They literally kill innocents..."

Even the United Nations' Human Rights Council chief Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile and herself a medical physician, also called for reassessment of economic sanctions slapped against Iran in the time of global pandemic, but it also fell flat. The so-called Progressives--- Democratic Party presiden-

tial hopeful Bernie Sanders, Somali-born U.S. Congresswomen Rep. Ilhan Omar, and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez called these sanctions inhuman and said they should be lifted immediately. Out of insensitiveness, the U.S. did not pay heed and summarily rejected it. The hawkish leaders sitting in Washington D.C. have made it clear that the spread of the virus will not save it from the inhuman sanctions and further tightened its 'maximum pressure' strategy to bring Iran to its knees.

Nevertheless, the Trump administration has offered 'humanitarian assistance' to Iran in fighting the deadly menace which is just a fig leaf intended to cover the Americans' vicious policies. Rejecting the U.S.' proffer as a mere euphemism, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said that Iran had no intention of accepting "a glass of muddy water." He said, "American leaders are lying... If they want to help Iran, all they need to do is to lift sanctions... Then we can deal with the coronavirus outbreak."

The crippling sanctions imposed on Iranian oil exports and banking systems are obstructing Iranian efforts to procure medicines, medical equipment and other essential items for civil purposes. It also cannot purchase certain items from any other countries, which [amounts to U.S.] flouting international norms. According to the U.S. Department of Treasury report, the Trump administration has truncated the number of licenses to American companies which export raw material for pharmaceuticals and medical equipment such as diagnostic kits, oxygen generators, full-face respirators, masks, and thermal imaging equipment. Medical staffers are facing difficulties in treating Covid patients due to the inhuman embargoes and [are] unable to contain the morbidity in this state of public health emergency. Some of the prominent Iranian political leaders and clerics have lost their lives. The gravity of this

catastrophe can be measured by the fact that Iran had to ask for [a] \$5 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan for the first time since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. But the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) Damocles sword is hanging over the fate of IMF loan as long as it remains under the blacklist. Unmoved by the global appeals, Washington is likely to block Iran's effort to get IMF's emergency loan needed to fight the COVID-19 outbreak.

The problem of successive U.S. administrations right from the beginning of the Cold War is that it wants to hegemonize the global politics that leads to unilateralism. The free flow of oil without any hindrance for its flourishing industrial economy is one of the apparent reasons behind its global hegemony. The American political establishment still believes that 'benign' U.S. hegemony and its unilateralism are the raison d'être for world peace. After the ending of [the] Cold War, they still reckon that Pax Americana is necessary for relative peace in the eastern hemisphere of the globe.

Since Trump got into the Oval Office, the POTUS has been increasing punitive actions against Iran. In 2018, he precipitously withdrew from a historic Iran nuclear treaty inked by his predecessor Barack Obama. On the contrary, he reimposed severe economic sanctions against its long-standing nemesis. The belligerence between this West Asian regional power and the 'global arrogance' had never gone beyond the verbal attacks. However, in an unprecedented move in January this year, on the persuasion of CIA chief Mike Pompeo, President Trump had given the go-ahead for the elimination of the most celebrated Iranian military officer and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps' (IRGC) al-Quds Force chief, Major General Qassem Soleimani, in a targeted assassination in Iraq. Though, General Soleimani was at the frontline in fighting against the global

terrorism unleashed by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). This U.S.' hot pursuit is a clear violation of the international law that shows how much it holds respect for it.

As the Coronavirus pandemic continues to ravage Iran, one positive development [that] has taken place is that some 32 level-headed U.S. lawmakers spearheaded by Rep. Cortez have written a joint letter to President Trump demanding immediate withdrawal of crushing sanctions against Iran so that it can obtain necessary medicines and medical equipment. The gesture shown by the American political leaders might be a glimmer of hope for the prospective thawing of relations between the US and Iran.

If the U.S. boasts that it is one of the oldest democracies and upholders of human rights, then its leadership must show its willingness to fight out the menace with transnational solidarity and cooperation with moderation and without any prejudices against any country in these trying times. That will suffice its ideals established by its founding fathers. U.S. should internalize the values of multilateralism in letter and spirit. Then world peace can be cherished in a true manner. Unlike others, Iran is no more a pariah state or a rogue entity. The Iranian nation is built upon great civilizational and cultural ethos and impeccable knowledge system.

In absence of any global effort to get it succeeded, the resilient people of Iran will overcome these difficult times once more on its own as it has evolved commendably since the Islamic Revolution 40 years ago. But the conformist attitude of the international community will remain a fact. Neither its people nor its leadership can be ignored from playing a pragmatic and responsible role in the comity of nations. It needs a fare share of its rights, not charity. So much so that tolerance, cooperation and mutual respect are the key to global peace.

(Source: Press TV)

MEK defectors tell of torture, forced sexual relations with Masoud Rajavi

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Intercept published a news article recently about the cult-like Iranian militant group the Mojahedin-e Khalq. The article is based on interviews with high-ranking defectors.

The following is an excerpt of the article: On a blisteringly hot summer afternoon in 2006, Reza Sadeghi ran into an old friend at the Iraqi headquarters of the Mojahedin-e Khalq, an exiled Iranian militant group better known as the MEK. The two men had not seen each other in over a decade. Sadeghi guided his friend, who had just arrived from Canada, on a stroll through the desert compound known as Camp Ashraf. He was glad to catch up with an old comrade. But he also had a burning question.

Sadeghi had effectively given his life to the MEK, which means “People’s Mujahideen of Iran.” A 26-year veteran of the group, he had not left Camp Ashraf for over a decade. During that time, he’d had no contact with his family or news of them. The MEK leadership had forced him and most of the other cadres living at Camp Ashraf to abandon even their closest relationships. Most painful for Sadeghi were thoughts of his son, Paul, his only child, now 16 years old. Sadeghi hadn’t seen or spoken to Paul since he’d arrived in Iraq.

As Sadeghi and his old friend strolled through the compound, two MEK minders followed at a distance. Sadeghi walked a bit faster, signaling to his friend that he needed to talk out of earshot of their escorts. Turning a corner between buildings, he whispered: “How is Paul?”

In 1996, Sadeghi traveled to Camp Ashraf, the group’s sprawling compound in northeast Iraq, for a mandatory six-month military training. While the MEK did propaganda and intelligence work, the group’s core skills were military. Membership required extensive training, including everything from weapons skills and bomb-making to operating a T-55 tank.

While he was in Iraq, Sadeghi decided to leave Paul, who was then almost 5 years old and had been born in Canada, with Sadeghi’s parents in Iran. At the time, Paul had never met his grandparents or been to Iran. Sadeghi planned to train for six months, retrieve Paul, and return to the U.S., where he’d spent several years raising money for the MEK’s leadership, which is based in Europe.

But when his training was over, the group asked Sadeghi to stay for another six months. He had been selected to train for assassination missions inside Iran and would fine-tune the fighting and sabotage skills that his commanders told him would soon help liberate his country. His MEK commander told Sadeghi that Paul would be sent back to Toronto to live with his mother, a Canadian woman whom Sadeghi had divorced not long after their son was born. Sadeghi agreed to stay.

Sadeghi got only rare updates about Paul during the 10 years he spent in Ashraf. Members were forbidden from discussing family or friends who were not MEK members. When he did ask about his son, they always told him that the boy was well, living in Toronto with Sadeghi’s ex-wife and receiving hundreds of dollars in support every month from the group.

Now, his old friend from Toronto told Sadeghi something that seemed impossible. His son, the friend said, was not in Canada at all. He had never left Iran and was being raised by Sadeghi’s parents there. Sadeghi’s Canadian ex-wife had filed a report with Canadian authorities, believing that Sadeghi had kidnapped the boy. Paul was declared a missing child by the Royal Mounted Canadian Police. His picture had even been printed on milk cartons in Canada in the hope that someone might find him and return him to his mother.

“No, he’s in Canada,” Sadeghi declared in disbelief. The friend insisted that wasn’t true. Canadian authorities had even interviewed him about Sadeghi and his son, the man said.

Sadeghi abruptly left his friend and marched to his commander’s office. He told her that he was leaving the organization to retrieve his son. He planned to join the U.S. soldiers at the spartan desert encampment they’d built to house those who managed to escape, Sadeghi said.

His commander called a group of other MEK members to detain him. Suddenly, about a dozen of Sadeghi’s comrades were grabbing him, trying to push and lift him into the back seat of a nearby Toyota pick-up. As he resisted, he felt one of his fingers



“He (Reza Sadeghi) had been selected to train for assassination missions inside Iran and would fine-tune the fighting and sabotage skills that his commanders told him would soon help liberate his country.”

snap. The MEK members shoved him into the back of the truck, pinning him to the floor with their bodies. The truck started driving. “You’re dead,” one of Sadeghi’s captors told him. “We are going to put you in the ground, and no one will ever know what happened to you.” Forced disappearances and solitary confinement were not uncommon at Camp Ashraf, and Sadeghi was sure he would be executed.

His only chance, he thought, was to try to kick out the window of the truck hoping the commotion would attract attention. He slammed his foot against the glass as the others fought to restrain him. The windows didn’t break, but as the truck slowed to turn onto the camp’s main road, it approached two American soldiers patrolling the road in a Humvee.

The soldiers stopped the truck and ordered everyone out. The men in the back got off Sadeghi and he raised himself up. “I want to leave the MEK,” he told the Americans in English. “I need your help.” The Americans took Sadeghi past the razor wire and armed Humvees and into their own makeshift military compound next door.

Once inside, Sadeghi asked to make a phone call. He still had the phone number of his brother who lived in Canada. He called him and asked for their parents’ number in Iran. After so much time without a word, they didn’t even know whether Sadeghi was alive or dead.

“When my mother picked up the phone, all I could say was hello. I didn’t know what else to say to her,” he recalled recently. “She recognized my voice and just started crying.”

Issa Azadeh, a senior operative who left the group in 2014 after 34 years, told The Intercept about his experience inside the MEK. “I couldn’t feel whether I was alive or dead,” said Azadeh. “I was thinking, ‘Did I make a mistake?’ But the first time when I got into the internet, I saw the truth. I searched about cults. I realized we were robots.”

“I loved the MEK very much. I saw all my dreams in this organization, everything,” Azadeh said when we met in Cologne, Germany, last fall. “But when I got involved in detail with things that no one else knew, I realized that there was no difference between [Joseph] Stalin and Massoud Rajavi.”

For MEK members, he said, “Rajavi was right after God. This is something that they put in our minds. Over the years, minute by minute, month by month, year by year, they put that in our minds. If you doubt Rajavi, it means that you doubt God.”

“Rajavi told us that you have to divorce your family completely,” Azadeh said. The leader told his acolytes that “family are the main poison for you guys” and counseled them that if their siblings or other relatives showed up at Camp Ashraf, the MEK members would be required to kill them. Azadeh was shocked. “At one time, family for MEK was honor,” he said. “Then Rajavi announced that family is poison or shame.”

“[Rajavi] said: ‘Don’t think about women. That’s not your life,’” Azadeh recalled. “You

have only one aim and one target: to obey everything I say and to overthrow the Iranian government.”

Batool Sultani was also an MEK commander and a member of the High Council. Soft-spoken with brown hair and glasses, Sultani easily blended into the crowd when we met in Cologne. The High Council governed the conduct of everyone living at Camp Ashraf. They could order the isolation, ostracization, and imprisonment of members who ran afoul of Rajavi. But when it came to major decisions, the council had “no real power,” Sultani said. “It was just for show and a means of using the women to keep control over the men who might become Massoud Rajavi’s rivals in the Mojahedin.”

“Maryam Rajavi came to us as female members of the group many times and asked us why we haven’t demanded to see our leader in his bedroom,” Sultani said. “There was a strong pressure” on MEK women to initiate sexual relationships with Rajavi, she said, “to show your commitment to the leader and the group.”

Another female member of the High Council at Camp Ashraf, whom The Intercept agreed to identify only as Sima, said she joined the MEK in the 1980s and left it in 2014. Unlike other former members, Sima asked that her real name not be used because she feared retaliation from current MEK members. She now lives in hiding in a European country and agreed to meet privately in a place where other local supporters of the group were unlikely to see her.

“You must know the organization and the psychological warfare that they start against you,” she told us in an effort to explain her fear. “They assassinate your personality and you will lose your closest friends; even your family wouldn’t trust you. This is the reason that these people are scared.”

As the years dragged on, she began to clash with other members. In response, they placed her under surveillance and forced her to engage in grueling self-criticism sessions that she described as psychologically torturous. Around 2000, Sima was nearing a breaking point. She made a plan with another woman to escape from Camp Ashraf. They plotted their exit in meticulous detail, but the other woman turned her in to MEK leaders. As punishment, Sima was subjected to even more intense ostracization and psychological torture.

For most of the next 14 years, Sima was confined to one section of Camp Ashraf, unable to move freely on her own. Like Batool Sultani, Sima described an intense form of psychosexual manipulation by Rajavi that she said became an integral tool for controlling female cadres. Years earlier, in 1995, “Rajavi gave every single woman in the organization a pendant and told us that we are all connected to him and to no other man,” Sima said. She was forced to divorce her husband and, like Sultani, eventually became sexually involved with Rajavi.

Around 1998, an even more chilling directive came down from Rajavi to the

female members of the organization. “I see some obstacles which have prevented us from reaching our goals and achieving victory,” Rajavi told members of the group, Sultani recalled. “That obstacle is hope for the future. We want to eliminate any kind of hope for the future from your mind. You are either with us or not!”

Sterilization would be a means of focusing the women’s minds. “They said that this organ of the body, the womb, has made women want to be mothers someday and return to domestic life,” Sultani said. “And so, visits with women began, to get them to go in groups of 20 or 30 to have a hysterectomy.”

Women were scheduled for appointments at an MEK hospital in Camp Ashraf. The procedures would be carried out by a female MEK member who had been trained as a doctor, assisted by a local Iraqi physician. At first, Sultani resisted. But finally “the pressure was so great that it broke my resistance, and I agreed that I, too, should make an appointment,” she said. “In other words, they gave so many and varied arguments for me to go to the hospital that I had no choice.”

Sultani said she finally defected from the MEK in 2006, after she was scheduled for the surgery but before it could be carried out.

“How many women have reached the castle?” Rajavi later asked in a meeting Sultani attended, referring to what she called the “women who had abandoned the last vestiges of their sexual world and were operated on.” The doctor answered that there had been 50 so far.

After much urging from MEK leaders, Sima said she finally agreed to have her ovaries surgically removed in 2011. “When you are under brainwashing, you would do anything and everything,” she told The Intercept. “You would do any military operation, you would go and have sexual relations with your leader, you would sell information and intelligence. We were under constant control by the leader.”

When Sima finally left the group, she said, “I was like a lost person.” The United Nations set up a meeting between her and her brother, whom she hadn’t seen for 30 years. At first, she was reluctant to hug or kiss him, so deeply alienated had she become from her closest kin. He showed her how to shop and use money. “We’ve never seen anything like this for about 30 years,” Sima said. “I completely forgot about real life outside MEK.”

When she first spoke out against the group, current members requested a meeting. They offered her several thousand euros not to criticize the group, which Sima says she declined. “I told them, ‘You cannot return what I lost, my family, my husband. You cannot return that.’”

“We joined the MEK for freedom and democracy and independence,” Sadeghi said. “But if we knew that Masoud Rajavi was spying on the Iranian government during the [Iran-Iraq] war, I would never accept that. If I knew that [we received] money from Saddam Hussein to give information, I would never accept that.”

“I remember we were attending a rally at Camp Ashraf where everyone from the movement was supposed to be gathered together,” he said. “They had told us that we had hundreds of thousands of members and maybe millions more supporters in Iran. At the rally, there were only a few thousand people at most. I remember at the time a few of us were wondering. If this is really a movement like Rajavi says it is, where is everyone?”

His reunion with Paul was bittersweet. “My son was supposed to be away from me for six months. It was 10 years,” he said. “The first question was, ‘Dad, where were you? I cannot believe that in the 20th century, you were in some place that you couldn’t be able to send me a postcard or call me for my birthday.’”

