



Tehran has asked IAEA not to listen to spy agencies run by Iran's foes **3**



Medical services free of charge for coronavirus patients in Iran **9**



AFC does not recognize the new Acting Secretary General of FFIRI **11**



Number of e-book readers increasing during home quarantine **12**



See page 8

Why Iran expects tourism boom after coronavirus

© Mehr/ Amin Borenkhar

A combination photo compares Hafezieh, the mausoleum of the illustrious Persian poet Hafez, full of visitors in March 2019 (R), with the one taken in March 2020 being deserted over coronavirus fears.



ARTICLE
Mohammad Mehdi Tehrani
President of the Islamic Azad University

Will the US experience decline or reemerge?

The World War II ended after the United States' forces used mass-destruction weapons for the first time in the world history against two Asian cities which left nothing but the mass killing of a vast number of Japanese civilians. The US atomic bombardment of the Japanese cities was a new evil innovation in utilizing science and technology by individual countries to gain more power. The new world order was formed by the US over the globe in 1945.

The United States detonated two nuclear bombs over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, 1945, respectively.

A decade later, on October 4, 1957, the Americans who know themselves as the technological winner of the last world war were shocked by the USSR. The former Soviet Union launched Sputnik satellite successfully into space which pushed the US into a deep panic. The development divided the world into the Western and Eastern blocs.

The Soviet Union, officially known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), was a federal socialist state in Northern Eurasia that existed from 1922 to 1991.

The Soviet Union's Sputnik 1 was launched into an elliptical low Earth orbit from Baikonur, Kazakhstan, on October 4, 1957, making it the first successful artificial satellite and marking the start of the Space Race. The satellite travelled at about 29,000 kilometres per hour, taking 96.2 minutes to complete each orbit.

Since then, the world countries have realized that they could gain more power only through being a pioneer in science and technology.

It is worthy of mentioning that it was space technological supremacy, launching Sputnik satellite, which gave the USSR upper-hand in face of the US hegemony.

More than any other occurrence in the United States history, the mentioned Sputnik-related crisis caused the American people and policy-makers to realize the importance of providing governmental supports for scientific-technological efforts to be capable of maintaining the US' military, technological and scientific supremacy in countering other world nations. **→7**

All bodies unified to contain coronavirus: Rouhani

TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani said on Sunday that all bodies in Iran are in coordination and unified in their struggle to contain outbreak of the coronavirus.

"All the system's bodies are integrated and coordinated in fighting the coronavirus and there are no different views in this respect," he said at a session of the National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus.

"The situation we are currently facing and the issue of fighting the coronavirus, there is no difference of opinion between government agencies and the three branches (of government)," he added.

He noted, "The whole system is integrated."

Rouhani also said that unity in the society has strengthened.

"Coronavirus has had good effects despite all the troubles it has caused. One of its good effects is greater unity of the society, the government, the people, the forces and the top bodies of the country," he explained.

Rouhani announces decisions on time schedule of businesses

Rouhani went on to say that the country's provinces can start businesses, which includes medium and low-risk businesses, from April 11.

"But high-risk businesses are still banned until April 19, for which decision will be made later. So risky businesses like sports centers and activities that require a large population are still banned until further notice," he added.

He also said, "Two thirds of all government

employees will work in the office from Saturday... The decision does not contradict the 'stay at home' advice by the health authorities."

He went on to say that based on the current decision pupils and university students at bachelor level will follow their studies on line by April 18.

However, he noted that all must observe the protocols announced by the Ministry of Health.

'We have faith in youths' capabilities'

Presidential chief of staff Mahmoud Vaezi said in a post on his Instagram page, "We have faith in youths' capabilities and capacities."

He also said, "In the government of prudence and hope, we have made efforts to use the youths' capabilities and appoint them in managerial position." **→2**

Iran-EAEU trade hits \$1.4b in 5 months

TEHRAN — The value of trade between Iran and the members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) reached \$1.489 billion in the five-month period after the implementation of the preferential trade agreement on October 27, 2019, IRNA reported.

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

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

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

preferential imports stood at 2.38 million tons with a value of nearly \$750 million.

Iran's biggest export destination among the EAEU countries has been Russia which accounted for about 50 percent of the total trade with the region. Armenia and Kazakhstan occupied the second and third places with 24.6 percent and 16 percent shares, he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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Iran unveils electro-optical system for coronavirus detection

Iran unveiled on Sunday a high-precision electro-optical system which can be used for recording an accurate enough temperature to tell if someone is running a fever and may be infected with the coronavirus.

The system gives the user a picture of any localized heat spots on the person. On Sunday, the total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran reached 58,226, of whom 3,603 have died and 22,011 recovered.

South Pars gas output 'more than projected'

TEHRAN — All of the platforms of Iran's South Pars gas field are operating in full swing so that their total output has exceeded the figure projected by the Oil Ministry's approved plan, IRNA reported, quoting the operation and production manager of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC) which is in charge of the development of the field.

"Fortunately, since the beginning of

the previous year the output of these platforms [South Pars operating platforms] has exceeded 100 percent of the projected figure and we are in a very good condition regarding safe and sustainable gas production," Alireza Ebadi said.

He noted that the POGC health committee is holding daily meetings to monitor the health and safety of the company's workforce, **→4**

Afghan immigrants in "Golshahr" struggle to halt coronavirus pandemic

By Samaneh Aboutaleb

TEHRAN — The co-producer of "Golshahr", Mojtaba Ehsani, has said that the documentary portrays the struggles put up by a group of Afghan immigrants in the Golshahr neighborhood in the northeastern Iranian city of Mashhad to halt the coronavirus pandemic.

The group has been organized by Seyyed Asadollah Sa'adati, a member

of Fatemiyoun, an Afghan brigade that fought against Daesh.

They produce face masks and other materials necessary for preventing the spread of coronavirus.

"The idea of producing the documentary came in our minds when we heard of a group of Afghan immigrants in Mashhad barred from entering their country on fears over coronavirus," Ehsani told the Tehran Times on Sunday. **→12**

9 people, 3 Indian soldiers killed in Kashmir fighting

By staff & agencies

Nine people and three Indian soldiers were killed in a pair of gunbattles in disputed Kashmir, an Indian army official said Sunday.

Indian soldiers killed five suspected militants along the highly militarized de facto front line in Keran sector on Sunday as an armed group of militants infiltrated from the Pakistani side of Kashmir into

the Indian-controlled part, said Col. Rajesh Kalia, an Indian army spokesman, AP reported.

Kalia said three soldiers were also killed. He did not specify the number of injured, saying only that some others who were injured were undergoing treatment.

There was no independent confirmation of the incident. **→10**



PERSPECTIVE
Farnak Bakhtiari
Tehran Times journalist

COVID-19 crisis: washing hands for 20 seconds, not wasting water for 20 seconds

These days, it is strictly recommended to wash our hands for 20 seconds as a great step to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus, but unfortunately many leave the tap running at the same time. This issue poses the greatest threat to the environment.

Worldwide, coronavirus has so far infected more than 1.2 million people and killed at least 66,000. In Iran, deaths surged to 3,603, with over 58,226 infections till Sunday.

The global outbreak of coronavirus pandemic has also triggered the demand for detergents, face masks, disposable gloves, which are negligently tossed on the streets after being used.

That means more and more waste ends up in landfills, bringing the environment a huge burden.

Regardless of the dire threats, hazardous waste can cause both for the environment and people, excessive water consumption today can become the biggest threat to the environment and natural resources.

Water consumption rises as coronavirus spreads

Alireza Tabatabaei, director of water operation supervision of Water and Wastewater Company, said: "According to the assessment made last week, water consumption increased in the metropolitan areas of Tehran by 26 percent, Esfahan 25 percent, Shiraz 22 percent, Tabriz 23 percent and Mashhad seven percent, compared to the same period last year.

Last week, 212 million cubic meters of water was consumed, compared to 189 million cubic meters in the same period last year, he lamented.

Explaining that nearly all of the provinces face serious water shortages, distinguished environmentalist Mohammad Darvish clarified that the entry of detergents and disinfectants into water sources and the release of plastic materials such as masks and gloves in nature adds insult to the injury. **→9**

Westerners' behavior reveals their anti-human approach: Iran's human rights body

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iran's High Council for Human Rights issued a statement on Sunday saying that the Westerners' behavior during history reveals their anti-human approach.

"The Western governments have killing of millions of innocent people in their record. They have always made efforts to portray themselves as defenders of human rights through media and also introduce independent countries as violators of human rights," the statement said.

The Westerners' behavior shows their identity as "owners of wealth and power" which has no regard for human and human rights, it added.

Elsewhere, it is said in the statement that the coronavirus outbreak has revealed the anti-human image of the Western governments, especially the United States.

"It proved the capitalists who rule over the liberal systems place no value to even their own citizens' rights," it added.

Elsewhere in the statement, the human rights council said that Iran is ready to transfer its experiences in defending human rights and human dignity.

■ **'Washington responsible for health of Iranians in captivity'**

The council also said that Washington is responsible for health of the Iranians held in U.S. prisons.

The statement urged the international bodies, especially the United Nations and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, to prevent any threat against the Iranian inmates in the U.S.

Palestine's Haniyeh expresses solidarity with Iranians in coronavirus fight

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Ismail Haniyeh, the head of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas)'s Political Bureau, has expressed solidarity with the Iranian people in fighting the coronavirus pandemic.



In a phone conversation with Ali Akbar Velayati, the top adviser to the Leader for international affairs on Sunday, Haniyeh wished success for the Iranians in the struggle to contain the deadly coronavirus.

Velayati hoped the coronavirus would be eradicated soon.

Also, in a phone call with Mohammad Javad Zarif on March 21, Haniyeh had announced the Palestinian nation's solidarity with Iran in their campaign to contain the coronavirus.

He also condemned the United States' anti-Iran sanctions

and called for lifting them.

As of Sunday, April 5, 58,226 Iranians have tested positive for the coronavirus and 3,603 lost their lives.

Assassination of Gen. Soleimani was Daesh wish: ambassador

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Parviz Esmaeili, the Iranians ambassador to Croatia, has said that U.S. President Donald Trump fulfilled what Daesh had been wishing by ordering the assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

In an interview with Vecernji list newspaper, the ambassador said that assassination of Soleimani was a "criminal" and "cowardly" act, IRNA reported on Sunday.



No retaliatory action will be an appropriate response to the U.S. terrorist action, he added.

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

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

terrorist attack.

Soleimani was recognized internationally as a legendary commander in the war against terrorist groups, especially Daesh (ISIS).

■ **'U.S. is responsible for spread of coronavirus in Iran'**

Ambassador Esmaeili also said that the U.S. is responsible for spread of the coronavirus in Iran and death of people.

He said that the U.S. sanctions have limited Iran's access to medicine and medical equipment.

The total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran has reached 58,226, of whom 3,603 have died and 22,011 recovered.

All bodies unified to contain coronavirus: Rouhani

1 → ■ **'Two million members of Basij are fighting coronavirus'**

Brigadier General Gholamreza Soleimani, the commander of the Basij Organization, said on Sunday that two million members of the Basij are active in fighting the coronavirus.

The total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran has reached 58,226, of whom 3,603 have died and 22,011 recovered.

Meanwhile, 2,483 new patients have been identified over the past 24 hours, Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Sunday.

He added that 151 more people have died during the same period of time, ISNA reported.

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

Iran ridicules Pompeo, says U.S. flirting with butchers

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi on Saturday ridiculed U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for claiming that Iranian diplomats are "agents of terror", saying the history of the U.S. is riddled with engineering coups, "flirting with butchers" and aiding and abetting with terrorists.

Mousavi made the comments after Pompeo, whom Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has described as "secretary of hate", had accused Iranian diplomats of being involved in an alleged "assassination" in Turkey last November. Pompeo had also claimed that Iranian diplomats "have conducted multiple assassinations and bomb plots in Europe over the past decade."

"Undisputed fact: US 'diplomats' have long been in the business of coups, arming terrorists, fueling sectarian violence, supporting narcotics cartels, bullying governments & companies, spying on even US



allies, flirting with dictators, butchers and terrorists, etc....," Mousavi tweeted.

However, the Foreign Ministry spokesman added, Pompeo - a former spy chief

It is a good opportunity to boost multilateralism: ex-diplomat

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Mohsen Pakaeen, the former Iranian ambassador to Azerbaijan, has said that the coronavirus pandemic is a good opportunity to boost multilateralism.

"The current situation provides a good opportunity for the countries which oppose the United States' policies, which are against the "international law and principles", to get united against this country's unilateralism and boost multilateralism through collective action," he told ISNA in an interview published on Sunday.

He said that the U.S. refuses to remove anti-Iran sanctions in the current situation because of its animosity towards the Islamic Revolution and the Iranians.

Despite international calls, the Trump administration is refusing to lift or at least suspend illegal sanctions against Iran, especially as the country is one of the countries hit hardest by the deadly coronavirus.

As of Sunday, April 5, the COVID-19 has infected over 58,000 Iranians and killed around 3,600.

"Right to enjoy health is a fundamental international right and no country should violate it," the former ambassador noted.

Iran's Ambassador to Russia, Kazem Jalali, said on Friday that the U.S. sanctions will lead to a "humanitarian catastrophe" in the world.

In a tweet in Russian language, Jalali added that today, the global community stood on one side and the U.S. on the other, according to IRNA.

U.S. foreign policy has even mocked role of the United Nations in solving global problems, Iran's top diplomat to Russia added.

In a tweet on March 29, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif urged the international community to stop supporting U.S. "war crimes" against Iran, urging the world to "stop obeying immoral and illegal sanctions" against Iranians.

He said that the U.S. "economic terrorism" on Iran has been expanding to the new level of "medical terrorism" which is not even permissible on the battlefield.

"This even 'exceeds what would be permissible on the battlefield,'" he noted.

The Trump administration has slapped the harshest ever sanctions in history against Iran. It has introduced a total ban on Iran's oil export with the aim of strangulating the Iranian economy.

The Academy of Medical Sciences of Iran has written to the UN to complain about the world's body failure to push for the lifting of cruel U.S. sanctions at a critical time when Iran is fighting a deadly coronavirus pandemic, Press TV reported on Thursday.

In the letter addressed to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, the academy's President Alireza Marandi criticized the UN and its affiliated organizations for taking "no effective measures" to ease the restrictive U.S. measures, which are hampering Iran's fight against the fast-spreading disease.

"Following correspondence about the U.S. government's illegal sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran and its



direct impact on the health of the Iranian people, unfortunately, so far, the United Nations and other relevant organizations including the World Health Organization, which claim to defend the rights of humanity, have taken no effective measures to lift the cruel sanctions against our dear children, women, men and patients," Marandi wrote.

Marandi, a former health minister, also lashed out at the Donald Trump administration for turning a deaf ear to international calls demanding sanctions relief and instead imposing even more anti-Iran sanctions.

Without brutal sanctions COVID19- can be managed better, vice president says

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — If the obstacles created by the "brutal" U.S. sanctions are removed, Iran can control the spread of coronavirus in a better way, Iran's Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri said on Saturday.

"We are in the midst of brutal U.S. sanctions," Jahangiri made the remarks in a meeting with managers and officials of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts. Addressing U.S. President Donald Trump, he said, "If you remove the obstacles, we will be able to better fight the coronavirus and manage this situation."

Various officials in the U.S. have criticized Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran.

Senator Bernie Sanders in his tweet on March 31 said that U.S. sanctions are obstructing medicine and aid from getting in, while coronavirus has caused suffering and death to Iranians.

In letter issued on Friday, about 150 Iranian academicians urged United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres to help end the illegal sanctions on Iran.

"As the signers of this declaration, we request Your Excellency as the UN's Secretary-General, and its subordi-



nate organizations, and also the whole world's intellectual community, civil society, international institutions, and the all noble people to help the Iranian state and nation in removing sanctions in order for them to be able to confront the disease outbreak," part of the letter said.

Worldwide, the total number of infections recorded

Army inaugurates convalescent center for coronavirus patients

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Army inaugurated a 120-bed convalescent center for recovery of patients who had contracted COVID-19 disease in the central province of Kerman, a military source said on Saturday.

Second Brigadier General Mehdi Memarbashi, the commander of Army's southeastern base in Kerman, said that his forces have thus far equipped two convalescent centers in the

provinces of Kerman and Sistan-Baluchestan with over 465 beds for emergency cases amid the coronavirus outbreak.

He added that the new center enjoys 120 beds and required medical equipment.

Memarbashi went on to say that his forces are to do their best to mitigate the outbreak within the framework of instructions drafted by the Health Ministry.

Earlier this month, the Army inaugurated

a 2,000-bed hospital in Tehran.

Habibollah Sayyari, the commander of the Army's bio-defense unit, said at the time that the goal of setting up the complex was to demonstrate the capabilities of the Army and help the health sector to reduce the length of hospitalization and rehabilitation process for coronavirus patients.

The complex was set up in the permanent ground of the Tehran International Exhibi-

tions. It has the capacity to accommodate 1000 more beds.

In early March, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei assigned the Armed Forces to work on the necessary methods to prevent a further spread of coronavirus, in addition to the other activities such as treatment of patients and establishment of medical centers like field hospitals and convalescent homes.

Deputy commander: Over 600,000 Basij forces fighting in anti-coronavirus battle in Iran

TEHRAN (FNA) — Deputy Commander of Iran's Basij (Volunteer Force) Brigadier General Mohammad Hossein Sepehr announced that more than 600,000 of his forces are at present actively helping the medical bodies in efforts to prevent coronavirus infection and treat patients.

"Today, over 600,000 Basij forces are rendering service to support different bodies in confronting coronavirus," General Sepehr said on Saturday.

He underlined Iran's success in controlling growing epidemic of coronavirus, and said 70mln of Iranian people have been screened for infection to COVID-19 virus with the help of 50,000 specialized Basij groups across the country.

Spokesman of Iran's Health Ministry Kianoush Jahanpour announced on Friday that 2,715 new coronavirus cases have been identified in the country, totaling the number of the infected to 53,183.

He expressed happiness that so far 17,935 patients have recovered and been discharged from hospital, noting that unfortunately 134 coronavirus patients have succumbed to

the disease during the past 24 hours, increasing the death toll to 3,294.

The coronavirus COVID-19 is affecting approximately all countries and territories around the world. The virus was first reported in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year. It has so far killed more than 59,000 people and infected over 1.1 million others globally.

The Iranian foreign ministry declared that despite Washington's claims of cooperation to transfer drugs to Iran via the new Swiss-launched payment mechanism, the U.S. is troubling the process amid the coronavirus outbreak in the country.

Although U.S. claims that medicines and medical equipment are not under sanctions, they have practically blocked the transfer of Iran's financial resources in other countries into the Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement (SHTA), Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Seyed Abbas Mousavi said.

As the death toll from the virus surges, Iran intensifies its preventive safety measures. Closures of schools and univer-

sities have been extended until mid April.

The government also imposed travel restrictions, especially on Iran's North, which is among the red zones. The country has also adopted strict digital health control procedures at airports to spot possible infections.

Health Minister Saeed Namaki announced last month that a new national mobilization plan would be implemented across the country to fight against the coronavirus epidemic and more effectively treat patients.

Namaki said that the plan will include all the 17,000 health centers and the 9,000 medical and clinical centers in all cities, suburban areas and villages.

He added that the plan will include home quarantine, noting that infected people will receive the necessary medicines and advice, but they are asked to stay at home.

Namaki said that people with a more serious condition will stay at the hospitals, adding that the public places will be disinfected, the entries of infected towns and cities will be controlled to diagnose and quarantine the infected cases.

The world needs to cooperate against the coronavirus—so lift sanctions on Iran: Foreign Policy

Fixing the nuclear deal could be a dress rehearsal for climate change

POLITICAL **d e s k** At the start of 2020 much of the world anxiously watched as open confrontation between the United States and Iran quickly escalated with the assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani. World War III memes began trending as we awaited Iran's response.

Anti-war voices were quick to note that our current hostilities, though not entirely new, reached this tipping point after President Trump's unilateral decision to quit the Iran nuclear deal and reimpose brutal sanctions on Iran, despite Iran's continued compliance with the landmark deal. No one anticipated at the time that the world would face a more imminent and deadly threat with the coronavirus, which forces us to either come together as an international community against a common foe, or divided, risk millions of lives.