Sadeghi had no answer. He was ashamed. He could not articulate how being a member of the MEK had made him feel bereft of individual agency.

In the meantime, Sadeghi, like the other defectors, has many regrets and struggles in his new life. What’s left of his family is scattered between Iran and the West.

“I would never [again] leave Iran, because all these years I left my family and my parents died,” he said. “I miss them very much.”

Every night, he dreams some version of the nightmare he’s lived. “Either I am in prison [in Iran], or I am in Camp Ashraf trying to escape. When I wake up, I’m sweating.”

Army chief lauds Defense Ministry for coronavirus fight

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Army Chief Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi has lauded the Defense Ministry for its efforts in fighting the coronavirus outbreak.

“I express my gratitude for the invaluable efforts you and your colleagues at the Defense Ministry,” General Mousavi said in a message to Defense Minister Amir Hatami on Wednesday, Mehr reported.

The efforts, according to Mousavi, included backing the country’s health system and supporting the Armed Forces in producing medical supplies among others.

He also praised Defense Ministry experts for producing a new generation of test kits that can detect the Covid-19.

Last month, the Defense Ministry unveiled the test kits, saying the kits can detect the coronavirus in three hours with 98 percent accuracy.



According to General Amiri of the Defense Ministry, the homegrown test kits were endorsed by the Health Ministry.

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

The first generation had been produced almost one month earlier.

The Defense Ministry started mass production of face masks, disinfectants, and protective clothes from the early days that the coronavirus disease was detected in Iran. It also unveiled advanced thermal cameras used as a screening tool in crowded places.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Monday that 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.

“#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.

Ex-IRGC Commander: US Might Disintegrate into Commonwealth States after Coronavirus

TEHRAN (FNA) — Secretary of Iran’s Expediency Council (EC) and former commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Mohsen Rezaee said that the United States could disintegrate several commonwealth countries after the coronavirus crisis ends.

“The US might turn into commonwealth states in the post-coronavirus world,” Rezaee wrote on his twitter page on Wednesday.

He added that the high expenses of the US fruitless military build-up in other countries, the US administration’s inefficiency and the states’ distrust of the Federal Government act like a “time bomb”.

The US is one of the most unequal nations in the world, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, outranked by only a smattering of countries -- Bulgaria, Turkey, Mexico, Chile, Costa Rica and South Africa.

The coronavirus pandemic and resulting economic shutdown is likely to increase the gap between the haves and have-nots, and doctors and public health experts say socioeconomic status is playing a role in whether a person will survive the disease.

The novel virus does not care about your race or socioeconomic status, but data released by several states suggest your race and socioeconomic status -- and everything that goes with it, including access to quality health care -- could make a big difference in whether you contract the virus and whether you survive.

‘Ease Iran sanctions during coronavirus pandemic’

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Los Angeles Times has published letters to the editor from people across the United States calling for easing of anti-Iran sanctions which have hampered the country’s fight against coronavirus pandemic.

Two of the letters are presented below:

To the editor: Although I try to be a person of faith, I have little faith in the current administration’s receptivity to calls from former leaders of both parties and columnist Doyle McManus to ease sanctions against Iran during this global health crisis.

Still, I’ll hope that some trusted advisor to Presi-

dent Trump or Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, fresh from celebrating the spiritual renewal of Easter or Passover, will appeal to the wisdom of acting on our professed Judeo-Christian values with generosity toward fellow humans suffering from the pandemic that plagues us all.

Easing sanctions to allow for medical relief would remind the world who Americans are; we might even remind ourselves.

Carol Flint, Santa Monica

To the editor: McManus is right to support COV-ID-19 aid for Iran.

More than that, we should end all U.S. sanctions now against Iran, re-enter the 2015 nuclear deal and begin to tell the truth about what went wrong in U.S.-Iranian relations as well.

Iran’s 1979 Islamic revolution was blowback from the CIA-backed coup against its elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, in 1953.

U.S. foreign policy has been egregious throughout the post-World War II, Cold War era, and continues to be so. Pompeo’s claim that the U.S. is the “leading light of humanitarian goodness” in the world is grotesque.

Rachel Bruhnke, San Pedro

Iranian stock market holds its largest-ever IPO

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran’s stock market witnessed its largest-ever initial public offering (IPO) on Wednesday.



As reported by domestic media, Social Security Investment Company (SSIC, also known by its Persian acronym Shasta), Iran’s major state-owned investment company, offered eight billion shares, which account for 10 percent of its stakes, for sales at the Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Iran’s major stock market.

Each institutional or individual trader could buy a maximum of 10,000 shares, by placing an order through the book-building method, according to a notice published on the TSE website.

Shasta is the investment arm of the Social Security Organization, which provides healthcare entitlement and pension benefits for a large proportion of Iran’s middle and working-class members of the labor force.

Iran-Turkey monthly trade via railway stands at 54,000 tons

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran and Turkey traded 54,000 tons of goods in a month amid the coronavirus outbreak and railway transportation served as the only means for transfer of goods between them, according to the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

“In a time span from March 16 to April 13, some 1,657 cargo wagons have commuted between the two countries carrying goods,” Rouhollah Latifi said in an interview with Mehr news agency.

“Of this amount, some 1,088 wagons imported 40,375 tons of goods from Turkey to Iran, while 569 wagons exported 13,537 tons of goods to Turkey,” he added.

Iranian exports to Turkey included polyethylene, urea fertilizer, watermelon, zinc ingot and paraffin, while the country imported bananas, zinc soil, fiber, paper pastes, paper and tobacco from Turkey, the official mentioned.

He named Sarisu trans-boundary market as the only land border where the exchange of goods is underway, presently.

Latifi had previously announced that due to the outbreak of COVID-19, commutes of trucks through the Iran-Turkey Bazargan border have been halted.

According to him, Sarisu was previously used only for imports of medical equipment to Iran, but as of this weekend, it can act as a gateway for imports of all types of goods.

Some 15 trucks can daily commute at Sarisu trans-boundary market, presently, he said on April 7.

Iran and Turkey are also enjoying trade via railway, he added.

Under the outbreak of the coronavirus, Turkey closed its borders as of February 22 and some 420 Turkish trucks that had been stopped in Iran’s Bazargan border returned home in late March.

Turkey has been the major trade partner of Iran, after China and Iraq, in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19).

During the 27th meeting of Iran-Turkey Joint Economic Committee, which was held in Ankara in mid-September 2019, the two sides investigated different ways of reaching the targeted \$30-billion bilateral trade and reiterated that reaching this figure is possible despite the pressures of the U.S. sanctions.

During the meeting, the Iranian president’s chief of staff, Mahmoud Vaezi, who is the Iranian chairman of the committee, mentioned expediting the process of implementing bilateral agreements on trade and economic issues as the most prioritized objective of the joint committee and said Iran has no limitation for expanding and deepening cooperation with Turkey.

Europe’s economy to slump more than 10% on coronavirus measures

Europe is heading for a double-digit slump in the first half of 2020 amid widespread lockdowns to stem the spread of the coronavirus, according to economists.



Bloomberg’s monthly survey puts the contraction in the euro area at more than 10% in the January-June period, with most of the hit -- 8.3% -- in the second quarter. Even with an expected rebound later in the year, the bloc’s output will still decline more than 5% in 2020.

■ Economic Damage

The survey results aren’t the only gloomy numbers to emerge on Tuesday. The International Monetary Fund predicts the 19-country bloc will contract 7.5% this year thanks to what it calls the “Great Lockdown,”

with the world economy shrinking 3%.

In its first World Economic Outlook since the virus outbreak, the IMF said the global recession will be the steepest in almost a century.

■ Europe fallout

Among the major euro-area countries, Italy will be the worst affected major economy, with a 9.1% contraction, followed by Spain at 8%.

In France where the government extended confinement measures to May 11, the IMF sees a 7.2% hit this year. Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire is even more pessimistic, saying on Tuesday that the slump could be 8%.

The Bloomberg surveys show widespread damage: Germany will shrink 7.6% this quarter, Italy 8.8%, Spain 10%, and the U.K. will suffer a near 12% contraction.

While rebounds are predicted later in the year, the timing depends on when restrictions on movement, gatherings and businesses are lifted, or at least eased.

(Source: Bloomberg)

17 new petrochemical plants to go operational by March 2021

1 → According to the official, due to the high volume of investment and their need for advanced technology, the oil and gas industry projects will not just lead to the production of crude oil but will also create a large volume of construction all over the country.

He further mentioned the South Pars phase 11 development project, noting that an Iranian company is going to solely take over the project after China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) followed the French giant Total and left the project under the U.S. pressures.

The oil minister said it is high on the ministry’s agenda to complete the South Pars gas field projects.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Zanganeh noted that all the contracts which have been signed with domestic firms for the development of joint fields will be finalized by the end of the current calendar year.

In July 2017, French company Total signed a \$1-billion deal to develop the South Pars gas field in cooperation with China National Petroleum Company (CNPC) and Iran’s Petro Pars.

However, in May 2018, the French com-



pany pulled out of the deal following the U.S. President Donald Trump’s decision for pulling his country out of the Iran nuclear deal. Later, the CNPC formally replaced Total in the project, but it suspended investment

in Iran later in December 2018 under U.S. pressures and finally left the project.

Located in southern Iran, South Pars is the world’s largest gas field which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf waters.

Steel products exports up 25% in 11 months yr/yr

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran’s export of steel products has risen 25 percent during an 11-month period ended on February 19, compared to the same time span in the previous year, Fars news agency reported.

The country’s production of these products has also witnessed a growth of seven percent during the mentioned 11 months.

The export of Iran’s steel ingot in the said time span has risen 42 percent as well to stand at 6.3 million tons, the same report confirmed.

Iranian major steel companies have produced over 18.5 million tons of steel ingots during the 11-month period, registering a four-percent growth from the figure for the same period in the previous year.

As Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) has announced, 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.

IMIDRO, Iran’s largest metals and mining holding,

IMF sees the global economy shrinking in 2020

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The International Monetary Fund (IMF), in its latest World Outlook Report titled “The Great Lockdown”, sees the global economic growth at -3 percent following the coronavirus outbreak.

The body has downgraded its previous forecast published in January 2020 by 6.3

percent.

According to the report, following this global trend, Iran’s economic growth is seen to be -6 percent, while the economic growth is expected to recover up to 3.1 percent in 2021.

The fund also predicted inflation in Iran to reach 34.2 percent for the current year, however it sees the inflation rate to fall to

33.5 percent in the next year.

The body has reported that the “Great Lockdown” recession is going to be the biggest in almost a century and warned the world economy’s contraction and recovery would be worse than anticipated if the coronavirus lingers or returns.

Based on the report, all the countries

around the world, including the advanced economies as well as the developing countries are going to be hit by the economic consequences of the pandemic.

The IMF also forecasted the oil prices to stay under the \$50 range for the next three years, saying that the oil prices in the current year would linger around \$35 per barrel.

China’s 2020 GDP growth set to sink to 44-year low as coronavirus cripples economy



China’s economic growth is set to stumble to its slowest annual pace in nearly half a century, as the coronavirus health crisis shuts businesses and brings the global economy to a standstill, according to a Reuters poll.

China’s leaders have pledged to take more steps to combat the impact from the pandemic that looks likely to delay a recovery in the virus-ravaged economy, as mounting job losses pose a threat to social stability.

Growth in the world’s second-biggest economy for 2020 was forecast at 2.5%, according to the median of 62 analysts surveyed by Reuters, which would mark the weakest clip since 1976, the final year of the decade-long Cultural Revolution that wrecked the economy.

That is a sharp easing from a 6.1% gain in 2019, and is below the 5.4% growth forecast in the March poll.

The survey also predicted China’s economy in the first quarter will contract by 6.5% year-on-year, for the first time since at least 1992 when the country first started issuing quarterly gross domestic product (GDP) data.

It also marks a reversal from 3.5% growth forecast in the last survey done in the previous month. China will release its first-quarter GDP data on April 17.

The projected 2020 growth would be weaker than the 3.9% rate in 1990, when the economy was hit hard after the Tiananmen crackdown, but still outperform a 1.6% contraction in 1976.

The forecasts highlighted the challenges faced by the Asia’s engine of growth given an immediate recovery looked some way off as the global pandemic hits exports, despite a sharp slowdown in China’s virus infections from its peak in February.

Early in the outbreak, Beijing imposed draconian travel restrictions and factory suspensions to curb the spread of the disease, but at a heavy price.

As the number of new domestic cases

are now easing, the government is slowly relaxing emergency measures and exhorting industries to reopen. But analysts say the pace of recovery in the coming months will be heavily constrained by external headwinds.

The virus has spread rapidly around the world, prompting unprecedented shutdowns in many countries, which has wreaked havoc along global supply chains and severely hurt overseas demand, raising the risk of a steep global recession this year.

“Despite its initial success in containing COVID-19, China is still faced with two dire challenges: nosediving external demand due to the pandemic, and the rising threat of a second wave of the virus,” said economists with Nomura, adding that the hope of a quick recovery is dimming.

The slump in China’s exports and imports eased in March, customs data showed on Tuesday, but analysts say the overall outlook remains grim as the pandemic has brought business activity in its major trading partners to a standstill.

The health crisis has dealt a particularly heavy blow to the country’s private sector, which is the most productive part of the economy and a key source of employment.

The small and privately-owned firms are facing a severe cash crunch to tide over a prolonged downturn, with many laying off workers or shutting down businesses.

Analysts expect nearly 30 million job losses this year due to stuttering work resumptions and plunging global demand, outpacing the 20-plus million layoffs during the 2008-09 financial crisis.

“Lingering fear of the virus and uncertainty over job losses mean people are remaining cautious. We expect household consumption to be negatively affected for many months to come and see only a gradual sequential recovery from Q2 onwards,” said Louis Kuijs, economist at Oxford Economics.

(Source: Reuters)

Coronavirus: 5 predictions for how the economy might recover



More than 50 economists were polled by Reuters, asking for their predictions for economic recovery after the coronavirus.

From a shrink as much as 6%, to 0.7% growth, here are the forecasts.

Will be it a U? A V? Maybe a W? Predictions for economic recovery after coronavirus-linked lockdowns are throwing up a medley of letters to indicate whether we can expect a bounceback, a slow-burn recovery or relapse.

Of more than 50 economists polled by Reuters, some forecast the world economy will shrink as much as 6% in 2020. The other extreme was a prediction for 0.7% growth. The average was a 1.2% contraction.

Carsten Brzeski, global head of macro at ING Research, dubbed the picture “a virus-driven ice age”.

“It is an abrupt stop of economic activity, from 100 to zero in just a few days or weeks,” he said, adding that made it extremely difficult to forecast the outlook. Here are some scenarios debated.

1. “V”

The best case outcome: when a growth plunge is followed by an equally sharp recovery.

The April-June GDP contraction will likely be on a scale not seen for decades. But fiscal and monetary stimulus - over \$10 trillion and counting - could aid an equally swift rebound.

Ross Walker, co-head of global economics at NatWest Markets, reckons the scale of economic decline expected this quarter implies “a sizeable rebound in Q3 and Q4 as businesses re-open”.

2. “U”

When recovery takes more than a couple of quarters. Because economies have suffered a faster and deeper contraction than in 2008-09, this may be the likeliest outcome.

U is the base case for ING’s Brzeski,

who notes the lockdowns’ impact will last for a while after they are lifted.

“Easing of the lockdown measures will be gradual, social distancing will continue and the tourist industry will likely continue to suffer,” Brzeski said.

3. “W”

Double-dip - if the easing of lockdown restrictions initially boosts activity but the effects of unemployment and corporate bankruptcies then start to filter through. This may happen also if new coronavirus cases emerge as has been the case in some Asian countries.

4. “L”

When growth plunges and does not recover for some time.

For this to occur, the global coronavirus tally needs to continue rising, forcing protracted lockdowns.

That scenario looks unlikely, given Wuhan, the Chinese city where the virus emerged, has ended lockdowns after just over two months.