While the danger of the virus transcends borders, again we see familiar politicking play out as the crisis unfolds. Nations continue to accuse each other of hiding information and pointing fingers to lay blame. With the first outbreak originating in China, some U.S. officials use threatening language and the President repeats the label "Chinese Virus" to vilify the Chinese state. In the midst of this pandemic, the issue of U.S.-Iran relations is also a central debate.

Iran is one of the hardest-hit nations in the world combatting the coronavirus. Iran's capacity to fight the virus is deeply impaired by an economy already devastated by sanctions, and sanctions that continue to impede its ability to acquire needed medical supplies.

While proponents of sanctions continue to claim that humanitarian aid is exempt from sanctions, the evidence on the ground shows

The JCPOA is a model for compromise and working together. The path for cooperation is always open to us, and at this precarious moment, our lives are hanging in the balance.



This virus is not confined to China or Iran, or Europe or the United States. It knows no borders, no religion, no gender, and no politics. In order to combat, it requires our mutual cooperation that transcends all these divisions.

otherwise. In fact, just a few weeks ago the U.S. Treasury eased slightly the restrictions on the Central Bank of Iran to facilitate humanitarian transactions. This move by the Treasury is an implicit admission that the U.S. sanctions regime is hindering these purchases.

Moreover, advocates of sanctions have achieved their objective of crippling Iran's economy, which is another factor that thwarts Iran's ability to undertake the massive challenges posed by the pandemic.

We need look no further than U.S. storefronts with empty shelves, or Americans' panic over a coming economic meltdown, to understand that access to medicines alone does not address the numerous complications of this crisis.

Now, imagine if our concerns were not about an impending economic catastrophe, but the ruin that we currently find our-

selves in. On top of that, imagine that our economy had no hope of recovery because the richest and most powerful country in the world was intent on maintaining its stranglehold of our economy as it watched our citizens literally suffocate. This is the state of Iran.

Despite growing calls from the international community and the United Nations for the United States to lift sanctions on Iran on humanitarian grounds, at least temporarily due to the pandemic, the administration has thus far refused and even taken measures to increase sanctions just last week.

At the same time last week, researchers at Iran's Sharif University estimated that if current conditions hold, up to 3.5 million Iranians could die. All this while U.S. sanctions have already made life miserable for ordinary Iranians, under the guise of its "maximum pressure" campaign.

Since the U.S. abrogated the nuclear deal, Iran has slowly reduced its compliance with the deal and now has more stockpiles of uranium and centrifuges spinning. Regional instability has increased, along with hostilities that brought us to the brink of an unwanted and needless war just a few months ago, though it may feel like an eternity.

By all measures, the only objectives this administration's Iran policy has achieved is to sow further distrust of the U.S. in the Iranian psyche, and disproportionately hurt innocent Iranian people.

The coronavirus crisis presents the perfect opportunity for the U.S. to resolve its ongoing conflict with Iran. President Trump can heed the calls to lift sanctions for humanitarian purposes, forcing Iran to return to full compliance with the still extant Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). This can open the door to further negotiations, provide a much-needed respite to hostilities, and save possibly millions of innocent human lives.

Whatever our enmities, or rightful grievances, the entire world is witnessing a historic moment. This virus is not confined to China or Iran, or Europe or the United States. It knows no borders, no religion, no gender, and no politics. In order to combat, it requires our mutual cooperation that transcends all these divisions.

The coronavirus pandemic is in many ways a dress rehearsal for climate change. These challenges can only be solved through global efforts and the collaboration of states. In its own right, the JCPOA is a model for compromise and working together. The path for cooperation is always open to us, and at this precarious moment, our lives are hanging in the balance.

While proponents of sanctions continue to claim that humanitarian aid is exempt from sanctions, the evidence on the ground shows otherwise.

Ambassador lists China's humanitarian aid to Iran

POLITICAL **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Ambassador to China Mohammad Keshavarz-Zadeh has announced the list of China's humanitarian aid to Iran amid the battle against the coronavirus outbreak.

Keshavarz-Zadeh made the announcement via Twitter on Saturday evening.

He said two flights will ship the Chinese aid from Beijing to Iran.

He added that Chinese people and government's contributions have so far been transferred by 28 flights from Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

The Iranian diplomat said the Chinese aid includes over 10 million face-mask, 500,000 coronavirus test kits, 300,000 medical and isolation gowns, 2,200,000 pairs of gloves, 350 ventilators, 500 prefabricated hospital rooms, drugs and hospital equipment.

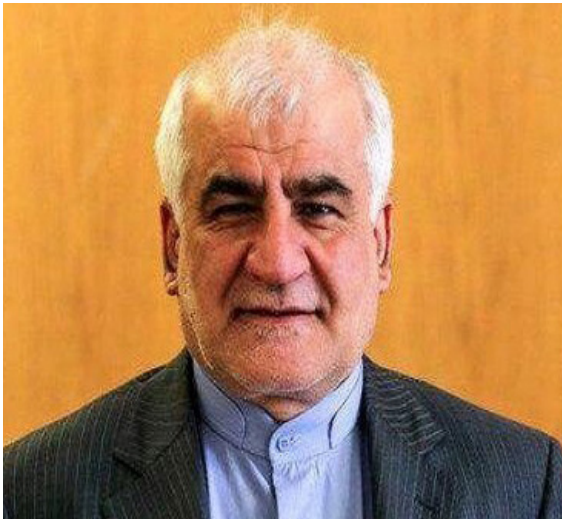
Keshavarz-Zadeh added that some flights will also carry humanitarian aid of Chinese business magnate Jack Ma to Tehran.

In another tweet earlier on Saturday, the ambassador said overcoming the coronavirus pandemic requires global cooperation.

Keshavarz-Zadeh said "Saturday" has been declared a day of mourning across China to remember victims of coronavirus.

He pointed out that more than one million people in the world are suffering from coronavirus today.

The Iranian envoy also extended his condolences to the



families of the victims of the coronavirus, especially the Iranian people.

Earlier on Saturday, people across China stopped for three minutes to pay tribute to those who have died in the country's coronavirus outbreak.

In Wuhan, where the outbreak began, all traffic lights in urban areas were turned red for three minutes. The city

of 11 million was the hardest hit by the outbreak, recording 2,567 fatalities. This accounts for more than three-quarters of China's coronavirus deaths.

The ambassador warned that the world should be vigilant against any xenophobic, racist or intolerant propaganda.

"It's absolutely wrong and inappropriate to label the novel coronavirus as the 'China Virus' or 'Wuhan Virus'," he told China.org.cn, referring to the practice of tying the virus to China by U.S. President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo earlier in March.

The ambassador said this kind of propaganda is not a new type of ignorance and racism, however, such language from the top leadership of a major power is unprecedented in the 21st century.

Trump's language has also drawn domestic criticism. "It's certainly not the way the leadership of the United States, the secretary of state, and the president of the United States, ought to be behaving in the best of times - but certainly not in a crisis," The Hill quoted former White House national security adviser Susan Rice as saying on Tuesday.

In the short term, Keshavarz Zadeh called on all countries and the United Nations to make effective arrangement to lead global efforts in sharing data about the COVID-19, coordinating international research, providing and encouraging greater funding of the World Health Organization, and humanitarian assistance.

Iran facing food, medicine sanctions for years, says ex-MP

POLITICAL **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A former lawmaker says despite the United States' rhetoric, Iran has been facing food and medicine sanctions for years.

"Coronavirus exposed the [U.S.] human rights claims as mere political play rather than a civilizational reality," ISNA on Sunday quoted Iraj Nadimi as saying.

Nadimi said the current circumstances showed to the world that the U.S. is preventing Iranians from access to healthcare equipment.

"Naturally, the sanctions shouldn't have targeted medicine and food, but in spite of the United States' rhetoric, Iran has not been able to have transparent access to global medicine and healthcare [equipment] due to financial and banking problems," he stated.

As of Sunday, 58,226 Iranians had tested positive for the coronavirus and 3,603 had lost their lives due to the deadly virus.

The United States has refused to lift illegal sanctions on Iran and even tightened them several times in recent weeks, hampering Iran's efforts to contain the virus as Washington restricts Tehran's access to life-saving medications and medical equipment.

In a letter to Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) Tedros Adhanom

Ghebreyesus on Friday, Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN office in Geneva Esmail Baqaei Hamaneh said medical sanctions by the United States government against the Islamic Republic amount to an "unprecedented threat" to global public health.

According to Press TV, Baqaei Hamaneh said the imposition of the cruel and illegal sanctions on Iran, which has resulted in the ordinary people being denied access to medicine and medical equipment and services, clearly exemplifies a "crime against humanity".

He added that the sanctions have blocked Iran's banking interaction with other countries in order to buy commodities required in the fight against the coronavirus and warned that the illegal restrictions are a serious threat to Tehran's efforts to battle and contain the virus.

Last month, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei described the U.S. as "the evil enemy of the Iranian nation," saying the U.S. is accused of producing the virus.

"I do not know how true this accusation is, but when such an accusation is made, which wise person will ask for your help?" he asked.

Ayatollah Khamenei also ordered Iran's military chief to establish a "health and treat-



ment base" to prevent further spread of the virus.

"Since there is some evidence that this incident might be a 'biological attack', this measure could be also some form of biological defense drill, which would add to national power and strength [of the country]," he said.

Last week, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said U.S. sanctions have made it "impossible" for Iranians to have access to essential drugs during the COVID-19 pandemic, warning that the bans

were leading to a "humanitarian catastrophe".

"The illegal blockade of Iran's financial resources by the sweeping U.S. sanctions makes access to drugs and medical equipment impossible," Zarif wrote in an op-ed titled "Fight the Virus, Not Us" published in the Russian business newspaper Kommersant.

"This is leading to a humanitarian catastrophe," the top diplomat warned, noting that Washington's campaign of 'maximum pressure' on Tehran undermines the country's efforts in treating COVID-19 patients and slowing down the spread of the deadly virus.

Zarif stressed that the threat of U.S. sanctions forces banks to avoid dealing with Iran and prompts European medical companies to refuse to sell vital equipment to Tehran.

"The world community must come to its senses and help Iran against economic, medical and drug terrorism," Zarif wrote.

In his op-ed, Zarif argued that Tehran has a "strong" healthcare system, but severe sanctions by Washington are draining its finances. "The American policy of maximum pressure hampers Iranian exports, while Iran has fewer and fewer sources of investment."