But L-shaped outcomes may be a risk for those emerging markets less able to engage big stimulus and often rely on commodity exports.

5. Swoosh

“Neither L nor U nor V, will do. Instead, we look for a tick mark-style profile,” Berenberg economist Florian Hense said.

That implies a sharp downturn, then gradual recovery as lockdowns are eased more gently than they were imposed.

AXA Investment Managers group chief economist Gilles Moec pictures a “swoosh” shape akin to the Nike sports brand logo.

“With consumer spending possibly impaired by a higher propensity to save and serious potential curbs on investment, we think the likeliest scenario is for the world economy’s rebound post lockdown to be quite soft,” Moec said.

(Source: World Economic Forum)

PGSR's capacity set to rise 60,000 bpd by late Sep.

ENERGY TEHRAN — Daily processing capacity of Iran's Persian Gulf Star Refinery (PGSR) is going to increase 60,000 barrels per day (bpd) to reach 480,000 by the end of the Iranian calendar month of Shahrivar (September 21, 2020), according to the managing director of the refinery.

Mohammad-Ali Dadvar put the refinery's current processing capacity at 420,000 bpd, Shana reported on Wednesday.

According to the official, some of the equipment and machinery for the PGSR development project have been already installed and some of them are still being manufactured by Iranian companies.

Dadvar noted that with the increase in the capacity, the refinery's output is also going to increase by at least 20 percent.

"Currently, an average of 45 million liters of gasoline and 17 million liters of gas oil are produced daily at the refinery and these figures will increase to about 54 million liters and 20 million liters per day, respectively," he said.



The official also underlined the surge in the refinery's naphtha production capacity, noting that up to four million liters of naphtha is produced in PGSR on a daily basis, most of which is exported to other countries in the region and Europe.

The third phase of PGSR was put into operation in early January 2019 and the fourth phase is going to focus on the optimization of efficiency and production capacity.

Persian Gulf Star Refinery in the southern province of Hormozgan is the first of its kind designed based on gas condensate feedstock received from South Pars gas field which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf.

Construction of the refinery started in 2006, but the project was delayed as the result of some mismanagement and also financial limitation due to the West-led sanctions against Iran.

As the Middle East's largest processing facility for gas condensate, PGSR is planned to play a big role to turn Iran into an exporter of gasoline.

NIDC taking on a more significant role in oil industry

ENERGY TEHRAN — Managing director of National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) says his company is ready to play a more significant role in the development of the country's oil industry in the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 20), Shana reported.

Outlining the company's plans for the current year, Abdollah Mousavi underlined NIDC's strategic position as a major subsidiary of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), saying: "One of the highlights of our executive programs for this year is going to be the participation in the drilling operations of National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC)'s 28-reservoir program."

NISOC is conducting new development projects in southern Iran under the framework of a program for maintaining and enhancing oil production in 28 reserves in the mentioned region.

According to Mousavi, NIDC has already started negotiations with some of the contractors that had won the NISOC tenders and some agreements and memorandums of understanding have also been signed for



future cooperation.

NIDC will supply the mentioned contractors drilling equipment and services, he said, adding that "In this regard, 19 heavy dry drilling rigs from the company's fleet will be based in operational sites in the current year."

Holding 70 onshore and offshore drilling rigs as well as equipment and facilities for offering integrated technical and engineering services, the company accounts for a major part of drilling exploration as well as appraisal/development wells in the country.

As previously announced, NIDC has dug over 240 oil and gas wells across the country in the past two years.

South Pars 17 under-development phases to be completed by Mar. 2021

ENERGY TEHRAN — Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said all the offshore and onshore operations in 17 phases of the South Pars gas field will be completed by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2021).

"Except for three onshore units of phase 14 all the offshore and onshore operations in 17 currently under development phases will be completed by the year end", IRIB quoted Zanganeh as saying on the sidelines of a headquarter meeting on Tuesday.

According to the official, with the completion of the mentioned phases, the total production capacity of the giant gas field is going to reach 750 million cubic meters and consequently, 1000 cubic meters of natural gas is going to be added to the national gas network's supply capacity.

South Pars gas field, which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf, covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which, called South



Pars, are in Iran's territorial waters. The remaining 6,000 square kilometers, called North Dome, are situated in Qatar's territorial waters.

The field is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.

The field is divided into 24 standard phases.

All the offshore operations of the development project of the field, except for phase 11, were completed in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19).

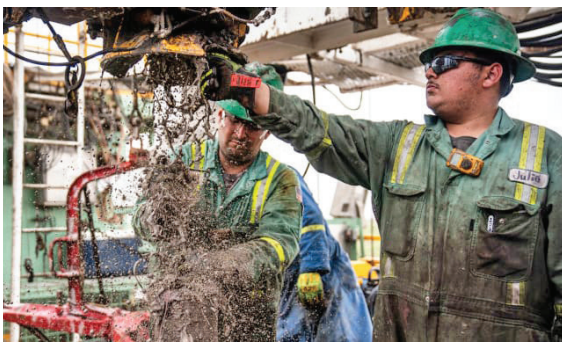
Oil falls 5 percent to \$28 on oversupply concerns

Oil fell five percent to around \$28 a barrel on Wednesday, pressured by reports suggesting persistent oversupply and collapsing demand due to global coronavirus-related lockdowns.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) on Wednesday forecast a 29 million barrel per day (bpd) dive in April oil demand to levels not seen in 25 years and said no output cut could fully offset the near-term falls facing the market.

Brent crude fell \$1.49, or 5 percent, to \$28.11 a barrel as of 0827 GMT, giving up an earlier gain. U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude slid 51 cents, or 2.5 percent, to \$19.60.

"There is no feasible agreement that could cut supply by enough to offset such near-term demand losses," the



IEA said in its monthly report. "However, the past week's achievements are a solid start."

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, along with Russia and other producing countries - a grouping known as OPEC+ - has partnered with other oil-pumping nations like the United States for a record supply-cutting agreement.

The IEA report added to downward pressure caused by rising inventories.

Industry group the American Petroleum Institute said on Tuesday that U.S. crude inventories rose by 13.1 million barrels, more than analysts expected. Official government inventory figures are due later on Wednesday.

(Source: Reuters)

Renewables account for almost three quarters of new energy capacity in 2019

In an exciting reported victory for sustainability, new renewable power accounted for a whopping 72 percent of all global power expansion in 2019.

According to new data released last week by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), the renewable energy sector added 176 gigawatts (GW) of generating capacity globally in 2019, although this was notably lower than the (revised) 179 GW added in 2018.

However, IRENA's annual Renewable Capacity Statistics 2020 shows that renewables expanded by 7.6 percent last year with Asia dominating growth and accounting for 54 percent of total additions. While expansion of renewables slowed last year, total renewable power growth outpaced fossil fuel growth by a factor of 2.6, continuing the dominance of renewables in power expansion first established in 2012. Solar and wind contributed 90 percent of total renewable capacity added in 2019.

"Renewable energy is a cost-effective source of new power that insulates power markets and consumers from volatility, supports economic stability and stimulates sustainable growth," said IRENA Director-General Francesco La Camera. "With renewable additions providing the majority of new capacity last year, it is clear that many countries and regions recognize the degree to which the energy transition can deliver positive outcomes."

"While the trajectory is positive, more is required to put global energy on a path with sustainable development and climate mitigation—both of which offer significant

economic benefits," continued Mr. La Camera. "At this challenging time, we are reminded of the importance of building resilience into our economies. In what must be the decade of action, enabling policies are needed to increase investments and accelerate renewables adoption."

Renewables accounted for at least 70 percent of total capacity expansion in almost all regions in 2019, other than in Africa and the Middle East, where they represented 52 percent and 26 percent of net additions respectively.

The additions took the renewable share of all global power capacity to 34.7 percent, up from 33.3 percent at the end of 2018. Non-renewable capacity expansion globally followed long-term trends in 2019, with net growth in Asia, the Middle East and Africa, and net decommissioning in Europe and North America.

Solar added 98 GW in 2019, 60 percent of which was in Asia. Wind energy expanded by close to 60 GW led by growth in China (26 GW) and the United States (9 GW). The two technologies now generate 623 GW and 586 GW respectively—close to half of global renewable capacity. Hydropower, bioenergy, geothermal and marine energy displayed modest year on year expansion of 12 GW, 6 GW, 700 MW, and 500 MW respectively.

Asia was responsible for over half of new installations despite expanding at a slightly slower pace than in 2018. Growth in Europe and North America increased year on year. Africa added 2 GW of renewable capacity in 2019, half of the 4 GW it installed in 2018.

(Source: www.goodnewsnetwork.org)

Saudi oil keeps flooding market with output pact yet to begin

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf suppliers may have agreed to cut oil production again starting next month, but by all indications the taps are set to remain wide open until then -- swelling stockpiles for at least a few more weeks.

The kingdom's crude exports so far in April stand at 9.3 million barrels a day, according to tanker-tracking data compiled by Bloomberg. That compares with 6.8 million barrels a day through the first two weeks of March. What's more, there are at least 10 supertankers with the capacity to haul a combined 20 million barrels of oil waiting to load at the Saudi port of Ras Tanura in the coming days.

■ Saudi surge

State-owned oil company Saudi Aramco pledged to boost output to 12.3 million barrels a day in April as it slashed prices in a battle for market share, following the collapse of the three-year-old OPEC+ pact in March. As the coronavirus spread across the globe, governments imposed restrictions on movement and demand declined further, as did prices.

Following marathon international talks this past weekend, there's now a new global deal to limit output, with Saudi Arabia agreeing to trim production to 8.5 million barrels a day in May and June. There's been no indication that any producer will close the taps before May, meaning millions of barrels a day of crude entering the market that aren't needed.

"The arrangement is from May," Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, the Saudi oil minister, told reporters on a conference call on Monday in reference to the OPEC+ agreement. "All of April was sold."

In other words, the price war is still on

for now. So far, the market hasn't been impressed. Global benchmark Brent crude fell by as much as 6% in London on Tuesday.

■ Deep discounts

Another measure -- the official selling prices that traders pay for actual barrels of crude in the physical market -- indicates that Saudi Arabia is still looking to gain market share. The so-called OSPs for April were already at their lowest in at least three decades. The kingdom released May's prices earlier this week, deepening the discounts to most markets, especially Asia, where the cut was greater than expected.

Traders are awaiting similar figures from other Gulf producers like the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, which generally follow the Saudi lead on pricing and production. They also have little incentive to cut output sooner than required.

UAE Energy Minister Suhail Al Mazrouei said on his Twitter account after the meeting that the country "is committed to reducing production from its current production level of 4.1m" barrels a day. That's at least 1 million barrels a day higher than it pumped in March, according to Bloomberg estimates.

All of that oil has to go somewhere, and with demand decimated, there's only one obvious destination -- storage. With cargo nominations already set for this month, Saudi Arabia isn't likely to reduce shipments to its customers. But it could trim volumes it's sending to storage tanks in Egypt, Rotterdam and Japan. Without any reduction in those flows, though, stockpiles will continue to build through the remainder of April.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Oil in the age of coronavirus: a U.S. shale bust like no other

Texas oilman Mike Shellman has kept his MCA Petroleum Corp going for four decades, drilling wells through booms and busts and always selling his crude to U.S. oil refiners.

But now the second-generation oilman has abandoned drilling any new wells this year and postponed some maintenance amid a sharp drop in global oil prices and brimming storage tanks. He is considering shutting most of his production down, for the first time ever.

Oil fields from Texas and New Mexico to Oklahoma and North Dakota are going quiet as drilling halts and tens of thousands of oil workers lose their livelihood. Fuel demand has plunged by as much as 30 million barrels per day (bpd) - or 30 percent - as efforts to fight the coronavirus pandemic have grounded aircraft, reduced vehicle usage and pushed economies worldwide toward recession.



"What scares me is not even being able to sell the product," the grizzled oil hand said from his firm's San Marcos, Texas, headquarters.

Refiners and other buyers are warning they may refuse his oil once contracts expire this month, he said. Or they may offer to buy at a price below his costs, so he is preparing to dip into retirement savings to pay employees, he said.

The governments of global oil producers and consumers are seeking to make unprecedented cuts to overall supply of some 19.5 million bpd. U.S. President Donald Trump heralded the deal to cut supply as one that would save hundreds of thousands of U.S. jobs.

But oil prices fell again this week, dropping as much as 10 percent on Tuesday, because even those cuts may fail to stem the glut. Prices remain far below production costs for many U.S. producers, including those in the U.S. shale fields - the scene of a revolution in the energy industry over the past decade that made the United States the world's top producer.

Across the United States, up to 240,000 oil-related jobs will be lost this year, about a third of the onshore and offshore oilfield workforce, estimates consultancy Rystad Energy.

The U.S. oil boom died on March 6, the day Saudi Arabia and Russia ended a four-year pact that curbed output and gave shale a price umbrella. Shale firms have accrued hefty debt during the years of expansion, leaving them exposed to the price crash that followed.

In March, U.S. oil futures tumbled to \$20 a barrel, a third of the January price and less than half what many require to cover production costs. The March drop led dozens of shale producers to cut spending and several retained debt advisors.

"As soon as the virus hit and oil prices dropped, they sent everybody home," said Joel Rodriguez, chief administrator of La Salle County, home of Texas's second-most productive oilfield.

Shale oil producers face well closures and "industry wide financial distress" even after the OPEC cuts, said Artem Abramov, head of shale at consultancy Rystad Energy. In some fields, he expects regional prices will hit single-digits per barrel, he said.

Spending on oil field services will fall 21 percent to \$211 billion this year, the lowest since 2005, according to researcher Spears & Associates.

Unlike the 2014-2016 oil bust, lenders are not making more financing available to producers, said Raoul Nowitz, head of restructuring at SOLIC Capital Advisors. He predicts up to 60 oil producers will seek protection from creditors this year, and many will not emerge under new owners. Some banks are setting up operations to take over and run failed producers.

■ Layoffs and shut-ins

OPEC's cuts may not be deep enough for oil producer Texland Petroleum, which operates 1,200 wells in the Permian Basin, the top U.S. oilfield. U.S. refiner and pipeline operator Phillips 66 asked President Jim Wilkes to reduce his deliveries by 15 percent, and another buyer canceled his contract outright.

"We've never had a time when we couldn't sell the oil we produce. And that's going to happen this time," said Wilkes.

Average daily U.S. oil production this year will fall 500,000 bpd, to 11.8 million bpd and sink another 700,000 bpd next year, the Energy Information Administration estimated. (For a graphic, click: here)

Production cuts are too late for workers like Jeremy Davis, a 36-year-old who in March lost his business development job at Advanced BioCatalytics, which makes chemicals for hydraulic fracturing. "They won't be fracking many wells for the rest of the year," said Davis, who after 16 years in the oilfield would now consider work outside the oil business. "I can't wait around for the industry to come back," he said.

Wall Street investors had already pulled back on the shale sector over the past couple of years because of poor returns, leaving producers with limited options for refinancing, said industry executives and analysts.

"There is no more lifeline," said Lance Loeffler, the finance chief at top U.S. fracking service provider Halliburton Co.

PayZone Directional Services, a Denver-based driller, threw in the towel last month.

"We could have stayed open and run until the money was gone but sometimes you just have to know when to cash in your chips and leave the table," said Beth Thibodeaux, chief executive officer.

■ Time to move on

So much unsold oil is sloshing around that some pipeline operators, fearful of having their lines clogged, are insisting that producers halt connecting new wells and prove they have buyers or storage outlets before oil from existing wells can be put into a line.

They have warned "by mid-May storage is full" and will refuse to take any more, said Scott Sheffield, CEO at Permian Basin producer Pioneer Natural Resources.

He and some other executives in Texas and Oklahoma want state regulators to mandate up to 20 percent output cuts, sparing only the smallest producers. In Texas, energy regulators on Tuesday heard Sheffield call for a state order to halt 1 million bpd from its shale fields to prevent sale at below production cost.

MCA Petroleum owner Shellman said he tells friends who lost their jobs that it is time to leave the oil business. "It's not ever going to be like it was."