Jannati wishes Larijani quick recovery from coronavirus

POLITICAL **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Chief of the Guardian Council Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati has spoken on the phone with Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani, wishing him quick recovery from the coronavirus.



In a separate phone call, Guardian Council spokesman Abbasali Kadkhodaei also spoke with Larijani, who has been in quarantine since he was diagnosed with the disease, Mehr reported.

The public relations department of the Majlis announced on Thursday that the Majlis speaker had tested positive for the coronavirus.

"Following certain symptoms, he was tested for the coronavirus and since the test was positive, he is now in quarantine and under treatment," it said in a statement.

Also in a message to Larijani, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Gabriela Cuevas Barron has said that the coronavirus pandemic will be defeated through collective efforts.

Speakers of the People's Council of Syria and State Duma also sent separate messages to Larijani, wishing him quick recovery.

Two tons of opium seized in Sistan-Baluchestan

POLITICAL **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iran's police forces in the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan have seized over 2,000 kilograms of opium in a single operation, the provincial police chief said.

Mohamamd Ghanbari said his forces confiscated the narcotics on Friday night when traffickers were carrying the big shipment to the city of Saravan, according to Tasnim.

Ghanbari said the drug traffickers in two pick-up trucks began to shoot at the police forces on a road linking Esfandak to Saravan and began to escape with maximum speed, but the police forces forced them to stop the vehicles by shooting back at them.

He said the traffickers left the drug-laden pick-up trucks and fled to the mountains, but the police forces captured two of them and found 2,034 kilograms of narcotics, including opium and hashish, in the two vehicles.

Police and security forces have been quite successful in ensuring security in the province despite its long borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan, harsh weather and vast desert areas.

Iran, which has a 900-kilometer common border with Afghanistan, has been used as the main conduit for smuggling Afghan drugs to narcotics kingpins in Europe.

Despite high economic and human costs, the Islamic Republic has been actively fighting drug-trafficking over the past decades.

The country has spent more than \$700 million on sealing its borders to prevent the transit of narcotics.

The war on drug trade originating from Afghanistan has claimed the lives of nearly 4,000 Iranian police officers over the past four decades.

Salehi: Tehran has asked IAEA not to listen to spy agencies run by Iran's foes

POLITICAL **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — It is necessary that the International Atomic Energy Agency not to listen to reports presented by spy agencies of countries hostile to Iran, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has said.



"The Agency should not be a complementary instrument for spy services of the countries and endorse the espionage acts which violate other countries' sovereign rights as well as laws ruling international relations," Salehi said in an interview with the Persian-language Etamad newspaper published on Sunday.

Last month the IAEA repeated claims by certain countries that it had identified three locations in Iran where the country possibly stored undeclared nuclear material or undertook nuclear-related activities without declaring it to international observers, Fars reported.

Following the claims, IAEA chief Rafael Grossi demanded Iran's "clarifications" over the so-called undeclared sites.

Salehi expressed surprise that the claims by Israel and certain countries against Iran have received attention from the UN body after IAEA chief Yukiya Amano died in office.

The UN nuclear watchdog has acknowledged that Iran is subject to the most intrusive inspections by the international body.

AEOI spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi also said that the UN nuclear watchdog had raised demands from Iran which did not have any legal basis. Kamalvandi said Tehran had strong reasons not to respond to them.

Tehran has "strong reasons" not to respond to "unprincipled questions and demands" by the IAEA, Kamalvandi said in an interview with national TV.

He added that Iran has offered the most detailed reports to the agency, noting that no country in the world has had this level of cooperation with the IAEA.

"Questions and accesses demanded by the International Atomic Energy Agency must have a legal basis," Kamalvandi insisted.

Number of real estate deals falls 70% in a month

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** —The number of real estate deals in Iran has dropped 70 percent in the past Iranian calendar month of Esfand (ended on March 19) which is also the last month of the Iranian calendar year, ILNA reported quoting the vice chairman of Iranian Real Estate Agencies.

Referring to the coronavirus outbreak affecting the housing sector, Hesam Oqbaei said 70 percent is the highest drop this sector has experienced over the past three years.

In South Korea, small businesses get desperate

With South Korea having apparently “flattened its curve” — i.e. lowered the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases to the point where its medical system can operate without being overwhelmed — South Korean President Moon Jae-in, the National Assembly and local governments have been rolling out a range of measures to revive the economy.



President Moon Jae-in has announced emergency aid packages to keep the economy afloat but some businesses are still waiting for the benefit. Photo: AFP

Last month, Moon announced emergency aid packages to keep the economy afloat, setting up a fund of 100 trillion won (\$81 billion) to assist businesses. The National Assembly has also passed an emergency budget of over 11 trillion won, and is expected to pass another imminently.

Moons has also announced that 70% of Koreans will be eligible for government cash grants, and local governments are offering residents “disaster basic income.” Gyeonggi Province, the province surrounding Seoul, has announced that it will provide 100,000 won (\$80.87) to all residents in the province from April 9.

However, bringing an economy that has been firing on only one cylinder for two months back to life is no easy matter. Three self-employed businesspersons told Asia Times that they are in desperate need of aid — but no help is reaching them yet.

■ The tourism operator
In recent years, a common sight in the streets around Seoul’s flagship tourism icon, the restored medieval palace of Gyeongbokgung, are the droves of domestic and foreign youths embarking upon selfie odysseys while attired in faux traditional attire.

Not this year. Amid the Covid-19 disaster, travel and tourism are among the hardest hit sectors

Oh Hyo-eun, manages a faux-traditional Korean clothing rental firm in the neighborhood. Things are dire.

“Revenues have decreased by 80% this month and I can’t see foreign tourists, who are the main customers, walking the streets,” Oh said. On average, just 10 locals per day have dropping by her shop since mid-February: In the past, she said, she could not count the number of visitors

Like every small employer, Oh is desperate for support from the government.

“There are standing charges such as real-estate rental costs, gas prices, and so on,” she said. “We can pay our employees’ salary, but I am not sure all the financial issues I am handling can be solved by the government’s economic measures.”

And things are going to get worse before they get better. As of April 1, South Korea decreed that all incoming travelers must undergo a 14-day quarantine period. With the virus rampaging across the globe and killing tens of thousands, when the government will lift that measure is anyone’s guess.

■ The farmer
After suspending the spring semester, the Ministry of Education has announced that every school will start online classes, starting from 12th grade and 9th grade students, on April 9. When some teachers and parents may breathe a sigh of relief, those who rely on traditional offline schools face disaster.

Chae Kyung-il is one of them. A farmer in South Jeolla Province, at the southern end of the country, he has been raising crops — maqui berries, blueberries and various vegetables — for 14 years. He distributes his produce himself, with his main customers being school cafeterias.

“My revenue has decreased drastically and I have been living from hand-to-mouth for about a month,” Chae said.

His produce — which used to go to schools, adorned with an eco-friendly label — is now sitting in piles on his farm.

“I have to harvest crops and sell them during the season but if I don’t sell them within 15-20 days after harvesting, the value will fall and I won’t be able to sell them.”

With schools out of play indefinitely, Chae needs another distribution channel — and he needs it fast. Other farmers sell via the Internet, but for Chae, who is used to distributing in person, the learning curve is steep.

“How can I use social media for advertising and sales of products when I don’t even know how to use basic social media services?” he said. “It’s impossible to create a platform by myself.”

Chae wants local government agencies to train him in how to use YouTube and other social media platforms as a sales channel. Instead, local authorities are providing courses in basic computing and Excel spreadsheets. These kind of courses are outdated, Chae and other farmers say, so he is currently learning how to use social media from family members.

■ The restaurateur
Though South Korea has not instituted national or even local lockdowns, social distancing guidelines have been issued. As a result, many people are staying home, which is particularly damaging to the restaurant trade.

Lim Soo-jong, the owner of a dumpling restaurant in Daegu, the southeastern city that is South Korea’s epicenter for Covid-19, has seen his customer numbers plummet.

“We earned only 30% of normal revenues last month,” he said. March was the peak month for the novel coronavirus in the country, but even though Daegu may be past the worst of the outbreak, diners remain cautious and numbers are not returning to the level that Lim would like. “I think just 50% have come,” Lim said.

Lim’s restaurant is more than a business: it’s a family heirloom. “I have been running this restaurant for 30 years after my father handed it over to me,” he said.

He says he is determined to stay in the business. “I had to overcome worse situations a long time ago, so I can wait till the virus burns out,” he said.

What was worse than the novel coronavirus outbreak? In 2004, a number of dumpling suppliers were charged with using rotten pickled radish as fillings for dumplings. The scandal proved devastating for dumpling restaurants.

“I cannot say how much I suffered from that scandal, but you can imagine how hard we are suffering right when I mention that incident.”

(source: Asia Times)

South Pars gas output ‘more than projected’

! → adding that “periodical meetings are also held for maintaining output and solving the problems regarding the platforms sustainable production.”

“All employees are monitored daily and the necessary actions are performed with great sensitivity and in a concise manner,” he stressed.

The last offshore platform of Iran’s South Pars gas field (shared with Qatar in the Persian Gulf) was installed on its

designated spot in early March.

As one of the world’s biggest gas reserves, South Pars gas field 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.

South Pars is divided into 24 standard phases of development in the first stage. All of the phases except for the phase 11 are fully operational at the moment.

Daily gasoline consumption falls 50m liters in Norouz holidays



ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Average daily gasoline consumption in Iran fell to 44 million liters during the Iranian New Year (Norouz) holidays (March 20-April 3) following the travel restrictions applied amid the COVID-19 outbreak, IRIB reported.

According to Keramat Veiskarami, the managing director of the National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOPDC), in the mentioned 15-day period the country’s gasoline consumption decreased by nearly 50 million liters compared to the figure for the previous year’s same period.

Iranians consumed 94 million liters of gasoline on average during the previous year’s Norouz holidays, Veiskarami said. “Fortunately, the significant decrease in gasoline consumption is an indication of the people’s conformance to the general recommendations of the Coronavirus Headquarters regarding the traffic bans during Norouz [holidays] this year, and it is hoped that this trend will continue in the coming days,” the official noted.

NIOPDC had previously announced the

country’s average gasoline consumption for the previous Iranian calendar month of Esfand (February 20-March 19) to be 68 million liters, while the figure fell to 44.9 million liters in the first week of the holidays.