Shellman, who as a youngster got his first taste of the oil business accompanying his parents to their own oil wells, has promised to pay his employees from savings even if they have to shut in wells. But the pain goes well beyond Shellman's wallet.

"From an emotional standpoint, this is killing me," he said.

(Source: Reuters)

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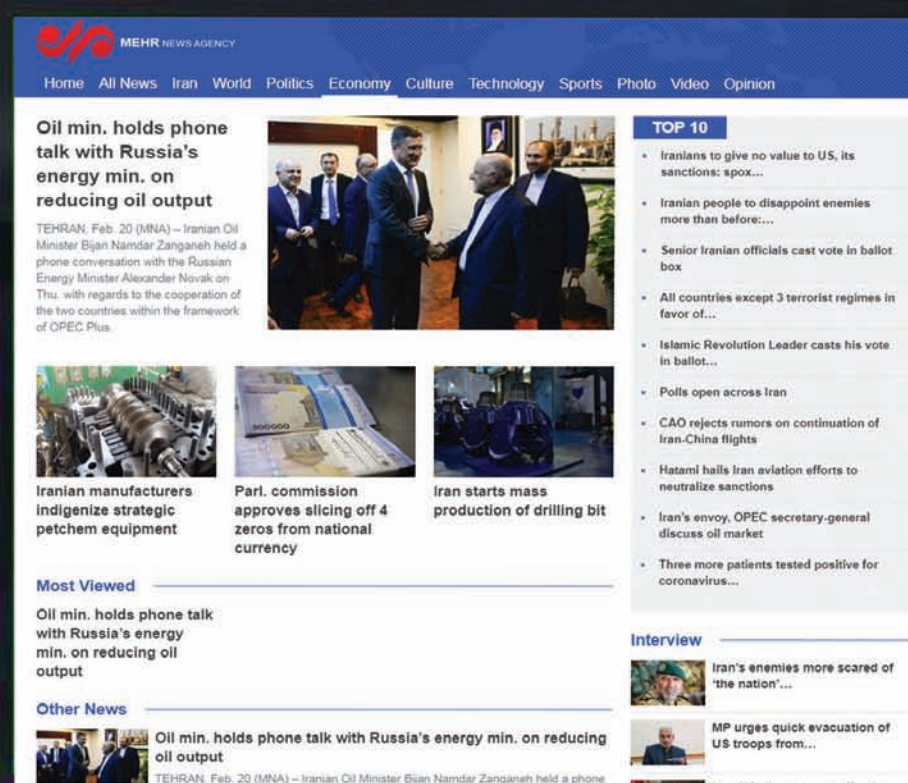
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This virus may establish a new world order

By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN—Professor Larry Backer in an interview with Mehr News Agency argues that the concept of COVID-19 may penetrate the world order like the virus attacks individuals.

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

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

In an effort to make the dimension of the changes to the existing world order by coronavirus clearer, we reached out to Larry Cata Backer, Professor of Law and International Affairs at Penn State University.

Here is the full text of his answers to our questions:

What will be the effects of coronavirus on the current world order?

First, it is important to underline that there WILL be effects on the current world order. That is an important premise because it was not at all necessary, nor was it necessarily predictable at the start of the pandemic. Thus, the first step in answering this question is to answer the question on which it must be based: have the influential elements with responsibility for the maintenance of the world order determined that the COVID-19 pandemic MUST produce effects. The answer to that question has become clear by the middle of April 2020—the COVID-19 pandemic must produce effects on a world order that, in retrospect will be understood, at the end of 2019, as a world order ready for change but unable to move by reason of inertia. In effect, then, COVID-19 will have effects on the world order precisely because those with the power to shape the narrative on the basis of which mass society understands and responds to the world have given that signification to the pandemic itself. Was it necessary to invest the pandemic with this change power? —NO! But does that matter anymore?—again NO!

Second, with the decision to invest the pandemic with this significance—that it must necessarily have an effect on the world order—the principal question comes into better focus. That question goes to the direction of the changes to the current world order that may emerge. Again—the effects and the direction cannot be understood as “natural” in the sense that there is an organic connection between the existence of pandemic and the vectors of change that it produces. The opposite is true. The changes to the world order triggered by the pandemic will reflect the application of rival ideologies through which the great powers see the world.

For Marxist-Leninist States, like China, the pandemic and their struggle against it proves and was crafted to exhibit, the virility and power of the Chinese political-economic model to meet and overcome the COVID-19 challenge. That, vindication, in turn, will likely enhance the possibility for the emergence of a more visible new Communist international around the principles (now internationalized) of the Chinese Marxist Leninist system with application first within developing states participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, and thereafter (again modified to suit context) in other states. The result, under a best-case scenario, will be the emergence of a new approach to international ordering grounded on the Chinese vision with the transnational application.

For liberal democratic states, the same is also true. Here the pandemic is also both a “test” and a “portal” through which the fundamental principles of the political economic order are tested, modified and from which they will emerge stronger. In these cases, there will likely emerge two variations reflecting the ancient fissures between the old Roman world (the EU) and its northern frontier (now under the leadership of the US as its most perfected vanguard force). Where the Chinese system will emphasize centralization, planning, and the superiority of the political sector, the liberal democratic versions will emphasize decentralization, markets (private power), and the superiority of the economic and societal sectors.

Thus, the effects of COVID-19 will not be revolutionary in the sense of abandoning old systems. Rather it will accelerate tendencies already well observed. It will also further refine a tendency toward differentiation (and choice) rather than toward convergence. But again, these dominant ideologies invested the pandemic with a very specific signification—and an ancient one: it was a test (which could be rationalized in religious or secular “scientific” terms). That test was meant to prove the value of the system tested. But it was also meant to serve as a furnace within which the weakness of those systems might be burned away, leaving only the strong core from which the system could emerge changed and re-invigorated. But changed in ways that will hyper emphasize some of its organizing principles (described above) and scorch away the rest.

It is in that context that one can consider the effects on globalization. Many members of the intellectual sector who produce analysis for a living, as well as the planning sectors of governmental organs, are now obsessed

with what they might (mis)interpret as the rise (again) of the state. And yet a closer view of “pandemic effects” might suggest that something else is at work here. Consider the focus on the way in which states “take control” through the re-invigoration of borders. But borders have always been a key element of economic globalization. Global production, itself grounded in the organization of segments, require that those segments be policed and protected. Economic globalization could not have existed in its current forms if it did not maintain these compartments that then could be used to segregate and contain risk. States, then, within the global order, were meant to work like watertight compartments on a 20th century ship. The danger for globalization with respect to the state was that the compartments could not be sealed off when necessary. That, in part, was one of the reasons that migration erupted as a crisis in the 21st century. At least with respect to that, the state operated more like the compartments on the Titanic than as wholly self-contained units (with the possible exception of North Korea).

Thus understood, the role of the state—as cogs in translational orders—emerges more clearly. Pandemic was precisely the moment with the protection of global production required the state to use its police power and its borders. But at the same time, the pandemic drew much more clearly the difference between the state as an agent for the protection of the free movement of goods, capital, and investment (even where those might be divided among the big three emerging globalist empires) on the one hand, and the use of the state as the custodian of their respective human capital. While trade was affected (and sometimes severely) the organization of trade at its foundation was not. It will be re-arranged of course. That is the primary effect of the pandemic on globalization. But more importantly, it will be used (its principal significs) to reposition the state as the shepherd of human capital corralled and to be utilized within their respective pens. These pens, once known as states, now serve an additional and important purpose not for the greater glory of the state necessarily but rather as the middle managers of global production. Of course, the other effect of the pandemic will be to make clearer the differentiation in the character of that role between apex states, and those below them. It will be to their organization around vertically differentiated global production chains arranged around the new imperial centers, and the rules created to facilitate trade between these centers, that will likely mark the core transformations that the pandemic will leave in its wake.

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

The answer to the first question changes the complexion of this second one. At its simplest, the answer must be that any event of severe stress—like pandemic—will likely reveal the weaknesses (as well as the strengths) of dominant systems that order political-economic-societal life within vertically arranged hierarchies in which some elements are privileged, and others survive as they can. But that answer applies equally to all systems, not just liberal democratic systems. And, indeed, the pandemic illustrates, for those who care to observe, the way that the stress it produces reveals both strength and weakness in all systems.

However, it is important to look more closely at the way that the stress of pandemic might reveal deficiencies in powerful or powerfully influential systems. By 2019, it had become a cliché among all political sectors and the intelligentsia that provided the foundations for their conclusions, that the post-1945 liberal democratic order and its manifestation in contemporary constitutional orders and the international framework of principles on which it was supposed to be based (or at least reflect) was either broken or in need of reform. Those at the margins of that discussion (Marxist-Leninist theorists, theocratic political-moral orders, so-called Third World and development oriented theorists) of course profited from that internal discussion. While many took that as a sign of the weakness of the system, for others, me included, it suggested an underlying strength. It suggested that the system was still quite “alive” in the sense that it was still the central element of the ordering of reality around which political-economic-societal systems could be ordered.

Enter the pandemic. An extraordinary entrance to be sure—in six months or so it has managed to sweep away much of the veiling behind which these discussions and battles for control of the “heart” of the system were taking place. And among those in the midst of the battling, it provided the signal—the sign—that they chose to interpret as permission to accelerate their move to seek control of the ordering norms of the system. It is in this sense that one might usefully understand the all too real view among virtually everyone about the deficiencies of the liberal democratic system as well as the way in which the pandemic provided the excuse necessary to reveal more publicly what was already well contested within the highest levels of the leadership of that system.

But it does not suggest the sort of fundamental deficiencies that might imperil the system. The opposite, I think, is true. In that light, the deficiencies must be understood within context. And that context can be divided into



two parts. One context would examine the deficiencies of the liberal democratic order from the perspective and through the lens of the ordering principles of political-economic-moral systems fundamentally incompatible with those of the liberal democratic order. For this perspective there can be nothing but deficiency precisely because the making of meaning with respect to the most fundamental objects of social ordering are impossible to reconcile. They simply cannot see the same thing in the same way. From this perspective it is true, as the question suggests, that the pandemic highlights all of the critical failings of the democratic order—the hijacking public policy by private institutions, the sovereignty eroding effect of markets on policy, the inefficiencies of public organs subject to multiple layers of consultation and fractures of authority, and the paralysis inherent in systems in which power is both sharply held and the success of its execution widely dispersed.

In contrast to this outsider perspective analysis, an insider perspective might yield a different analysis. The insider perspective would examine the deficiencies of the liberal democratic order form one of two distinct analytical positions. The first would take as a given the soundness of the fundamental organizational principles of that order and focus instead on the deficiencies of its implementation. Those deficiencies might derive from system failures (e.g., the political institutions ought to be reformed to correctly reflect principle, or the law must be enforced in accordance with a correct application of principle, etc.). The second would focus on the need to reform or further develop but not reject) the fundamental ordering principles themselves. In the context of pandemic these might center on the division of authority between different levels of government, to the division of authority within a political institution. In the United States this translated into furious debates about the way that American federalism impeded or advanced the fight against the pandemic. But they might also center on the substance of the principles themselves—and these may then create a discursive space around corruption (e.g., should the state provide support for business or to working people? How should medical resources be rationed? To what extent may the state or private actors mandate personal behavior among the masses? And the like).

In the international sphere, these deficiencies are marked by the borderlands between public and private sectors which are evident in the organization of global production. Thus, for example, the need to impose a responsibility on multinational enterprises for the effects of economic decisions taken in consequence of the pandemic that cause severe harm to local economies down their production chains. This has been particularly apparent in the context of the production of garments in which decisions taken by large Western multinational firms might severely affect the economic viability of states like Bangladesh.

Taken from this perspective, the usual reporting about winners and losers is stripped of much actual significance. The pandemic has not produced a list of winners and losers along the conflict binaries that were popular before the pandemic: the state versus the private sector; bureaucracy and planning versus the market; liberal democracy versus Marxist-Leninism; China versus the United States, etc. Much more interesting is the way that the intelligentsia and the political classes they serve have sought to develop a discourse around the pandemic that its critical significs is the way that it will decide or change the contours of battles for global leadership. This is the sort of material one feeds mass opinion for the purpose of the propaganda wars that are an integral part of inter-systemic competition. They are important for the fury with which they are pursued, and their ability to sway common understanding. But they have very little to do with the actual movement of dominance under conditions in which no one system has emerged spotlessly triumphant. If the pandemic shows the world anything, it is that all systems under stress will have to change in light of their failures and will need to exploit those areas which showed each at their best. From that the battles for control of global narrative, of leadership, and the like, will continue even as the character of the combatants

necessarily changes. But those changes, again to underline the opening perspective, has little to do with the virus itself—it has everything to do with the way that people invest these actions with meaning, and the extent to which such meaning is widely embraced. No magic here; and there is no organic progress toward triumph of one or another of the camps; it is all strategy, and work, and discipline, however those can be advanced within the rules of the respective “operating systems” of these actors.

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

At last, we come to the most profound question, but also the one that may be easiest to answer—at least in general terms. The changes suggested above are both broad and fundamental. They will likely produce structural and fundamental changes. While it is far too early to provide much detail, the changes may be sketched in broad outline.

First, the fundamental relationship between the individual and governing institutions (the state in Marxist Leninist systems; the state and private institutions in liberal democratic orders; and the state and religious leadership institutions in theocratic systems) will change in profound and quite noticeable ways. While it is likely that the discourse of personal liberty and of individual autonomy will not change in the short term, the application of those principles will change. The broad outlines of those changes are already apparent. The first cluster of changes revolve around the power to monitor. Surveillance will become central to the organization of society and the understanding of privacy will change to suit the need. This does not mean that there will not be opposition, indeed there will be, but that it is likely that the opposition will have an effect only at the margins. In a sense this ought to come as a surprise to no one. All systems have embraced, some with enthusiasm, cultures of compliance and accountability for business and economic conduct. It is only a small step to transpose these now muscular cultural expectation around accountability to the individual. The framework around which accountability is driven is monitoring and reporting. It is grounded in data harvesting and in judgment manifested through data analytics. The rationale will be based on the protection of the individual, first; and then on the protection of society from individuals whose conduct have (they always have) spillover effects. It will be difficult to resist this trajectory made more compelling in the shadow of pandemic. But surveillance will not mean merely the burden of being observed. As suggested above, it also implies the duty to account and to submit to systems of accountability. One sees this already in the systems developed in Israel and then Russia designed to track targeted individuals and then to warn others who might be exposed to them. It is seen in the way that Taiwan and South Korea have aligned their information systems for the purpose of surveillance with specific objectives (public health in this case) in mind. Even in the United States, the recent exposure of the way that large internet platforms (Google for example) to track people and to use that in the service of the police power in a crisis reveals the extent to which such surveillance is already normalized. Its rationalization remains at the earliest stages of development.

Second, the scope of governmental authority will likely change. It is difficult, though to predict the direction of that change and it is likely to be highly contextual. Part will depend on the way in which a system disperses power between its public and private organs. But the character of that power will change as well. There will likely be an acceleration of the trend, already quite evident in most systems of moving away from the increasingly primitive view of government as actually managed by high (sometimes elected) officials in which the issues revolve around the exercise of sovereign executive, legislative and judicial power (however arranged) to a system that is centered on administration by managers. The bureaucratization of all aspects of life actually signals the movement of power from the political to the managerial elements of institutions. The pandemic revealed in all

its majesty that the state and its principles are captive to the administrator, to the technician, to the field expert, and to those who design and operate systems that connect policy to implementation. States that expose that connection tend to do well; states that seek to suppress this trajectory by muzzling or sidelining their technocrats often find themselves criticized and their efforts undermined.

Third, the nature of borders will change. As mentioned in more detail above, borders will indeed matter more for the control of people. At the same time, they will matter less for the organization of economic activity. At the same time, the nature of the porosity for economic activity will depend on the alignment of particular states within clusters of states organized around a vanguard state. The result, of course, is a fundamental reorganization of globalization. But this is unpalatable. So, expect that these changes will occur without much comment. Expect as well that those at the forefront of change will reject any notion that they are changing anything. And expect as well that eventually the principles of globalization will be re-interpreted to provide the discursive basis for legitimating the new global organization of economic activity.