Iranian government has imposed an intercity travel ban in late March to prevent further spread of the coronavirus during the New Year holidays.

Gasoline consumption in Iran has already been following a downward trend since the implementation of a rationing plan by the government.

In mid-November 2019, the Iranian government started rationing of subsidized gasoline and increased fuel prices as part of a plan to reduce the energy subsidies to use the revenue for supporting underprivileged families.

Later that month, deputy finance and economic affairs minister said the fuel rationing plan would make the country able to export 3.65 billion liters of gasoline every year and earn about 14 trillion rials (about \$3.3 billion) from the exports.

Iranian major automakers manufacture over 863,000 vehicles in a year



ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Three major Iranian carmakers, namely Iran Khodro Company (IKCO), SAIPA Group and Pars Khodro, manufactured 863,263 vehicles during the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), IRNA reported citing the data released by Codal website.

According to the data, during the previous year, IKCO manufactured 393,812 vehicles, of which 35,953 were produced in the last Iranian calendar month of Esfand (February 20-March 19).

Production by SAIPA stood at 363,379, of which 23,696 vehicles were manufactured during the last month.

Pars Khodro manufactured 106,072 cars during the past year. Production in Esfand reached 9,300 vehicles.

Iran has been following a program for supporting domestic manufacturing of auto parts since due to the U.S. sanctions the country’s automakers have been facing some problems in supplying their needed parts and equipment.

Industry, Mining and Trade Minister

Reza Rahmani has said that the policy of domestic manufacturing of auto parts should be seriously followed up and in this due capable manufacturers should be supported.

In January, Iranian Auto Parts Makers Association’s Secretary Maziar Beyglou announced that Iran has achieved 80 percent self-sufficiency in manufacturing of auto parts.

The official expressed hope that self-reliance in this sector reaches 90 percent through domestic production of required raw materials.

Domestic parts manufacturers are able to play a key role in creating a boom in the country’s manufacturing and employment sectors, in addition to playing their leading role as the auto industry’s intermediates, Beyglou said.

Mentioning the industry ministry’s strategies for promoting domestic production, the official said: “Following the current policies, we will see the production of a number of new vehicles from domestic automakers in the coming years.”

How the coronavirus job cuts played out by sector and demographics

The job losses suffered in March as the U.S. economy shut down in the face of the novel coronavirus pandemic were widespread but still were disproportionately felt in a handful of employment sectors and by women, the young and the less educated.

In all, 701,000 jobs were reported lost last month, the Labor Department said on Friday, but even that massive number - the largest since the financial crisis 11 years ago - did not capture the true depth of the losses because the monthly survey was conducted too early in March.

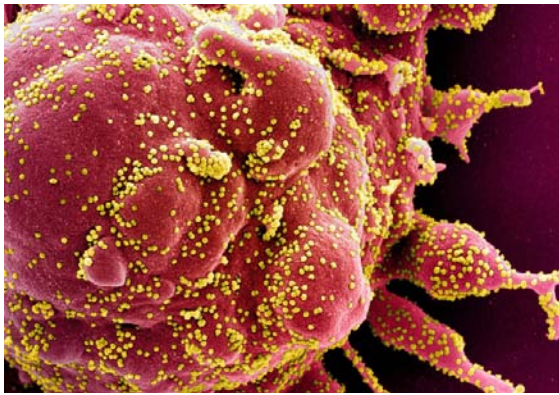
Still, it shows that even in the earliest stages of the business closures that have since spread across the country, the cuts were most heavily felt in industries such as hotels, restaurants, and education as the travel industry shut down, bars and eateries closed their doors, and daycare centers shuttered, all in the aim of limiting the spread of the disease.

And, perhaps ironically in the middle of a health crisis, the health care sector was among the most afflicted as providers of nearly any service apart from acute care for sufferers of COVID-19, the lung ailment caused by the novel coronavirus, suspended operations and stopped seeing patients.

The following report offers a picture of how March’s job losses - certain to be revised higher and followed by even larger cuts in April - played out across various industries and demographic groups.

The largest share of that came at restaurants and bars, which slashed 417,000 jobs.

Around 76,000 health and education jobs were eliminated



led by 29,000 cuts at dentists and physicians offices and another 19,000 at day care centers.

The federal government sector stood out as a rare example of net job gains last month, thanks to the addition of 17,000 temporary workers for the 2020 census.

By race or ethnicity, the largest increases were seen among Asians and Latinos, with increases of 1.6 percentage points each, nearly twice the overall increase of 0.9 percentage point. Both whites and African Americans saw their rates rise at the same pace as the national rate, although the unemployment rate now for blacks - at 6.7% - is 65% higher than for whites at 4%.

The youngest workers were also the most likely to lose work in the early stages of the shutdown.

The unemployment rate for teenagers rose by 3.3 percentage points to 14.3% and for those between 20 and 24 years old by 2.3 points - the most since 1953 - to 8.7%.

By contrast, unemployment for those in the 25-to-34-year-old age bracket rose by just 0.4 percentage point to 4.1%. The jobless rate for workers aged 45 to 54 rose 0.7 percentage point to 3.2%, the lowest rate for any age group.

Workers with lower levels of education also found themselves thrown out of work at a higher rate in March.

The rate for workers without a high school diploma jumped by 1.1 percentage points to 6.8%, the highest in nearly three years.

For people with a college degree, meanwhile, the jobless rate rose by 0.6 percentage point to 2.5%. Still, it was the largest monthly increase in the rate for that demographic since the Labor Department began tracking it in the early 1990s.

And finally, there was a notable gender gap in the unemployment rate increase last month. The jobless rate for men rose by 0.7 percentage point, while the rate for women rose 0.9 percentage point, perhaps explained by their greater representation in the hardest-hit employment sectors such as hospitality and health care.

The overall rate for both sexes over the age of 20 now stands at 4%.

(Source: Reuters)

Economists warn the UK economy could shrink by 7.8% in 2020

Britain’s economy is set to suffer its worst year for a century as the jobs market is crippled by the coronavirus lockdown and firms go bust, economists warned on Saturday.

The economy is now predicted to shrink by an astonishing 7.8 percent overall in 2020, analysis by banking giant Nomura has found.

That would represent the most severe hit to livelihoods since a 13 percent slump in 1921, when Britain’s exports collapsed and the post-First World War boom was ended by a fierce deflationary spiral.

George Buckley, UK economist at Nomura, said this year’s crash would easily surpass the 2008 financial crisis — when the UK economy

suffered a 4.2 percent fall — and the lows of the Second World War.

“This will be the worst year for GDP for just shy of a century,” he added. “The worst data we’ve seen since the depression of 1921 was during the final stages of the Second World War, when GDP fell by 4.6 percent.”

Separate figures obtained by The Mail on Sunday show the jobs market has deteriorated far more quickly than it did after the 2008 crash.

Britain’s largest recruitment website Reed said the number of new vacancies being advertised has fallen by the same amount in three weeks as it did in nine months during the crisis just over a decade ago.

Vacancies on the Reed website last week dived 63 percent from 59,000 to 22,000. That followed drops of 45 and 55 percent in the previous two weeks.

James Reed, chairman of Reed, said: “I’ve never seen anything like this. The shock waves now are much larger and faster. This is going to have a seismic impact on employment and we need to make sure it is not catastrophic.”

A memo circulated among bank bosses, seen by the MoS, shows half of the UK’s 5.8 million small and medium-sized businesses face running out of cash in just eight weeks.

The note, from credit reference firm Experian, also warns of a consumer debt crunch, with

borrowers unable to pay off their debts as they lose their jobs, become furloughed or see their earnings slashed.

The report said most families now have little to no savings to fall back on following a decade of record low interest rates. It added: “Even those on 80 percent of salary may see their finances stretched and may need to resort to credit.”

Kristalina Georgieva, head of the International Monetary Fund, said: “This is a crisis like no other. Never in the history of the IMF have we witnessed the world economy coming to a standstill. It is way worse than the global financial crisis.”

(Source: dailymail.co.uk)

Oil industry joins the fight against coronavirus

Ventilators from Tesla. Hand sanitizer from Anheuser Busch and fellow distillers. Face masks from General Motors. It sounds like something out of a science fiction—or possibly parody—novel, but it is, in fact, our new reality: the reality where businesses change to survive and help fight the pandemic that shook the world. And oil and gas players are joining the effort. Call it what you will -- an attempt to regain credibility in the public eye, a way to take advantage of a bad situation, or simply doing the only reasonable thing to do in the circumstances, but oil and gas majors are indeed trying to help.

Shell, for example, said last month that it was diverting resources to the increased production of isopropyl alcohol, which is the primary ingredient in hand sanitizers. It also said it would make 2.5 million liters of the ingredient freely available to the healthcare sector in the Netherlands.

The supermajor is also offering free food and drink to healthcare professionals at 15,000 retail outlets globally as well as to truck drivers and delivery personnel “who are vital to maintaining supplies.”

Total, for its part, has pledged gasoline vouchers worth \$54.2 million (50 million euro) to French hospitals for their workers’ travel to fight the virus, as well as donations to the Pasteur Institute and other research facilities.

“In this period of crisis, Total’s teams remain mobilized to enable French people to make all their necessary travel arrangements. With its nationwide network, Total is working alongside those who are fighting the epidemic everywhere. Which is why the Group has decided to make this practical gesture of support for our hospital staff, who are working to ensure the health of patients,” CEO Patrick Pouyanne said.



BP is also offering free gasoline to UK and Spanish emergency services vehicles as well as free delivery of food and convenience goods from its fuel stations. The supermajor also offers free fuel and fuel cards in Germany, Poland, and Turkey’s capital, Istanbul. The company also said it had donated \$2 million to the WHO’s Covid-19 Solidarity Response Fund.

Exxon has teamed up with a research organization—the Global Center for Medical Innovation—to develop safer reusable personal protection equipment (PPE) for healthcare workers, such as face shields and masks. The company said the FDA is currently reviewing the prototypes, and as

soon as it gives them the green light, Exxon will begin production. Such equipment is very much in demand right now, with shortages of N29 protective face masks in short supply in many disease hotspots.

Eni has set up a hospital in Rome to treat the many victims of Covid-19 in Europe’s hardest-hit country. The supermajor is also collaborating with other hospitals in Italy to expand patient capacity and emergency response capacity. The company is donating a total of \$33 million for various Covid-19-related efforts.