Fourth, few people speak to international financial institutions and their role in the post COVID-19 world. That is a pity. Largely left behind, perhaps as a matter of policy, perhaps because their bureaucratic girth makes nimble movement difficult, it is possible that the role of IFIS will be changed. On the one hand, in the middle term public IFIs may become a useful tool for the implementation of normalized expectations for national shepherding of their populations to ensure maximum productivity (and thus maximum contribution, in the aggregate, to collective wealth). Loan conditionality, technical assistance and the like, the now ancient tools of IFI management of states can be used to those ends. But that requires consensus about what exactly is to be expected of states. That latter project will likely provide a window in the contests for global control of narrative among the US-China-EU with second order powers working furiously at the margins. Irrespective of the way that it is resolved, the application of the fundamental principles of animal husbandry through the language of rights will likely grow.

Fifth, the discourse of migration, as well as its management, are likely to change. One of the peculiar consequences of the pandemic, already much noted, has been the way that states, without much resistance, were able to reconstitute their borders for the protection of their populations. But borders are tools with a rich palette of uses—even if only directed against people. While it is unlikely that the discourse of migration will change much in the short term, it is possible that the management of migration—especially where it can be reconstituted as the movement of peoples (collective movement) rather than the product of individual circumstances—may begin to assume a different form, and one that is more restrictive. At the same time, this broader movement will be masked by wide variations among states, given their national challenges. More interesting will be the extent to which migration becomes a challenge more among states with vulnerable populations, than of migration between the periphery and the “metropolis.”

Sixth, the nature of the police power will likely change as well. It is likely that the future of power will be shaped as much by models based on data analytics, as it will be founded on the application of principles and human judgment. Machine learning and modelling has driven the response to COVID-19 irrespective of the political-economic or moral model to which the responding state adheres. The human factors has been disappearing from the development of approaches to protecting the human factor in societal organization. One speaks here to “at risk” populations, to the science of transmission, to predictive analytics. One speaks here to the use of analysis to align health, sustainability, economic and political consequences in ways that maximize the objectives of those applying the analytics. One sees, in the end, the emerge of automated management as the principal consequence and effect of the pandemic on the way in which the global order is conceived and managed. In the future it is as likely that contests for power will be between distinctive approaches to data analytics, and the effectiveness of the algorithms used to provide incentives and punishments than it will be about the underlying principles around which society—even global society—is ordered.

Professor Larry Backer researches globalization, especially as it relates to the emergence of ways of understanding constitutional and enterprise law. His most recent work touches on the regulation of multinational corporations, sovereign wealth funds, transnational constitutionalism, and the convergence of public and private law. He researches issues of governments as private actors in global markets, the development of law and social norm systems to regulate business and human rights.

He teaches classes in constitutional, corporate, and transnational law and policy. Professor Backer is a member of the American Law Institute and the European Corporate Governance Institute. He served as chair of the Penn State University Faculty Senate for 2012-2013.

Zanjan province exports \$1.2m of handicrafts

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Handicrafts exports from Zanjan province reached some \$1.2 million during the previous Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended March 20), CHTN reported.



Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Azerbaijan, Oman and some European countries were the main importers during the period, provincial tourism chief Amir Arjmand said on Sunday.

“Zanjan’s handicraft products are a source of income, employment and development for the province, as well as a great opportunity to enter global markets,” he added.

In late January, Zanjan was designated as a “world city of filigree” by the World Crafts Council after the WCC assessors visited various craft workshops, stores, exhibits and bazaars of city in a two-day itinerary in last December.

Filigree consists of curling, twisting, or plaiting fine, pliable metal threads and soldering them at their points of contact with each other with a metal groundwork.

Some 1,600 historical relics seized in Kerman

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Iranian authorities have confiscated 1,590 historical objects in Kerman province, southeastern Iran, during the past Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended March 20).



Nine people were also detained in this regard, provincial tourism chief Fereydoun Fa’ali announced on Wednesday, CHTN reported.

The big and sprawling Kerman province has been a cultural melting pot since antiquity, blending Persians with subcontinental tribe dwellers. It is home to myriad historical sites and scenic landscapes such as Bazaar-e Sartasari, Jabalieh Dome, Ganjali Khan Bathhouse, Malek Jameh Mosque and Shahdad Desert to name a few.

Travelogue: Arrival in Tehran and I am already at home!

By Monica Scaccabarozzi

(Part 1/5)

It’s August 2019 and preparation of the journey not so simple (at the time ... but today it would be really trivial!!!) all because of a truly remarkable, sad and reprehensible fact ... the prejudice, the preconception!

Nobody knows anything about this country, on the contrary, it is known only for what we hear from the news, from the press ... from the false information that comes to us!

How much ignorance that circulates around what you don’t want to know, prejudice and ignorance will kill this world, the human race will die out and maybe ... this is not a bad thing.

I see in all this, but a principle of new life!

Well sorry, returning to the preparation of the trip, I immediately remember this was the year of Trump’s madness ... the year of the supremacy of human stupidity.

Donald Trump strangles the Iranian economy with its sanctions, it collects the demolition of a U.S. drone and sends hundreds of soldiers to neighboring Saudi Arabia, liquidates the capture of seventeen CIA spies in Tehran as false, but continues to repeat that he does not wage a war with Iran wants.

It seems to be on the eve of the First World War, in the time when everyone denied it. The declaration of the Embargo ...

How long can an exercise of provocations at the limit endure ... the war explosion like the one that has been going on for months in the Persian Gulf?

I will find an answer only by going to Iran.

Every journey I seek and organize, really brings suggestions, interpretations ... I can see things from a different point of view and suddenly lighten up!

Every journey reveals something to me.

In this country, with the exception of the big cities, which by now have similar connotations to any other city, I discover how traveling along large sections by car, for days, below, the roads are surrounded by arid and inhospitable deserts, roads that do not seem to lead to nothing.

Here my father is ecstatic and admires the salty desert in front of him.

Seas of sand, salty deserts, barren mountains, dry and torrid borders.

Behind the windows of the car, this arid film runs inexorably, suddenly, spectacular scenery rich in vegetation opens up, so luxuriant as to disorientate me and make me lose the sense of belonging or, incredibly, huge squares open up with mosques that take away the breath, an architecture so equally dazzling, blue domes and the minarets that defy the sky and decree their unquestionable capacity and human ability; the crowded bazaars of people, which move like waves in the midst of a rough sea.

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

Off the beaten path: Fun and non-touristy experiences in Iran

→ **1** the men perform moves to the rhythm and pace set by the morshed, leader, who sits at the top and sings poems of Hafez or the Shahnameh and plays his drum and bell. Though the zurkhaneh is traditionally a men-only locale, Saheb al-Zaman in Yazd also allows women to observe. The meditative-like experience is sure to be one of your most memorable.

■ Enjoy a play or concert

Tehran has plenty of plays to watch on any given night of the week. And even though famous Iranian actors often star in them, ticket prices are remarkably affordable. Watch an original Persian play or perhaps an interpretation of one of Woody Allen’s.

Don’t speak Persian? Look to the universal language of music and try a concert instead. Whether it’s traditional, pop, or the national orchestra, you will easily be able to find something unique in one of the many concert venues around town.

■ Visit a festival, religious ritual

There are numerous cultural festivals and religious ceremonies around Iran in which you may be interested. It might be one of the many Nowruz festivities or the Ashura religious ritual, which is best seen in Yazd, or Lorestan provinces where locals engage in kharrah mali, rubbing mud on their bodies in a ritual to commemorate the slaying of Imam Hossein (AS).

Elsewhere, Kashan’s rosewater festival in the spring is a delight to both the nose and the eyes. Find out what’s happening during your stay.

■ Feel Zoroastrian districts

The Zoroastrian neighborhood in Yazd is simply enchanting. Between the door knockers, cypress trees, candles, arches, and benches, it’s apparent that every part was very intentionally designed.

One of the best features, however, are Ashtikonan Alleys (Ashti is a Persian word which means reconciling), which are plentiful.

These “make up alleys” are very narrow, sometimes just wide enough for one person. The thought behind it was that if two people were on non-speaking terms and passed one another here, they would bump into each other and be forced to talk, thereby making up.

■ Try street food

The people of Ahvaz are remarkably cheerful despite the hardships they endured during eight years of war and now often harsh weather conditions. One of the best places to witness this carefree attitude is Lashkar-Abad, a long street with some of the most delicious street food around.

Falafels, spicy samosas and roasted chicken are all served up hot and fresh while cars blast bandari music, typical beats of the south, all up and down the street. Go at night, pile your falafel high, and soak up the good energy while chatting with the friendly locals.

■ Make overnight camp in desert

Why spend the night in a four-star hotel when you can spend it under all the stars you could possibly ask for? Try the Maranjab Desert outside Kashan, where you can pitch a tent or stay in a local motel if you’re outdoorsy but still enjoy



Literally “house of strength,” the Iranian zurkhaneh is an ancient gym where men practice what can be described as martial arts meets yoga.

a few basic luxuries.

If you’re around Yazd, head to Zeinodin and experience the life of Silk Road caravan traders in a 400-year-old caravanserai. Make a campfire or stargaze with an astronomer. Either way, resting your head for a night under a star-filled sky is unforgettable.

■ Go on a culinary tour

Food unites everyone, and what better way to learn about the culture than through your stomach? There are businesses in Tehran that offer culinary tours that kick off with a bazaar run to learn about traditional Iranian ingredients and pick up some of the freshest items before heading back to their kitchen where you’ll get some hands-on practice by preparing various dishes. Lasting just half a day, it’s the perfect bite-size experience of authentic Iranian cooking.

■ Discover historical core of Tehran

Though it may be hard to believe, the southern parts of Tehran were at one point the most northern parts. Neighborhoods like Sangelaj, with its narrow, winding alleys, and Udlajan, a once predominantly Jewish neighborhood, seem to be frozen in time as lifestyles continue as they always have.

Among the treasures that you can find here are synagogues,

the first bank of Iran (since converted into a teahouse), a 900-year-old sycamore tree, public bathhouses still in use, and beautiful old palaces.

■ Stay with nomads

Go off the beaten path and dive into a little culture. A few hours drive outside Shiraz, you can find the Qashqai nomadic tribes. These nomads are now semi-settled, having adapted somewhat to more modern lifestyles, but they still migrate south around Shiraz for the winter. There might be a language barrier, but the Qashqai are eager to interact with tourists and foreigners and share their centuries-old culture and traditions, such as carpet-weaving.

■ Get back to nature

Weekends for Iranians consist of getting away from city life and heading into nature, even for just a few hours. With a diverse geography, depending on where you are, you could head to the coast, forest, desert, mountain, canyon, or waterfall, among other places.

Check out some of the best hiking trails throughout the country—all you need is a comfortable pair of shoes and a backpack. Skiing just outside Tehran is also an option if you’re visiting in winter.

Flash floods harm historical sites, monuments across Kerman

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Heavy rainfalls have inflicted considerable damage to some historical sites and monuments across southeastern Kerman province.

“A significant number of historical monuments and ancient sites have been seriously damaged in the province,” ILNA quoted Mojtaba Shafiei, the provincial deputy tourism chief, as saying on Wednesday.

“Based on preliminary studies and monitoring, the estimated amount of these damages varies between three to 30 percent from one county to other.”

The official noted that the pouring rains have caused flooding in some historical sites, adding, “We are preparing a list of damaged monuments for the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.”

Reminding that the protection of historical monuments and archeological sites is one of the main priorities of the cultural heritage and tourism department, the official said,



“Regarding to the current conditions, police forces in charge of safeguarding cultural heritage, are on high alert in the damaged sites.”

Spring floods caused damage to many urban and rural areas in several provinces of Iran, mainly in the southern parts of the country, claiming lives of several people.

Lesser-known Iranian province prepared to jumpstart tourism after coronavirus

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — The tourism sector of Iran’s southwestern Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province is prepared to improve quickly after coronavirus crisis ends, provincial tourism chief Mohammad Hosseinzadeh said on Wednesday, ISNA reported.

He also noted that innovative plans and programs and various cultural festivals are being organized to attract tourists and travelers to the alluring destinations of the province.

The tourism sector of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province has taken 150 billion rials (over \$3 million) hit from the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) over the last two months.

Not in tourist radar, the western province attracted over four million people, mostly domestic travelers, dur-

ing the Iranian year 1397 (ended March 2019), according data announced by provincial tourism department.

Over the past couple of weeks, Iran has limited travel between its cities in an effort to halt the spread of the coronavirus.

Domestic travel in Iran traditionally reaches its climax from mid-March to early April, a time corresponding to the Persian New Year (Noruz) holidays. Iranians made 74 million overnight stays in their domestic trips during the Noruz holidays last year, which showed a 20 percent increase year on year.

As of Feb 23, Iran temporarily closed cultural heritage museums and historical sites across the country in a preventive measure amid fears of coronavirus outbreak.



HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — A total of 25 eco-lodge units will come on stream in Fars province by the end of the current Iranian year (March 20, 2021),

25 new eco-lodges to be completed in Fars by yearend

provincial tourism chief has said.

“25 eco-lodges [which are currently being constructed to renovated] will be completed during the current year,” CHTN quoted Mosayeb Amiri as saying on Monday.

“We intend to escalate the number of eco-lodges in Fars as ecotourism-related accommodation is a way to develop tourism in lesser-known areas (of the southern province),” the official noted.

The ancient region of Fars, also spelled Pars,

Tourism projected to generate 2,000 jobs in Gilan province

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — Some 2,000 job opportunities in tourism sector are projected to be created in the northern province of Gilan by the end of the current Iranian calendar year 1399 (started March 21).

A total of 156 tourism-related projects are scheduled to be completed in the province, which will generate 2,000 jobs for residents of the province, provincial tourism chief Shahrud Amir-Entekhabi said on Wednesday, CHTN reported.

Last December, Gilan was selected as the first province to start the country’s comprehensive tourism plan, which is to be developed under the auspices of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

Sophisticated Rasht, capital of Gilan province, has long been a weekend escape for residents of Tehran who are looking to sample the famous local cuisine and hoping



for some pluvial action – it’s the largest, and wettest town in the northern region. Gilan is divided into a coastal plain including the large delta of Sefid Rud and adjacent parts of the Alborz mountain range.

Bounded by the Caspian Sea and the Republic of Azerbaijan on the north, Gilan, in the far past, was within the sphere of influence of the successive Achaemenid, Seleucid, Parthian, and Sassanid empires that ruled Iran until the 7th century CE.

capital of Persia during the Zand dynasty from 1751 to 1794.

Iran announced in 2018 that 2,000 eco-lodges would be constructed across the country until 2021. Having a very diverse natural setting, Iran offers varied excursions to nature lovers. Sightseers may live with a nomad or rural family or enjoy an independent stay.

Experts say each eco-lodge unit generates jobs for seven to eight people on the average so that the scheme could create 160,000 jobs.

All-Iranian anti-corona products to hit market within month

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Iranian-made medical items will be soon mass produced and hit the market within the next month, Babak Shokri, vice chancellor of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences has stated.

The items consist of diagnostic kits, face masks and ventilators made by Iranian researchers, he said, IRNA news agency reported on Wednesday.

The kits on the market take one to several hours to diagnose, but the university plans to produce kits that can detect the disease for up to 20 minutes, and these kits are not only used for coronavirus but all the viruses, including AIDS and

bird flu, he explained.

Referring to the second research project, he said that university researchers have been able to produce devices that make fabrics resistant to coronavirus by performing physical and chemical operations on them.

Sourena Sattari, Vice President for Science and Technology, announced on Saturday that two types of diagnostic kits are now mass-produced by knowledge-based companies, first one is the RT-PCR tests, 8 million of which are being produced per month; while the other is serology-based tests that a total of 400,000 are being manufactured monthly and is expected to reach up to 2 million.