Others are donating. Chevron said it had distributed more than \$7 million to food banks, educational, and healthcare services. Refiner

Valero has donated \$1.8 million to front-line organizations.

Naturally, there is space for criticism. Handing out sandwiches as Shell is doing may be a nice thing to do, but is it enough, given the company’s resources?

BP’s free fuel will also no doubt be criticized as will the size of its donation to the WHO’s Covid-19 Solidarity Response Fund. A company making billions donating just a couple of measly million to fight the modern plague? They could have kept it. The thing is, however, if these companies were doing none of those things, they would still have been the target of criticism. Right now, Big Oil is in the position of Big Banking back in 2008-2009, for certain groups.

Whatever they do, they would never get it right.

It is, however, worth mentioning those that have joined the anti-virus effort, because most oil and gas businesses have their hands full with just surviving. First, they slashed their spending plans. Then they shelved share buybacks. The next step will be the start of layoffs unless the oil price situation improves sharply and quickly.

“A sustained drop in oil prices would cost the sector 50,000-75,000 jobs if employment returned to its low from a few years ago,” Nathan Sheets, chief economist at PGIM Fixed Income, told CNBC a couple of weeks ago. The chances of that happening are, unfortunately, quite big. In fact, with everyone calling the current crisis unprecedented and the worst in history, job loss in the oil industry could end up being even greater than during 2014-2016. Whatever their motivation, it’s good that Big Oil is helping fight the pandemic now while they can still focus on anything else besides survival.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Aramco delays oil pricing amid Saudi-Russia row on oil cuts



Saudi Aramco is delaying the release of its closely-watched monthly oil-pricing list until later this week as the kingdom spars with Russia over a potential meeting of global producers that would aim to halt the collapse in crude.

Aramco is now set to announce its official selling prices for May by Thursday, according to a person with knowledge of the situation who asked not to be identified because the information is private. The OSPs, as the prices are known, were due to be published on Sunday.

The state oil giant is delaying the announcement to await signs of what may happen at a meeting planned for Thursday at which suppliers would discuss crude production amid a collapse in demand due to the coronavirus. Saudi-Russian diplomatic barbs are opening a fresh rift between the world’s two largest oil exporters and jeopardizing a deal to cut output and keep crude from tumbling further. Benchmark Brent crude has plunged 48 percent this year.

Aramco’s media office declined to comment on the delay.

The coalition known as OPEC+ had curbed production since 2017, but limits on its members’ output expired at the end of March after Saudi Arabia failed to per-

sue Russia to accept deeper cuts. With the Saudis now ramping up production to record levels, U.S. President Donald Trump has said suppliers are open to reducing production once again to take 10 million to 15 million barrels of unwanted crude off the market.

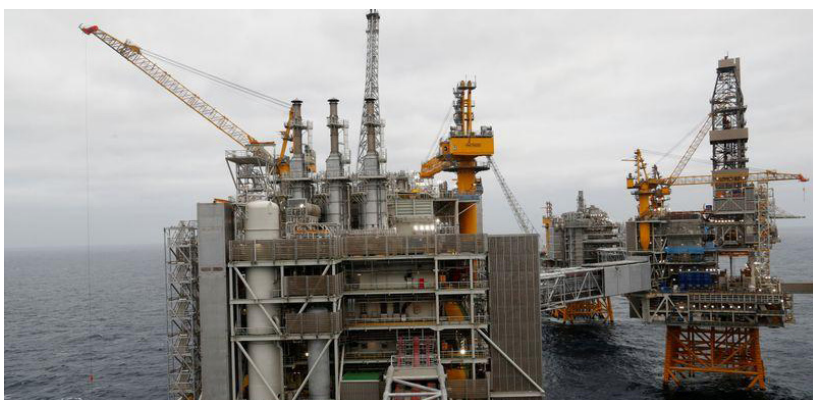
The debate over new production cuts poses a challenge for the world’s most valuable listed company as it tries to decide how to price its crude. By delaying its announcement, Aramco can better gauge the amount of oil it may have available to sell next month. The postponement would also give it time to deepen its price discounts should an OPEC+ deal fall apart, as Aramco is competing for sales in a glutted market.

The kingdom’s energy ministry dictates Saudi oil output, so any decision by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, Russia and other producers would determine the amount of crude that Aramco can offer customers.

Refiners and traders expect Aramco to cut pricing for May due to the collapse in demand. The delay could be interpreted as an effort to put the global price war on hold and give countries more room to negotiate reductions in output.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Norway may cut its oil output if other big producers agree deal: minister



Western Europe’s largest oil and gas producer Norway said on Saturday it would consider cutting its oil production if a global deal to curb supply is agreed by the world’s biggest producers.

OPEC and its allies are working on a deal for an oil output cut equivalent to about 10% of world supply in what member states expect will be an unprecedented global effort including the United States.

Washington, however, has yet to make a commitment to join the effort.

Oil prices have shed two thirds of their value in the first quarter of the year, pummeled by a drop in demand due to coronavirus lockdowns and after Russia and Saudi Arabia failed to agree on further output cuts.

The price of North Sea oil touched an 18-year low of \$21.65 a barrel on March 30. It has since recovered to more than \$30 a barrel on hopes of a new global oil output deal.

“If a broad group of producers agree to cut production significantly, Norway will consider a unilateral cut if it supports our resource management and our economy,” Norwegian Oil and Energy Minister Tina Bru said in an email to Reuters.

She said Norway had been in a dialogue with other oil producing countries, without elaborating on a potential size of the output

cut.

Norway, which meets about 2% of global oil demand, is not a member of OPEC. It has cut its oil output several times before, including in 1990, 1998 and in 2002, always in tandem with other producers when prices fell.

During the first half of 2002, Norway cut its output by around 150,000 bpd after oil prices fell to below \$20 a barrel following attacks in the United States on Sept. 11, 2001.

Norway’s crude oil production stood at 1.75 million barrels per day (bpd) in February, up 26% from a year ago thanks to the ramp-up of state-controlled Equinor’s giant Johan Sverdrup oilfield.

Equinor said on March 30 it expected Sverdrup, Western Europe’s largest oilfield, to hit a daily output of 470,000 bpd in early May, up from around 350,000 bpd at end-2019.

Norway’s crude oil production peaked in 2001 before declining somewhat. It has been rising again since 2014, with most of its oil being exported to Britain and other European countries.

Aside from Equinor, other companies producing oil off Norway include Aker BP, ConocoPhillips, Lundin Energy, Eni’s subsidiary Vaar Energi, Shell, Total, OKEA and DNO.

(Source: Reuters)

Trump threatens tariffs on oil imports to ‘protect’ U.S. energy workers

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Saturday he would impose tariffs on crude imports if he has to “protect” U.S. energy workers from the oil price crash that has been exacerbated by a war between Russia and Saudi Arabia over market share.

“If I have to do tariffs on oil coming from outside or if I have to do something to protect our ... tens of thousands of energy workers and our great companies that produce all these jobs, I’ll do whatever I have to do,” Trump told reporters in a briefing about the coronavirus outbreak.

Oil prices have dropped by about two-thirds this year as the pandemic crushes demand and as major producers Russia and Saudi Arabia boost output in a war over market share.

The United States in recent years has become the world’s biggest oil producer, at times putting its exports in competition with Russia and members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC.

As oil prices drop, many heavily leveraged U.S. energy companies face bankruptcies and workers are at risk of layoffs. After meeting with industry executives on Friday, Trump said he was not considering tariffs at the moment, but it was a tool that could be used “if we’re not treated fairly.”



Two major industry groups, the American Petroleum Institute and American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers, told Trump in a letter on Wednesday that tariffs on oil imports would jeopardize the domestic refining business as some plants depend on crude from abroad.

The United States imported more 1 million barrels per

day of oil from Russia and Saudi Arabia combined in 2019, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Trump reiterated on Saturday that Saudi Arabia had told him it had agreed with Russia to jointly reduce output by an unprecedented 10 million barrels per day or more. The countries have not confirmed the plan, other than saying they would discuss ways to stabilize global oil markets.

OPEC and Russia have postponed a Monday meeting to discuss oil output cuts until April 9, OPEC sources said, due to a Saudi-Russia dispute over who is to blame for plunging crude prices.

When oil prices started dropping last month, Trump initially emphasized it would be good for motorists. On Saturday he said gasoline prices could fall to 90 cents a gallon and conceded that the oil price crash is “going to hurt a lot of jobs in our country.”

De facto OPEC leader Saudi Arabia and Russia would be “destroying themselves” if they do not end the price war by reducing output, Trump said, noting that “I couldn’t care less about OPEC.”

(Source: Reuters)

Will this be the slowest year ever for oil & gas mergers?

By Alex Kimani

When the energy sector faces a severe existential threat as it currently is after the epic oil price collapse, the usual playbook is to resort to tie-ups in a bid to survive. Unlike other industries where M&A activity tends to correlate with economic activity in the broader market, crises in the oil-and-gas sector tend to trigger a wave of merger mania in response to low commodity prices. For instance, the last oil bust of 2016 acted as a catalyst for the \$60 billion M&A deal between energy giants Royal Dutch Shell and BG Group, Suncor Energy and Canadian Oil Sands, as well as a \$35-billion proposed merger between Halliburton and Baker Hughes that eventually fell through.

In sharp contrast, the current year is recording a dramatic fall in M&A activity in the energy sector: An ominous sign that the oil and gas bust--the worst in history amid the dreadful COVID-19 pandemic--has everybody freaked out.

In other words, bearishness in the sector has truly reached a crescendo.

A fresh report from Enverus (formerly DrillingInfo) has revealed that U.S. upstream M&A deals during Q1 2020 only amounted to \$770 million, less than 1/10th the average deal amount recorded quarterly over the previous decade.

The largest dollar transaction for the quarter was a deal by Alpine Energy Capital to purchase Approach Resources’ Midland Basin assets for \$193 million. Compare that to the \$55 billion tie-up between Occidental and Anadarko or the \$9 billion merger between Marathon Oil and Andeavor Logistics, both of which were consummated last year.



If M&A numbers for the next three quarters track Q1’s trajectory closely, then 2020 could end up being the slowest year in the history of mergers in the sector.