At present, 40 advanced ventilators are manufactured daily in the medical equipment sector, he explained.

Knowledge-based companies can

produce any medicine effective in countering coronavirus or approved by the scientific committee within a week to 10 days, he noted.

Theories on origins of COVID-19 disease

➔ However, an analysis by Nature Medicine Journal suggests COVID-19 virus is a testament to natural selection, not bioengineering. The new analysis compares the genome of COVID-19 with seven other coronavirus known to infect man: SARS, MERS, SARS-Cov2 (which can cause severe disease), along with HKU1, NL63, OC43 and 229E (which typically cause mild symptoms), wrote Nature Medicine Journal ([nature.com/articles/s41591-020-0820-9](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-020-0820-9)).

“Our analyses clearly shows that SARS-Cov2 is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus,” the journal article concludes.

COVID-19 bat-borne disease

Shi Zengli — a virologist often called “bat woman” by her colleagues works at Wuhan Institute of Virology. She has spent a considerable amount of her time outside a lab on virus-hunting expeditions in bat caves over the past 16 years. Her studies have shown that the southern, subtropical areas of Guangdong, Guangxi and Yunnan have a greater risk of coronavirus jumping from animals to humans, particularly bats, a known reservoir for many viruses. Her story has been covered by Scientific American magazine and other media outlets.

Scientists have long warned that the rate of infectious diseases is accelerating — especially in developing countries where people and animals mingle and move about.

Coronavirus — named because, seen under a microscope, their spiky surface resembles a crown. The coronavirus was mainly known for causing common colds until the SARS outbreak became a game changer. One aspect that scientists are trying to figure out is search for animal viruses that could find their way into humans.

It is believed that the civets, a nocturnal animal like bats, were the intermediate host — a vehicle for the virus to ride on until it infects another species -- to transfer the coronavirus to humans in a fish and wildlife market in Wuhan. How the civets got it still remains a mystery.

Two previous incidents are worth considering. First Australia’s 1994 Hendra virus infection, in which contagion jumped from horses to humans. Second one is Malaysia’s 1998 Nipah virus outbreak which was transferred from pigs to humans. Both were caused by pathogens that originated in fruit eating bats.



With a growing population today, increasing deforestation, changes in land use, wildlife and livestock transportation around the world, sharp increase in domestic and international travel, new disease outbreaks are a mathematical certainty.

After five years of intense sampling of pathogens found in Shitou Cave, outskirts of Kunmin, capital of Yunnan, scientists discovered hundreds of bat borne coronavirus with incredible genetic diversity. “The majority of them are harmless,” Shi told Scientific American, adding that “dozens belong to same group as SARS.”

In Shitou Cave the team discovered coronavirus strain in 2013 that came from horseshoe bats with genome sequence 97 percent similar to civets in Guangdong. The finding concluded a decade-long search for a natural reservoir of SARS coronavirus.

To many, the region’s wildlife market — which sells a wide range of animals including bats, civets, pangolins, badgers and crocodiles — are perfect melting pot. According to several studies humans could’ve got it from bats directly and suggest pangolins may have been intermediate hosts.

On February 24, China announced a permanent ban on wildlife consumption and trade except for research, medicinal or display purposes. This will stamp out the 76 billion dollar industry putting 14 million out of jobs, according to a 2017 report commissioned by Chinese Academy of Engineering.

However, eating wildlife has been part of cultural tradition in southern China for thousands of years. Ban won’t change things overnight and may push business underground.

In 2016 four pig farms in Qingyuan County in Guangdong suffered acute vomiting and diarrhea killing 25,000 animals. The cause of illness, called swine acute diarrhea syndrome (SADS), turned out to be a virus 98 percent identical to coronavirus found in horseshoe bats in a nearby cave.

Given the scale of swine farming in many countries, such as the U.S. and China, scientists say looking for coronavirus in pigs should be top priority.

Although coronavirus in Wuhan is the sixth outbreak caused by bat-borne viruses in past 26 years — the other five being Hendra in 1994, Nipah in 1998, SARS in 2002, MERS in 2012, and Ebola in 2014 — the animals are not the problem. “The problem arises when we get in contact with them,” Shi says.

During her bat hunting expeditions she has identified dozens of deadly SARS-like viruses in bat caves, and warns there are more out there. Because 70 percent of animal-borne infectious diseases come from wild creatures, “where we should start to find all those viruses in wildlife globally and develop better diagnostic tests,” Shi says.

“One in every fifth mammal is a bat,” says Professor Kate Jones, a biodiversity scientist at the University College London. It is estimated that there are 900 to over 1,200 species of bats in the world.

Virologists and other scientists believe that we should focus on high-risk groups of mammals prone to coronavirus infections, such as bats, rodents, badgers, civets, pangolins, and non-human primates. Countries in tropics, where wildlife diversity is greatest, should be the frontline of this battle against viruses.

Once potential pathogens are mapped out, we are able to catch an outbreak before it turns into an epidemic, saving lives and dollars.

Scientists estimate as much as 5000 coronavirus strains are waiting to be discovered. “Bat-borne coronavirus will cause more outbreaks,” Shi says with a tone of brooding certainty. “We must find them before they find us.”

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

\$7b to be allocated to retrofit, rebuild flood-devastated houses

A budget of 290 trillion rials (nearly \$7 billion) will be allotted to reconstruct and repair housing units destroyed by flood in 18 provinces across the country, Mehdi Jamalnejad, deputy interior minister for urban and rural development has announced.

Flood has devastated some 169,377 housing units, 68,333 of which are beyond repair and must be reconstructed, he stated.

Moreover, household appliances of 109,832 families also have suffered damages, he further regretted.

He went on to say that 20,000 housing units, undergone devastation by recent flooding in Aq-Oala county in northern Golestan province, are under construction.

Non-repayable loans amounting to 25 trillion rials (nearly \$600 million) will be provided for retrofitting of houses, 7.4 trillion rials (around \$177 million) will also be earmarked to compensate for the infrastructure damages, he explained.

اختصاص بیش از ۲۹ هزار میلیارد تومان برای بازسازی خانه های سیل زده

معاون عمران و توسعه امور شهری و روستایی وزیر کشور گفت: براساس مصوبه اخیر هیات وزیران مبلغ ۲۹ هزار و ۱۳۰ میلیارد ریال برای بازسازی و جبران خسارات ناشی از سیل در بخشهای مختلف ۱۸ استان پرداخت می شود.

بر اساس ارزیابی های انجام شده در ۲۱ استان کشور، بیش از ۱۶۹ هزار و ۳۷۷ واحد مسکونی شهری و روستایی در سیل های اخیر در کشور آسیب دیده اند که باید دوباره احداث شوند.

جمالی نژاد بیان داشت: در اثر سیل به ۱۰۹ هزار و ۸۳۲ واحد مسکونی نیز خسارت معیشتی وارد شده است.

وی اضافه کرد: امروز ساخت ۲۰ هزار دستگاه واحد مسکونی که در سیل آسیب دیده بودند نیز در آق قلا شروع شد.

دبیر کمیته نوسازی و بازسازی قرارگاه بازسازی مناطق سیل زده در ادامه گفت: ۲۵ هزار میلیارد ریال تسهیلات قرض الحسنه و همچنین مبلغ ۷ هزار و ۴۶۰ میلیارد ریال برای مرمت زیرساخت های آسیب دیده از سیل پرداخت خواهد شد.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“co-, col-, com-, con-, cor-”

■ **Meaning:** with or together

■ **For example:** What will it take for us to **coexist** in peace?

PHRASAL VERB

Nose out

■ **Meaning:** to find out or discover information, secrets, etc.

■ **For example:** He nosed out their plans.

IDIOM

Crocodile tears

■ **Explanation:** To shed crocodile tears means to shed false tears or show insincere grief

■ **For example:** Caroline pretended to be sad but we all knew her tears were crocodile tears.

Over 50% of COVID-19 patients in Iran recovered, death toll declining

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Some 53 percent of persons who were infected with the coronavirus in Iran have recovered from the disease so far and the number of deaths is on a downward trend.

The total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran has reached 76,389, of whom 4,777 have died and 49,933 recovered.

Meanwhile, 1,512 new patients have been identified over the past 24 hours, Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Wednesday.

He added that 94 more people have died during the same period of time compared with 97 the day earlier and 111 two days ago, ISNA reported.

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

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

FAO scales up technical assistance to Iran on addressing Desert Locust infestation

TEHRAN — As desert locust infestations in East Africa and South-West Asia have intensified in recent months, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has provided an additional \$200,000 to further strengthen Iran’s technical capacity to control Desert Locust.

Signed by FAO and Iran’s Plant Protection Organization (PPO) on March 19, the \$300, 000 Technical Cooperation Project (TCP) “Urgent action for capacity building to control desert locust infestation in Iran”, now totals \$500,000.

“Given the alarming situation of desert locust in the region and the possible huge damages this pest can cause in agricultural production and rural livelihoods, FAO determined to further extend its technical assistance to Iran, and accordingly allocated additional funds to this project,” said FAO Representative to Iran, Gerold Bödeker.

Expressing his hope to contain desert locust effectively across the country, Bödeker emphasised, “the project mainly focuses on providing around 320 Iranian experts with the requisite technical knowledge and skills to detect, track, report on and rapidly respond to desert locust infestations.”

He added that “As part of the agreement, FAO will also assist the country in procuring vital equipment needed to equip two desert locust control centers that will allow a quicker and more effective response.”

According to Keith Cressman, the Executive Secretary of the FAO Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in South-West Asia (SWAC), “Widespread rains over the last couple of months in East Africa and South-West Asia including southern Iran, provided a conducive environment for the desert locusts to breed. In East Africa, this represents an unprecedented threat to food security and livelihoods since it coincides with the beginning of the planting season.”

Cressman who is also FAO’s Senior Locust Forecasting Officer noted that “It is crucial to join hands and share knowledge and skills to manage this dangerous migratory pest and prevent further deterioration of the situation.”

“FAO has implemented similar projects in Pakistan, Yemen and East African nations, all aimed to support its Member States in managing the threat posed by the desert locust,” he concluded.

WORDS IN THE NEWS

India and China talk

(June 25, 2003)

he Indian Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, has signed an important agreement with Chinese leaders in Beijing. This will reopen a cross-border trade route through the politically sensitive and long-disputed territories of Sikkim and Tibet. This report from Jill McGivering:

The main thrust of Mr Vajpayee’s trip to Beijing is to make progress on practical issues - with mutual trade and business at the top of the agenda. In the past, the tense, even hostile, relationship between the two countries has been an obstacle to progress **on the ground**. But this latest agreement is a major step forward and a good example of a new policy of **putting emotive disagreements to one side** and focusing instead on practicalities. The handling of the **apparent** concessions over Tibet and Sikkim seem to be a **classic case** of political **fudge**.

The wording seemed veiled in secrecy - until newspapers in both countries **seized on** the issue and both declared political victory for their own leaders: Indian papers saying that China now recognised Sikkim as part of India and Chinese papers hailing India’s apparent recognition of Tibet as part of China. Meanwhile officials on both sides are struggling **to play down** the political significance altogether and say their positions haven’t actually changed. Indian officials still insist the Dalai Lama is welcome in India and there’s no question of forcing him to leave. They want **to throw the focus back on** the practical trade gains made possible as a result of the opening of this geographically important route - and as far away as possible from their positions on disputed territory now making headlines.

Words

thrust: the thrust of an activity or an idea is the main or essential thing it expresses

on the ground: when you talk about what is happening on the ground, you are talking about what is really happening in a situation, rather than what the people who are in control are thinking or saying

putting emotive disagreements to one side: keeping disagreements that may cause strong feelings separate from the present discussions

practicalities: the practicalities of a situation are the aspects of it concerned with real events rather than with ideas or theories.

apparent: an apparent situation seems to exist, although you cannot be certain that it exists

a classic case: a typical example. A classic example of something has all the features that you expect that kind of thing to have.

fudge: avoidance of a clear or definite decision or statement

seized on: showed great interest in. If you seize on something you show great interest in it, often because it is useful to you.

to play down: if you play down a fact or feature, you try to make people think that it is not particularly important

to throw the focus back on: to direct attention back towards

(Source: BBC)

UK arms giant sold £15bn in weapons to Saudi Arabia during Yemen war

→ 1 Last week, the invaders claimed they were halting military operations in support of United Nations peace efforts and to avoid further spread of the new coronavirus in Yemen.

The Yemeni army, however, reported days afterwards that it had been forced to repel several Saudi-led assaults on various fronts in just one day.

The Houthi Ansarullah movement — which runs Yemen and leads its armed forces — said the Western-backed coalition had even ramped up its acts of aggression since announcing the so-called truce.

EU looks to apps as way of easing virus lockdown

As the EU's economy reels from virus lockdowns, Brussels unveiled a proposed roadmap Wednesday to ease restrictions on life and businesses, relying in large part on smartphone tracking apps.

That technology aims to spot localized COVID-19 outbreaks in real-time. Already many individual European governments are on the verge of rolling out their own tracking apps — AFP reported.

But the European Commission is concerned those go-it-alone initiatives will provide incompatible data sets, useless for compiling a whole picture across the single market where people and goods are meant to move freely.

It is also worried these apps could fall foul of strong EU data privacy rules and Europeans' deep-seated wariness of technological prying.

"The aim is to get the single market back on track so that it can work properly," Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen told a videolink news conference as she unveiled the 16-page roadmap to phasing out lockdowns that have brought life to a standstill in many countries.

- Apps already appearing -
The document puts data collection and contact tracing at the top of its recommended measures, above expanding testing, reinforcing healthcare systems and providing more protective gear.

But it said the use of any apps should be "voluntary" and comply with personal data protection rules.

"Tracing close proximity between mobile devices should be allowed only on an anonymous and aggregated basis, without any tracking of citizens, and names of possibly infected persons should not be disclosed to other users," it said.

Afghan girls try building ventilator from used car parts

A team of robot-designing girls in Afghanistan is trying to build a low-cost medical ventilator from car parts, as health authorities look to boost critical-care capabilities for coronavirus patients in the impoverished country.

If the teenagers succeed and can get government approval for their prototype, they say it could be replicated for as little as \$300, where normally ventilators sell for around \$30,000.

"The team is working with local health specialists, as well as experts from Harvard University, to produce the prototype based on a design by Massachusetts Institute of Technology," said Roya Mahboob, who runs an Afghan tech company and sponsors the team of five girls, aged 14-17.

They are part of a bigger group of high-achieving high school girls known as the "Afghan Dreamers", from the western city of Herat.

The girls made headlines in 2017 after being denied visas to take part in a robotics competition in Washington -- before President Donald Trump intervened and they were allowed to travel.

They are taking engine and battery parts from a Toyota Corolla -- ubiquitous on the streets of Afghanistan -- to produce a prototype they started designing after the Herat governor called for more ventilators as coronavirus cases rose.

Central to the ventilator is a self-inflating plastic sac known as an Ambu bag that medical staff use to help patients breathe. The girls' prototype uses a mechanical system to operate the bag automatically and accurately.

(Source: AFP)

COVID-19 pandemic can hit Israeli regime harder than expected

→ 1 The regime has closed educational institutions and businesses and income levels are down. The virus poses a challenge to citizens in terms of their personal, social and national security. The number of infected Israelis who need to be quarantined increases daily, as unemployment also rises along with inflation; growth indicators decline alongside the fact that there is no general budget in operation due to the absence of stable government.

The Israeli economy — as with others — is also being hit by the collapse of global markets and exports, a reduced workforce and, importantly, the fall in the number of tourists as flights are cancelled and non-essential journeys are as good as banned.

Army support for civilians will focus on the food supply chain, the provision and delivery of medicine, and helping the elderly and those with special needs. This support might be cut if security threats require army personnel to be re-deployed. In such a scenario, the police will only have access to a small number of army officers to help enforce the anti-virus measures. At this point, there are no plans to use army reserves to help the police. Regular soldiers from the Israel Defense Forces are on duty for the time being.

If the virus spreads within army ranks, the IDF's ability to defend could be curtailed to a serious degree. Already, senior officers have imposed quarantine on around 4,000 personnel, including many of their own seniority. No soldier is being allowed to travel abroad for at least 30 days.

International travel bans will have an obvious effect on Israel's ability to gather intelligence in the field. This increases concerns about security as Mossad agents and their contacts are limited by lockdowns in what they can do, and will not be immune to contracting the virus.

The Netanyahu's decision to involve Mossad and other agencies to curb the virus is a concern for many. Their movements are now being tracked around the clock. Netanyahu has authorized security agencies to have access to mobile telephone data; they can record calls made, and read emails and WhatsApp chats. The citizens complain about this invasion of their privacy but the Prime Minister has made such decisions without the approval of monitoring bodies.

Russia says Trump's move to cut WHO funding over coronavirus is selfish

Russia on Wednesday condemned U.S. President Donald Trump for cutting funding to the World Health Organization, saying his decision was selfish and hurt a body that many countries were looking to for leadership amid the coronavirus crisis.

Trump, who has faced criticism for his administration's response to the coronavirus epidemic, has grown hostile towards the WHO and on Tuesday halted funding to it over its handling of the pandemic, Reuters reported.

The United States is the WHO's biggest overall donor.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said on Wednesday that the U.S. announcement was "very alarming".

"This is an example of a very selfish approach by the U.S. authorities to what is happening in the world as regards the pandemic," Ryabkov was quoted by the TASS news agency as saying.

"Such a blow to this organisation at a time when the eyes of the world community are in many ways looking precisely to it is a step worthy of condemnation and censure," he said.

U.S. President Donald Trump's move to freeze America's funding to the World Health Organization (WHO) — the body leading the global fight against the new



coronavirus pandemic — has drawn global censure.

China, where the virus first emerged, said on Wednesday that the US had to fulfill its obligations to the WHO at a time when some two million people were ill with COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian also said at a regular press briefing that the US's refusal to contribute

funding came at a critical stage and would affect all countries in the world.

Trump, who is under immense pressure for his slow and inadequate response to the American outbreak, said on Tuesday that he had ordered a halt to the US's funding to the WHO because of what he alleged to be the body's mishandling of the global health crisis.

Over 607,000 have been affected and more than 28,000 have died in the US

France summons Chinese envoy over criticism of West's response to Covid-19 pandemic

Paris has summoned its Chinese envoy after the embassy published a blistering critique of the West's response to the Covid-19 crisis, accusing leaders of failing to act and abandoning vulnerable citizens to death and starvation.

"Certain publicly voiced opinions by representatives of the Chinese Embassy in France are not in line with the quality of the bilateral relations between our two countries," Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said in a statement late on Tuesday, calling on Ambassador Lu Shaye to answer for an article published on the Chinese Embassy website over the weekend.

Entitled 'Restoring distorted facts,' the lengthy post — which listed no author — tore into the U.S. and European

governments for their handling of the pandemic, while defending Beijing from accusations of concealing information and of a sluggish response, RT reported.

The article claimed that some nursing homes had been "deserted," leaving elderly patients "to die of hunger and disease."

The post also took aim at Western news outlets, "which take themselves for paragons of impartiality and objectivity," yet appear to care more about "slandering, stigmatizing and attacking China" than covering the raging health crises in their own countries.

Responding to the blustery article, the French FM insisted "there is no room for polemics" amid the Covid-19 pandemic, stating he made his "disapproval" clear to Lu and that France and other nations must pursue "unity, solidarity

and the greatest international cooperation."

The diplomatic row comes as Washington steps up efforts to pin blame on Beijing for the global health crisis, accusing Chinese officials of concealing vital information in the early stages of its outbreak and thereby hampering the world's ability to respond. The World Health Organization has also come under fire, with US President Donald Trump halting the agency's funding on Tuesday, alleging it helped China to "cover up" the epidemic, costing thousands of lives. Beijing has repeatedly rejected those allegations, maintaining it has been fully transparent with the international community all along, and that the US even "wasted precious time" that China helped it to buy with proactive containment measures.

U.S. coronavirus deaths set single-day record



U.S. coronavirus deaths have risen by a single-day record 2,228 to top 28,300, according to a Reuters tally, as officials debated how to reopen the economy without reigniting the outbreak.

The United States, with the world's third-largest population, passed a second milestone late on Tuesday with over 600,000 reported cases, three times more than any other country.

The previous single-day record was 2,069, set last Friday.

The increase of 2,228 deaths excludes a revision by New York City to include deaths presumed to be due to the novel coronavirus but never tested dating back to March 11.

Officials reported 3,778 "probable" deaths, where doctors were certain enough of the cause of death to list it on the death certificate, and 6,589 confirmed by a lab test. Combined, that would put the total fatalities in the city to over 10,000.

As the numbers continue to rise, officials debate over how and when to reopen the U.S. economy and start easing restrictions.

■ **Coronavirus delivers record blow to U.S. retail sales in March**

US retail sales suffered a record drop in March as mandatory business closures to control the spread of the

novel coronavirus outbreak depressed demand for a range of goods, setting up consumer spending for its worst decline in decades.

The Commerce Department on Wednesday said retail sales plunged 8.7% in March, the biggest decline since the government

started tracking the series in 1992, after falling by a revised 0.4% in February.

According to a Reuters survey of economists, retail sales were forecast to have fallen 8.0% last month.

The report came as millions of Americans are thrown out of work, and strengthen economists' conviction that the economy is in deep recession. States and local governments have issued "stay-at-home" or "shelter-in-place" orders affecting more than 90% of Americans to curb the spread of COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the virus, and abruptly stopping the country.

"The economy is almost in free fall," said Sung Won Sohn, a business economics professor at Loyola Marymount University in

Los Angeles. "We will see the bottom when the coronavirus infection rates stabilize. It's going to be a pretty deep bottom from which to come up."

U.S. occupation destroyed Iraqi state structure: Kadhimi

→ 1 Kadhimi called on political parties to cooperate with his government, which he said would focus on preparing for early elections and face the unexpected challenges caused by the outbreak of the novel coronavirus and the sharp fall in oil prices.

■ **PM designate says resolved to end illegal foreign military presence**

Also, on Wednesday, Al-Kadhimi said he is resolved to bring an end to any illegal presence of foreign boots on the ground in his country, adding Baghdad will soon hold talks with Washington in this regard.

Speaking to the Baghdad Today news website, Kadhimi

said that he was "serious" about ending any manifestation of the illegal presence of foreign forces in Iraq.

He also noted that Baghdad would discuss with Washington the nature of U.S. presence on Iraqi soil in the near future.

On January 5, the Iraqi parliament voted for a resolution that called for an end to the presence of all foreign troops, including the Americans.

The vote came two days after the U.S. military — acting on President Donald Trump's order — launched a fatal drone strike on senior Iranian anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani upon his arrival in the Iraqi capital at

Iraqi parties require PM-designate to end U.S.-led military presence: MP



An Iraqi parliamentarian says the country's political parties have conditioned approving Prime Minister-designate Mustafa al-Kadhimi's cabinet on his acting on a law approved by the parliament that mandates evacuation of US-led forces.

Sa'ad al-Sa'adi, a senior member of the Fatah (Conquest) parliamentary coalition, made the remarks to the Baghdad Today news website on Tuesday.

The legislature ratified the law in early January, only days after the United States carried out an unauthorized drone attack, assassinating Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of the Popular Mobilization Units, or Hashd al-Sha'abi anti-terror force, and a number of others.

The attack came while General Soleimani was on an official trip in the Iraqi capital at Baghdad's request.

The assassinations were followed by thousands-strong funeral processions and protests across both Iran and Iraq in honor of the commanders and condemnation of the U.S.'s nearly two decades of deadly interference in the region.

On April 9, Iraqi President Barham Salih tasked Mustafa al-Kadhimi, director of the country's National Intelligence Service, with

forming a new government in a month. The presidential ceremony was attended by several high-ranking politicians and public figures, something that was interpreted as Kadhimi's across-the-board popularity with Iraq's political groupings.

He was the third person to be nominated for the office in 10 weeks after his predecessors Adnan al-Zurfi and Mohammed Allawi withdrew their bids failing to secure the legislature's support in their task of forming a government.

Al-Sa'adi said, "Now that Mustafa al-Kadhimi has secured the parliament's vote of confidence [that enabled his nomination as the premier], one of his most important duties is to implement the law ratified by the parliament, based on which all foreign forces should be evacuated from Iraq."

The condition is one of the most important ones that Al-Kadhimi has been committed to implement, al-Sa'adi noted, adding "he has consented to [implementing] this condition."

Al-Sa'adi called the result of the parliamentary vote binding, saying it could not be defied by any premier, and has to be put into force, especially in light of the far- and wide popular support that it has received ever since ratification.

(Source: Press TV)

the invitation of the Baghdad government.

The attack also claimed the lives of Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) or Hashd al-Sha'abi, along with eight other Iranian and Iraqi people.

The prime minister designate also said his government would pursue an open policy based on the principle of common interests in foreign and Arab-Islamic spheres.

Kadhimi further underlined the need for de-escalation as a prerequisite for attracting investments and diversifying the oil-dependent economy.

A practical plan to resume IPL games and stay healthy

By Asghar Maziar

TEHRAN — The outbreak of the novel coronavirus has affected all parts of the communities over the world, including sports and, in particular, football.

When it comes to sports, it involves both economic and entertainment. With much of the sports events on hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no broadcasting rights and no ticket sale. The small businesses around football, such as selling of jerseys and team items, are now severely damaged. For fans, the wait for some action is a frustrating time.

In such a situation, when athletes are forced to stay at homes and do fewer sports activities, they are more likely to lose their fitness and suffer injuries after returning to the competitions.

The suspension of football leagues is another issue that has raised a lot of questions. Can Liverpool be declared champions if the 2019-20 English Premier League season is voided? They need just two more wins to secure the title. And yet, declaring them champions if the season is eventually voided could have legal implications.

With the Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on the world, football should be the last thing on anybody's mind. The problem is that the future offers extreme uncertainty. Nobody knows when the Covid-19 crisis will run its course. In my opinion, the decisions that are made about how and when the football leagues could resume play, should be based on the policies of each country in terms of the health and care systems implemented by the state governments of those countries.

The situation of each country is different from others, and we cannot compare Iran



with some other countries who have plans to resume the games as early as next month. Sports events cannot and should not be started until the breaking of the corona chain and the reduction of the number of infections.

The point that has received less attention about football is that there are a lot of conflicts and touches between players during the games, and this can increase the risk of transmitting the virus among them. We must be patient until the coronavirus pandemic is firmly controlled.

Some important people in football have already spoken about why one team, namely Persepolis, cannot be declared champions of the Iran Professional League (IPL) if the season is voided. If, and it is a huge if, the season cannot be completed, then there is no way you can have a winner or loser.

Another option, which is my solution to this problem is to stop the league as it is in the current situation, with 21st weeks being played, and then resume the remaining nine

weeks from the next season.

Then, we will start the 2020-2021 season. In fact, with this plan, we should be able and ready to hold two and a half leagues in two years.

The clubs will have more fixtures to play and a congested calendar meaning some teams often finding themselves playing once every three games. But in this way, the health of footballers and all the staff involved in football will not be endangered. Health is the most critical priority.

Marc Wilmots needs to make peace with Iran



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Marc Wilmots is going to take charge of Turkish giants Fenerbahçe but there is an obstacle ahead of him. The Belgian coach has left his job as Iran coach in early December after two parties failed to reach consensus and the case still remains open in FIFA.

Iran football federation and Wilmots have filed lawsuit against each other and the ex-Belgium coach needs to bring this conflict to an end to be granted permission

to lead the Turkish top-flight team.

Wilmots has already rejected Antwerp's offer to join Fenerbahçe but Iran's complaint to FIFA prevents him to sign a new contract.

Now, the two sides should bury the hatchet.

Under stewardship of Wilmots, Iran defeated Hong Kong and Cambodia but two defeats against Bahrain and Iraq left the Persians in third place in Group C of the 2022 World Cup qualifications.

Iran's Beiranvand named Asian FIFA World Cup Hero



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran international goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand has been named the Asian FIFA World Cup Hero.

In a poll conducted by the-afc.com, 68 percent of participants voted the Iranian goalkeeper. Beiranvand beat Japanese legendary midfielder Keisuke Honda who earned 24 percent.

Australian Tim Cahill, Sami Al Jaber from Saudi Arabia and Korean Park Ji-sung were the other candidates.

The winner was chosen by a panel of experts combined with the results of the public vote.

Beiranvand was Iran's star at the 2018 FIFA World Cup group stage, where he saved Cristiano Ronaldo's penalty and kept his country's hopes alive in Portugal match.

The Persepolis shot-stopper shone as Iran edged past Morocco 1-0 in their opener and he then produced another string of excellent saves in a narrow 1-0 loss to Spain, when only a fortuitous Diego Costa goal got the better of the big custodian.

Esteghlal fans overwhelmed me: Markus Neumayr

German-Swiss midfielder Markus Neumayr has praised the Esteghlal fans and likened the team to Barcelona.

He joined Esteghlal on July 31, 2018 on a two-year contract but was released by the team at his request after just playing eight matches for the Iranian team.

In an interview with spox.com, the 34-year-old midfielder talked about his former club.

"I was immediately overwhelmed by the amount of Esteghlal's fans. The club has 40 million fans and between 80,000 and 90,000 spectators attended home games. It was almost like you play for FC Barcelona," Neumayr said.

"Everyone knew me in the city. Maybe I was the only blonde in the whole country. It was actually impossible for



me to go to a restaurant or walk through the city. It's normal there the fans ask you to take a picture and in the beginning it was difficult to deal with but I got used to it, he added.

Sir Alex Ferguson persuaded the promising attacking midfielder to join United in 2003 when he was 16 and at Eintracht Frankfurt and the now 34-year-old recalled being invited for dinner at the former United manager's home.

"After my trial, he invited me to his home. His wife made tea for us and we talked about football for an hour. He explained what the club stands for and what he planned to do with me. For me, a 16-year-old youngster, this was very, very impressive," he said.

(Source: spox)

Safety is first priority of FIFA – Infantino

FIFA president Gianni Infantino has again made it clear that all-around safety is the first priority of football's governing body. Infantino thinks that rushing things will be dangerous for a global game like football.

Speaking in a video chat with the Brazilian legend, Ronaldo, the head of international football governing body made his position clear about the time of resuming football competitions.

"This is a good question but the right answer is that public health come first. Our priority is health and it comes before anything else. As long as there is a risk you will not play," Infantino said.

"We need to wait and see how things are going forward, the situation is too serious at the moment," he continued.

Discussions are being held around the

world over when and how to restart the season. The president of FIFA said it would depend to the state governments' decision to resume the games in each country.

"I saw people arguing about when we can return to play. We will resume playing when authorities will tell us so. Then we will keep playing to finish competitions. But we cannot put people's lives at risk for a football match, it's not worth it.

"We all need to be responsible and respect people who are suffering I this moment. We will play when we can. Maybe in August? I don't know yet."

■ **Why FIFA is comparatively unaffected by coronavirus**

FIFA is not soccer. It helps govern the world's most popular sport, but the two aren't synonymous. And while leagues, clubs, players and soccer-adjacent employees of

all kinds struggle – unable to play, to entertain, to make money – FIFA sits on \$2.745 billion in reserves (as of 2019), trying to figure out how it can help.

Perhaps more importantly, its cash cow almost surely won't be interrupted by the pandemic. FIFA has no direct stake in the Champions League or any national league. Over a four-year cycle, it makes more than 80 percent of its money from the men's World Cup. It makes a significant chunk of the rest from the Women's World Cup. The nearest of those two tournaments is 31 months away.

"FIFA's financial position," according to its latest annual statement, "is particularly strong and sustainable." That's because the 2018 World Cup brought in \$5.36 billion. That whopping revenue number not only exceeded expectations, it gave FIFA a 2015-

2018 profit of more than \$1 billion, which blew away the \$100 million budgeted projection. Reserves soared, from \$930 million after 2017 to \$2.75 billion a year later.