■ Fire sale

The Enverus report reveals there are only ~\$4.7B in upstream deals currently available in the market for sale, the majority of which are property sales in the Eagle Shale. Compare that to \$92 billion in completed mergers for the oil-and-gas industry in 2019 or the average of \$78 billion over the past 10 years. Mind you, practically all Q1 deals were closed before March, an indication that the widespread lockdown is having a terrible effect on business.

The dearth of deals in a critical time such as this can mean several things.

First off, few companies are willing to conduct a fire sale of their assets given how badly valuations in the sector have tanked. The energy sector’s valuation has been cut in half since the beginning of the year after the oil price crash, and could go lower if the oil price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia persists. Indeed, reports are emerging that some oil producers have begun including ‘zero clauses’ in their contracts as protection to avoid being forced to pay buyers in the event of oil prices sliding below \$0 a barrel. You know that things have truly gone to the dogs when producers are seriously contemplating negative oil prices.

Second, it’s too risky for potential acquiring companies to start buying cheap assets during times of massive volatility and uncertainty such as these. After all, nobody’s even sure where the industry will be in six months, 12 months, or two years from now. Deep-pocketed companies would rather just sit on the sidelines and wait for the storm to subside before starting to hunt for prime assets for pennies on the dollar.

Third, a lot of M&A activity tends to be heavily leveraged, and not many energy companies have maintained healthy credit ratings in this bloodbath. Consequently, a lot have resorted to the junk bond market, where they will have to pay through their noses in due time thanks to astronomical yields.

Indeed, most companies, including those with relatively healthy balance sheets, would rather engage in activities with faster ROI such as spending and production cuts. In fact, this is exactly the trend we have been witnessing in the space.

U.S. oil majors including Chevron Corp. (NYSE: CVX), Devon Energy Corp. (NYSE: DVN), Marathon Oil (NYSE: MRO), Occidental Petroleum (NYSE: OXY), Cenovus Energy (NYSE: CVE) and Apache Corp. (NYSE: APA) have followed in the shoes of Europe’s Big Oil including Royal Dutch Shell (NYSE: RDSA), Italy’s Eni SpA, French major Total SA and Norway’s Equinor ASA (NYSE: EQNR) in announcing a raft of capex, share buybacks, and dividend cutbacks.

Chevron announced a 20 percent cut in its FY 2020 guidance for organic capital and exploratory spending of \$20B to \$16B as well as suspension of its \$4B stock buyback program, in a strong response to the oil price crash but said the dividend program remains ‘very secure.’

Devon Energy has gone on a spending-cut rampage, lowering capex twice in the space of a month by 45 percent. The company will slash spending by 29 percent in the current fiscal period and reduce drilling activity in a bid to preserve liquidity.

Meanwhile, Occidental Petroleum announced that it had slashed quarterly dividend by 86 percent to 11 cents from the previous level of 79 cents and lower 2020 capital expenditure from the earlier expectation of \$5.2-\$5.4 billion to a range of \$3.5-\$3.7 billion in a bid to safeguard its liquidity.

With so much uncertainty going in in the sector, you can’t even blame companies with ample liquidity for not rushing out to scrounge on bargain picks of companies on their knees.

(Source: oilprice.com)

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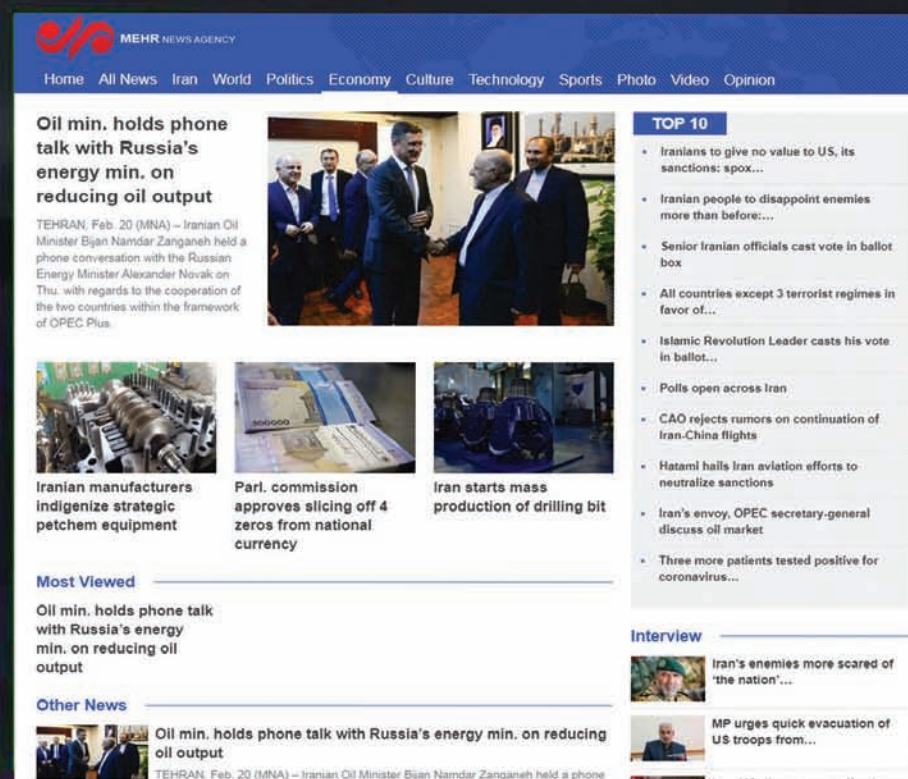
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Will the US experience decline or reemerge?

A glance at the importance of science and technology for policy-makers

➔ US atomic attack to Japan, as well as its reaction to the USSR's success in launching the Sputnik satellite, laid the foundation of the United States' current general structure.

Since then and according to the US' major policies, the country's universities became the first bedrock for conducting government-backed researches. Several state-run laboratories were established to gain more scientific progress aimed at reinvigorating the country's national security. The mentioned inspiring policies further motivated a generation of university students who were completing science and engineering courses across the United States.

Shortly after World War II and during the Cold War years, the US government boosted its support for scientific efforts which resulted in the glory of the country's scientific institutions. The mentioned approach guaranteed the US' fifty years of pioneering in science and technology worldwide. The approach also granted Washington an internationally leading role.

Undoubtedly, the US' diplomatic and economic progress were rooted in the shocks the country's society faced following the launch of the Sputnik satellite. Approval of Space Law by the Congress, the establishment of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 1958, unprecedented hike in the budget of the scientific institutions, the establishment of state laboratories as well as the establishment of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA or DARPA) were among the US' measures to narrow down its vulnerability in facing a crisis similar to the Sputnik.

DARPA is an agency of the United States Department of Defense responsible for the development of emerging technologies for use by the military to cope with surprising innovations similar to the Sputnik.

The 20th century ended the Eastern bloc's collapse and the United States' access to the Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Information technology and Cognitive science (NBIC) gave a chance to the US to rule over the world during the 21st century. However, social developments and the promotion trend in various parts of the world were signs of a wonderful change in higher education, researches and innovations across the global geography.

The mentioned change created an advancing multi-polar world regarding science and engineering after decades of domination of the US, the European Union and Japan.

A glance at the rate of different countries' investments in the last two decades shows the significance of allocating more funds on research centers. The US, which was the leading player in the research activities worldwide expressed concern over footages of a new form of competition in international arenas. The US, according to its data, was concerned about the progressive capabilities of China, India and even the Russian Federation.

The Russian Federation, commonly known as Russia, is a transcontinental country extending over much of northern Eurasia (Asia and Europe). The largest country in the world by land area, Russia has the world's ninth-largest population.

In the meantime, Iran managed not to remain behind in the mentioned global competition. In over a decade of continued scientific achievements, Iran upgraded its scientific standing from 58th in 1996 to 15th in recent years. Unprecedented growth in peaceful nuclear, as well as space industries and the remarkable number of higher education alumna, turned independent Iran into a competitive newly-emerged scientific power. The sanctions, imposed on Iran, were a series of inactive strategies adopted by the US to prevent Iran from emerging as a new scientific power. However, the country successfully managed to turn the sanctions into opportunities in various fields of science, economy, banking and oil industry.

Under the 2015 nuclear accord, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran agreed to put limits on its nuclear activities in exchange for the termination of economic and financial sanctions. However, US President Donald Trump abandoned the deal in 2018 and introduced the harshest ever sanctions in history against Iran. So far, the European trio – Germany, France, and Britain – which are signatory to the pact and the EU in large have not done anything tangible to shield Iran from sanctions.

It should be mentioned that the US has started to specify its weak points via reviewing its current standing as Wash-

ington has mainly realized its deficits. A report titled "Over the Storm" drafted by the American Science Foundation in 2005 released a warning for the threats



facing the US' domination. The report had significant impacts on the policies of former US President Barack Obama.

US scientific supremacy is rapidly declining in various fields including higher education and knowledge-based industries.

Once, the United States was the leading destination for foreign university students in higher education worldwide. The total number of students who complete their registration process in the US universities reached 784,000 in 2013 from 475,000 in 2000. However, regardless of the rise in the total number, the registration percentage declined from %25 in 2005 to %19 in 2013 due to other countries' success in attracting international students. Britain, Australia, France and Germany were new destinations for international students.

In other words, skilled technicians and engineers are the primary sources of innovations in the nowadays competitive economy in the 21st century. The governments in certain countries have paved the way for the students to access higher education as a priority. In the meantime, the mentioned countries have been trying hard to attract a talented workforce as those skilled staff working in scientific and engineering fields intend to seek a better financial situation in other countries.

According to the latest statistics released in 2020 by the American National Science Foundation (NSF) under the title of Science and Engineering, Indicators show that China has reached or in some cases has left the US behind regarding researches and innovations.

The statistics show that the total number of PhD graduates in China has approximately reached the United States' record.

On the other hand, the US budget allocation on researches has been declining year by year while individual Asian nations, especially China, have increased the mentioned budget. Research budget in China is more than the European nations' budget for the same purpose, and it will soon surpass the US research budget too.

On the subject of global investment in research activities, the US' share decreased from %32 in 2000 to %25 in 2007. The European countries' share also decreased from %25 to %20 in the same period. Nevertheless, the Asian countries' share increased from %25 to %42, which was a severe alarm to the US.

On the subject of research activities from 2000 till 2018 across the world, the US' share declined from %28 to %17, but China's share increased from %5 to %21.