As long as the 2022 men's World Cup, slated for November and December in Qatar, isn't impacted by the coronavirus, FIFA will remain on solid ground. It could be hurt long-term by a worldwide economic downturn. But most of its broadcast contracts – its chief source of revenue – are locked in for years to come. Fox, for example, has agreed to pay hundreds of millions of dollars for U.S. English-language rights to every FIFA tournament through 2026.

Soccer's governing body, therefore, will be fine. Its many members, on the other hand, need help.

(Source: Equipe)

Recovered Ghaemi signs with Qatar's Al Rayyan

MNA — Iran volleyball star Farhad Ghaemi has signed a contract with Qatar's Al Rayyan SC Volleyball Team after recovering from an ankle injury.

No information about the fee and duration of the contract has been revealed. Reports indicate that Ghaemi should leave for Qatar in August.

Ghaemi, 30, had suffered a cracked ankle injury in early October 2019 during training for his former club team Shahrdari Urmia.

Al Rayyan is an eight-time winner of Qatar Volleyball League and its best performance in the international competitions goes back to 2014 when the team finished runner-up at the 2014 FIVB Volleyball Men's Club World Championship.

Milad Ebadipour, Team Melli's outside spiker and the current player of Poland's PGE Skra Belchatów, has also played for one the Qatari club, winning the country's Emir Cup with the team in 2016-2017 season.

Mehdi Torabi might leave Persepolis

PLDC — Persepolis iconic midfielder Mehdi Torabi will likely leave the team at the end of the Iran Professional League season.

There is a release clause in his contract which allows him to leave the team if he receives an offer from a foreign club.

Iranian media have reported that the two Qatari teams and one Belgian club eye the Iranian international midfielder.

In the current season, he has scored eight goals for the Reds and assisted five and his transfer will be a big blow for the Iranian popular team.

Fernando de Jesus to file complaint to FIFA against Pars Jonoubi

TASNIM — Brazilian goalkeeper Fernando de Jesus is going to file a complaint against Iranian football club Pars Jonoubi.

Pars Jonoubi has canceled the goalie's contract but has yet to settle his debt. Now, the 36-year-old wants to file a lawsuit against the Iranian team.

Fernando de Jesus has already filed a complaint against another Iranian team Machine Sazi and the team has been banned from signing any new players for the next three transfer windows.

It's not for the first time an Iranian team is threatened by the transfer ban.

Iran's two-time AFC women's Futsal Champ joins BreakTheChain campaign

IRNA — Fereshteh Karimi joined the Asian Football Confederation's (AFC) BreakTheChain campaign to help fight coronavirus pandemic.

Among the latest athletes that joined the campaign are Korea's Lee Chung-yong, Bahrain Mahdi Al Humaidan, and Iran's Karimi. The campaign successfully spreads the guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Karimi said in her video that it is the first time that the people of the entire world have faced such a challenge. The virus has made everyone anxious.

She wanted everyone to wash their hands, keep the safe distance from others and stay home.

She hoped that the virus will sooner be defeated so that the people live in peace again.

Head of Iran's Health Ministry's Public Relations Office Kianoush Jahanpour said on Tuesday that 48,129 people out of a total of 74,877 infected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) have survived and recovered whereas 4,683 have lost their lives.

Jahanpour said that 1,574 new affected cases have been detected since, pointing out that 3,691 cases are in critical condition.

Australia's Harrison inks PSV Eindhoven deal

Amy Harrison is the latest Australian women's international to seal a move to Europe, joining Dutch powerhouse PSV Eindhoven on a season-long deal.

The 23-year-old midfielder will join the club for the 2020-21 campaign, with the current season of the Women's Eredivisie – in which PSV remain unbeaten – one of many in European football to have been halted by COVID-19.

When Harrison does arrive in Eindhoven, she will become both a pioneer, and also the newest Matilda to walk an increasingly well-worn path.

She will become the first Australian to appear for PSV Eindhoven's women's team, but her move makes her the 10th Matildas player in a matter of months to sign with an European club.

Sam Kerr's much-publicised move to Chelsea was quickly followed by Caitlin Foord, Hayley Raso and Chloe Logarzo, who joined Arsenal, Everton and Bristol City respectively, while 17-year-prodigy Mary Fowler was snapped up by French outfit Montpellier, with four other Australian internationals joining clubs in the Norwegian top flight.

Harrison, who has 10 caps to her name, is a two-time W-League Championship winner and was part of Australia's 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup squad, but hasn't appeared for the national team since last November, missing out on selection during the team's successful Tokyo Olympics qualifying campaign.

The move is Harrison's first in European club football, although she did feature in a brief stint for American club Washington Spirit in 2019.

(Source: the-afc)


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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

It is enough wisdom for you that it clarified salvation and depravity for you.

Imam Ali (AS)

Tehran research center offers free access to atlases of Iran-Iraq war

CULTURE TEHRAN — The Research Center and Archives of Sacred Defense in Tehran has given free access to a collection of military atlases of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.



A number of military atlases of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war published by the Research Center and Archives of Sacred Defense.

The PDF copies of 20 military atlases of the war, known as the Sacred Defense in Iran, have been published on the official website of the center.

One of the atlases is dedicated to Operation Beit-ul-Muqaddas that Iran carried out in 1982 to liberate its southwestern city of Khorramshahr, which had been captured by Iraqis on October 26, 1980 during the early months of the war.

The collection also includes an atlas of Sarallah Brigade, which at one time was commanded by Martyr Qassem Soleimani.

Another atlas from the collection is about the effects of the war upon Iranian cities.

In a new movement launched after onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Research Center and Archives of Sacred Defense has provided free access to a number of its invaluable resources.

Earlier last week, the center offered a collection of 1600 UN documents on the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

All the materials can be downloaded on the official website of the center <http://www.defamoghaddas.ir/Index.jsp>.

The center has also offered the PDF copies of over 100 its books for free download on the site.

Filmmaker Siamak Shayeqi dies at 66

A R T TEHRAN — Siamak Shayeqi, the director of the acclaimed Iranian dramas “Dowry for Robab” and “Ferdows Garden, 5 PM”, who had been in a coma since Saturday, died in a Tehran hospital on Wednesday morning. He was 66.

“My father was suffering from cancer and was receiving treatments for three years,” his son, Sam, told the Persian media.

“We were expecting him to get better, however, he went into a coma on Saturday and was hospitalized since then,” he said.

The type of cancer was not mentioned in Sam’s words.



Siamak Shayeqi in an undated photo. (Cinema Press/Maryam Qasemi)

According to Sam, his father will be buried today in the Artists Section of Tehran’s Behesht Zahra cemetery.

“Sharareh”, “Winter Dreams”, “Moon in the Jungle,” “Purple Clouds” and “My Mother Gisoo” were among Shayeqi’s noteworthy credits.

Last year, Shayeqi and actress Fatemeh Motamed-Arya were planning to make a documentary about the Iranian House of Cinema under the title “Where Is Friend’s Home”. However, the project was never carried out due to his illness.

Iran to celebrate Sadi Day for Turkish audiences live on Instagram

CULTURE TEHRAN — Iranian plans to celebrate Sadi Day for Turkish Persian literature aficionados with a live program entitled “Sadi and a Wise Life” on Instagram.

A speech by Iranian Persian literature professor Davud Esparham, who is a guest lecturer at Istanbul University, is part of the celebration.

The program has been organized in collaboration with the Iranian cultural attaché and the Istanbul branch of the Sadi Foundation, Iran’s institution that promotes the Persian language overseas.

Sheikh Muslih od-Din Sadi Shirazi, one of the greatest figures of classical Persian literature, is annually commemorated on Sadi Day, which falls on April 20 this year. However, no celebration or meeting will be organized due to the coronavirus epidemic.

Sadi is famous worldwide for his Bustan (The Orchard) and Gulistan (The Rose Garden), which have been translated into many languages.



Mausoleum of Iranian poet Sheikh Muslih od-Din Sadi Shirazi, Shiraz.

Marquez “Love in the Time of Cholera” inspires director Rahmanian play on coronavirus



Stage director Mohammad Rahmanian in an undated photo.

A R T TEHRAN — Celebrated Iranian writer and director Mohammad Rahmanian is busy these days writing the play “Love in Days of Coronavirus” inspired by Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s “Love in the Time of Cholera”.

“This teleplay centers on love in its different forms during the coronavirus days,” Rahmanian told the Persian service of ISNA on Wednesday.

The Colombian Nobel prize-winning author Marquez wrote “Love in the Time of Cholera” about Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza who fall passionately in love in their youth, however, Fermina eventually chooses to marry a wealthy, well-born doctor.

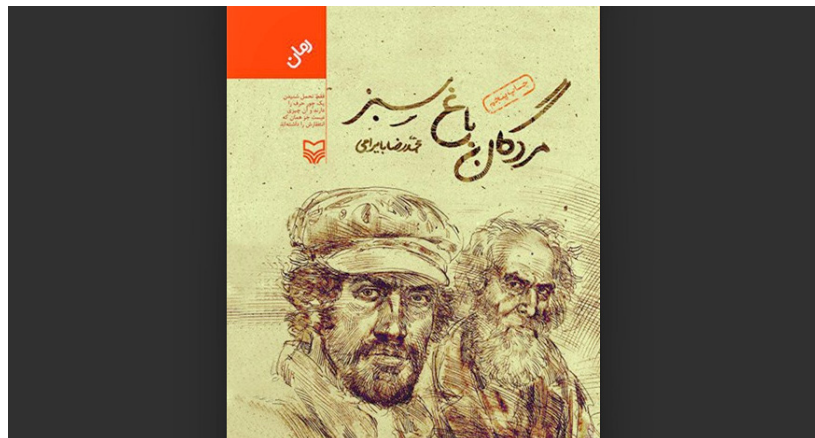
Rahmanian emphasized that the experience of days of coronavirus needs to be recorded for the following generations and added, “The truth is that we are living in a very strange period of history. Of course, our historical periods have always been strange, but this is very special, because it might change the fate of the entire world.”

“I think the coming generations would like to know more about this period of history and these works should be recorded to serve as their future sources,” he remarked.

He also noted that he has plans to set up a workshop on writing plays.

“The workshop will be held in a videoconferencing format centering on professional writing,” he concluded.

Persian novel “Deceased of the Green Garden” published in Azerbaijan



Front cover of the Persian version of writer Mohammadreza Bairami’s novel “The Deceased of the Green Garden”.

CULTURE TEHRAN — Iranian writer Mohammadreza Bairami’s novel “The Deceased of the Green Garden” has been published in Azerbaijan.

The book has been published by the Pol Literary and Translation Agency, a Tehran-based institution that translates Iranian books and presents Persian-language publications around the world.

The novel is about a peddler named Balash, who is employed as a radio host due to his beautiful voice. He then begins to work as a reporter for the daily “Azer Baijan”. But the new developments in the central government bring his progress to a halt.

Published by Sureh-Mehr Publications, the book has already been translated

into Russian.

Bairami was born in 1965 in northwestern Iran in a village at the foot of Sabalan Mountain. He is the author of more than 30 novels and collections of short stories for which he has received many literary awards.

His credits include “The Smoke behind the Hill”, “The Eagles of Hill Sixty”, “Wolves Aren’t Scared of Snow”, “The Fifth Chapter of Silence”, “The Last Seven Days” and “The Mountain Called Me”.

His novella “Barren” on the blight of war was picked as best novel in 2016 at the Jalal Al-e Ahmad Literary Awards, Iran’s most lucrative literary award.

Bairami was also selected as Iran’s best writer of the past 40 years in February.

U.S. movie theater operators aim for a late-summer blockbuster season

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — U.S. movie theater operators, who were forced to shut their doors in March to help slow the coronavirus spread, are aiming to welcome back crowds across the country by late July for a belated kickoff to the summer movie season.

Ahead of that, operators are considering a transition period when they open some locations in parts of the United States where the novel coronavirus outbreak is receding fastest. That could start as early as mid-June, said Patrick Corcoran, spokesman for the National Association of Theatre Owners, though he called any timeline “very tentative.”

The timing will depend on guidance from health authorities, he said.

Among the challenges theaters face are making sure filmgoers feel comfortable gathering in groups and having a variety of appealing movies. Hollywood studios are unlikely to release big-budget films when they cannot mount a nationwide release.

Expected blockbusters such as Walt Disney Co’s (DIS.N) “Mulan” and “Wonder Woman 1984” from AT&T Inc’s (T.N) Warner Bros are currently scheduled for late July and August.

“There are two schools of thought,” Corcoran said. “People will be very tense and careful and nervous, or people will just be desperate to get out of the house. It’s going to probably be a mixture.”

During their first weeks back in business, theaters likely will show classic movies or films that were playing in March, when theaters went dark, Corcoran said.

That could mean reviving a beloved musical such as “Grease” or running a marathon of “Back to the Future” or “Harry Potter” movies, said Brock Bagby, executive vice



A man cycles past a shuttered movie theater in Times Square following the outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in the Manhattan borough of New York City, New York, U.S., March 17, 2020. (Reuters/Carlo Allegri)

president of Missouri-based B&B Theatres, which operates 400 screens in seven states.

Executives are brainstorming ways to draw audiences, such as staging a costume contest around a “Harry Potter” film or serving butterbeer, Potter’s favorite beverage, Bagby said. Not on the agenda are “sad or very heavy dramas,” he said.

“We want the movies we bring back to bring joy to people,” Bagby said.

Operators also are debating how visible to be with steps such as extra cleaning, “whether it makes people comfortable or more nervous,” Corcoran said. “There’s always a delicate

dance with any kind of precaution like that.”

Theaters owners likely will look at restaurants and bars for clues on how people are reacting. Safety measures may vary at different cinema locations depending on local guidance, he added.

Bagby said B&B’s locations will implement social distancing if authorities recommend it. In the weekend before theaters closed, the company cut auditorium capacity by 50% to leave room between seats and had “zero issues,” he said. Customers adhered to the practice and some showtimes sold out at half-full, he said.

During the shutdown, theater chains and independent operators have been trying to tap government assistance or other financing to stay afloat. Cinemark Holdings Inc (CNK.N), for example, said on Monday it had raised \$250 million through a sale of debt.

Getting a full slate of Hollywood movies back on the calendar depends not just on the United States. Studios will need receipts from around the globe to support their most expensive films, said Chris Aronson, president of film distribution at ViacomCBS Inc’s (VIACA.O) Paramount Pictures.

Paramount plans to release animated family film “The SpongeBob Movie: Sponge on the Run” on Aug. 7, a week later than its previous July 31 slot. The studio moved another summer flick, “Top Gun: Maverick”, to December.

In China, the world’s second-largest movie market, authorities re-opened theaters in March following an extended closure, but abruptly shut them two weeks later without explanation.

“If there is great uncertainty in major parts of the world,” Aronson said, “I think there are going to be issues opening major films.”

Andrea Bocelli’s Easter Sunday performance breaks YouTube record

LOS ANGELES (Variety) — Andrea Bocelli is officially YouTube’s newest superstar.

The Italian tenor’s live-streaming solo performance on this Easter Sunday, streamed on April 12 exclusively via YouTube from the Duomo in Milan, has gone into the record books as drawing the biggest audience for a classical live

stream in YouTube’s history.

Bocelli’s “Music For Hope — Live From Duomo di Milano” reached over 2.8 million peak concurrent viewers, according to YouTube. That also makes it one of the biggest musical live-stream performances of all time. (YouTube says the first weekend of 2019 Coachella was its biggest music live-

stream ever with about 82.9 million live views, but note that took place over three days and featured multiple artists.)

The 25-minute Bocelli video generated more than 28 million views worldwide in its first 24 hours, and as of Tuesday morning had topped 35 million views. Even prior to the stream beginning, more than 1 million

viewers were queued up in the waiting room.

In addition, over the past 48 hours, Bocelli’s Easter Sunday performance reached the No. 1 spot on YouTube’s trending charts in multiple countries, including the U.S., UK, Italy, Canada, Spain and throughout Latin America, including Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Colombia.