On the subject of a value-added share of hi-tech and mid-tech industries, China's progress was eye-catching in the face of the US. Regarding the hi-tech industry, the US' share decreased from %38 to %32, but China's share increased from %6 to %21. In hi-tech and mid-tech industries in 2018, China with %28 surpassed the US whose share was only %22 of the global share.

The mentioned indicators caused the US to get worried about the rivals' progress in various filed of science and technology.

However, the science and innovation are playing a very active role in the US economy and national security more than ever; some scientists are worried about the people's lack of intention to seek governmental supports for the scientific centers in comparison with the rivals' budget allocation.

The US' scientific supremacy is now in danger due to the American officials' ignorance and indifference.

The worry started following the September 11 attacks when the US officials failed to understand the importance of science in attaining more power. The worry further covered the country's higher education centers, especially in science

and mathematics.

The US engaged in three wars in the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan. It dispatched a vast number of forces and spent a hefty



amount of money for military operations in the region. Later the US engaged in two proxy wars in Iraq and Syria, which resulted in nothing but the destruction of the US hegemony.

If the US intends to leave behind its rivals in the new knowledge-based world economy, it should accelerate its scientific growth which is undoubtedly indebted to providing more supports for the research centers by the government. Worrying about the people and government's adherence to push the relevant decision-makers under pressure to provide supports for the scientific centers caused some representatives in Congress, including Vernon Ehler (r-mi), one of two PhD physicists in Congress, to ask this question, "Now that we need the Sputnik-like the story, where is it?" Some others, including Bill Gates, the owner of the Microsoft Company, have talked about an accidental occurrence similar to the Sputnik satellite launch to once again lead the country towards adopting farsighted policies in the science field.

Some other figures, including Shirley Jackson, the former chairman of the US' Science Development Society and head of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, believe that the US is currently facing an invisible crisis.

In February 2005, the US Media National Society held a meeting, which was attended by the business and academic elites to express their concern over threats posed by the Asian countries of China and India against the US scientific supremacy. The meeting addressed by Craig Barret, the executive manager of Intel, said, "This is a gradual crisis. It is not something to which the Americas' mind can give the correct response. This is not a hit similar to the Sputnik story or tsunami."

In the meantime, a senior columnist in the New York Times, Thomas L. Friedman said, "The crisis is nothing but continued erosion of the United States' scientific and technological base which has thus far been upgrading innovation sources and living standards in the US."

Mac Cronic and Smith, the authors of Post-Sputnik novel, which was written in 2008 to explain the US' scientific policy in the 21st century and published by the University of Michigan, opined that there are several reasons to be worried about the ruling system in the US. They added that the US students had gained weak results in international mathematics and other scientific exams. The authors further said that many American companies and industries are losing their international standings and traditional leadership as the companies' owner had started to sell their shares to the foreigners, including the Chinese enterprises.

They concluded that foreign workforces had occupied more and more job opportunities in the US.

Following other countries' intention to conduct researches by themselves, many essential types of research are being conducted outside the United States. More students are avoiding registering in the US' universities as they are being attracted to other countries' academic centres which are offering better centers for research and training courses.

Besides, there are several countries which can now be considered as serious rivals for the US, and the US itself is engaged in national challenges, including dependence to other countries' crude oil, facing epidemic diseases and biologic attacks.

Such problems, which of course are different from alarms caused by launching the Sputnik satellite in 1957, should not be ignored. The mentioned challenges and many other problems need public awareness in order to push the govern-

ment towards paying more attention to the reinvigoration of scientific and technological progress. It is so regretful for the Americans that the US has turned into an imitator instead of a scientific leader worldwide.

Based on the American politicians' anticipations, the pandemic disease or a biological attack turned from a possibility into a reality after a decade when the possibility was planned. It is happening precisely within the framework of conflict between the US and China as two close rivals in the scientific and technological fields and in the days when the US is on the verge of decline. The US has named the coronavirus as the Chinese virus and China has claimed that the US soldiers participating in the Military World Games as the root causes of the virus outbreak.

The 2019 Military World Games, officially known as the 7th CISM Military World Games and commonly known as Wuhan 2019, was held from October 18–27, 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei, China.

The 7th Military World Games was the first international military multi-sport event to be held in China. Also, it was the most significant military sports event ever to be held in China, with nearly 10,000 athletes from over 100 countries competing in 27 sports.

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. The disease first emerged in China in early February and then infected most of the world countries, including Iran, Italy, Spain, France, the US and many other nations.

Following the claims as mentioned earlier and explanations, two scenarios can be developed. The first one is the repetition of history. It will include the formation of new players in the scientific and technological areas, especially China, which has been as the main threat to the US' domination for more than a decade. The US' policy-makers, relying on high-level documents, have claimed that China is a threat to the United States threats.

In this battle, may a bipolar world similar to the second Cold War era take shape in the near future as it took shape in the Sputnik story in 1957. However, such a claimed world will not be formed unless the pandemic disease can create a shock similar to the Sputnik story to change the US scientific and technological policies simultaneously. If the latter prediction occurs, the US will witness another fifty years of scientific leap which will enable it to return to its previous standing, which is now declining in the face of the newly-emerged powers.

The US' revival can be materialized only after the Far East nations' economy narrows down. It can be materialized if the US manages to dominate energy resources in Iraq and Iran.

It is worthy of explaining that bipolarity can be defined as a system of world order in which the majority of global economic, military and cultural influence is held between two states. The classic case of a bipolar world is that of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, which dominated the second half of the twentieth century.

Iran, along with China's hastily growth, is one of the leading foreign barriers in the mentioned scenario. Iran can prevent US domination over the Persian Gulf energy resources and can foil the US sanction-based plots.

The second scenario talks about the collapse of the US hegemony. It talks about a new world order in which the US is not the leading player similar to the European countries that lost their standing during the Cold War and were turned into the second-hand powers.

Now, talking about being surprised by the crisis regardless of a decade long of warnings seems to be meaningless. It is more alike to the inefficiency of the US management system.

This article tries to emphasize the post-coronavirus world situation in which the US-planned theory of globalization and collective leadership of the world will come to an end.

I have to mention that materialization each of the mentioned scenarios can lead us towards the source of coronavirus as a product of the US-owned biologic weapons arsenal or transmission of the disease from an animal including bats or anteater to the people in China's Wuhan.

However, the US President Donald Trump's behavior to emphasize imposing more sanctions on Iran and targeting popular Iraqi forces of Hashd al Shaabi speculate that coronavirus outbreak might be a pre-planned plot.

A well-known Iranian proverb says that nothing can be hidden forever.

Brace yourself for waves of Coronavirus infections

Here's what we should be expecting in the war on Covid-19.

By Nicholas Kristof

In the world war against the coronavirus, there's both very good news and very bad news.



Via de Servi in Florence, Italy, with the Santa Maria del Fiore Cathedral in the background, on March 11. Credit...Clara Vannucci

To understand what lies ahead, epidemiologists study the places battered first. Here are lessons from the front lines:

■ First, we have a toolbox that works. Even for countries that bungled the initial response, like Italy and the United States, there's hope: Social distancing succeeds in slowing the contagion, and it does so quickly — within a few weeks of the adoption of tough measures.

Both Italy and Iran appear to have passed through the worst of this wave of Covid-19, as measured by new cases. But even after new cases slow, deaths continue at a high rate because people often die four weeks after they were infected.

In the United States, two of the first places to suffer outbreaks were the Seattle area and New Rochelle (a suburb of New York). There were firm responses for both, with New Rochelle subject to a controversial containment zone and Washington State working with large companies to get people to work from home.

This was effective. New Rochelle is no longer a hot spot, and Washington also flattened its curve, with coronavirus hospitalizations dropping.

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For the United States as a whole, confirmed infections are still increasing rapidly, but one hopeful sign is that Kinsa Health Internet-linked thermometers show a downward trend in fevers across most of the country (these are for all kinds of fevers, not just those from Covid-19, and some people with infections are asymptomatic).

On balance, all this is excellent news. Early on, epidemiologists simply didn't know how well social distancing would work. Now it's clearer: We have the tools to save lives, if we will use them.

■ Second, countless thousands will still die because of past mistakes and complacency.

A pandemic is like an oil tanker: It continues to move forward long after you hit the brakes. In China, deaths didn't fall sharply until a month after controls had been imposed. The benefits from social distancing in the United States will take time to ripple through the system, and there will continue to be new infections — and many more deaths.

The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington has a constantly updated model that predicts that the daily death toll across the United States will rise until April 16 and then slowly decline. By the beginning of August, it estimates that more than 93,000 Americans will have died from Covid-19.

(I interrupt this bleakness for a dose of uplift: In Oregon, a 103-year-old, William Lapschies, caught the coronavirus in early March but recovered in time to celebrate his 104th birthday with pizza and chocolate cake on Wednesday. Happy 104th, Mr. Lapschies!)

More bad news: Case fatality rates have been creeping up, and lethality may be greater than many had expected. Germany was hailed for a death rate of only about 0.5 percent, and South Korea was not much higher; now both have case fatality rates well above 1 percent.

In models of the virus that my colleague Stuart A. Thompson and I published, we used a death rate of 1 percent. But if the South Korean death rate by age is applied to the demography of the United States, the American case fatality rate is about 2 percent, according to Dr. Christopher Murray, the director of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.

A great majority of the deaths in the United States will have been avoidable. South Korea and the United States had their first coronavirus cases on the same day, but Seoul did a far better job managing the response. The upshot: It has suffered only 174 coronavirus deaths, equivalent to 1,100 for a population the size of America's.

That suggests that we may lose 90,000 Americans in this wave of infections because the United States did not manage the crisis as well as South Korea did. As of Friday night, the U.S. had already had more than 7,000 deaths.

■ Third, while we can bend the curve, it will bend back when we relax our social distancing.

This is more bad news, for many people seem to believe that once we get through this grim month or two, the nightmare will be over. But the virus is resilient, and health experts warn that this may be just the first wave of what may be many waves of infections until we get a vaccine sometime in 2021.

Already, Japan after initial success is seeing a surge of infections, while China and South Korea have struggled with imported infections; that seems inevitable as economies restart and travel resumes.

"There's this biological fact that still in South Korea, the people who haven't been infected aren't immune, and as soon as there's an end to social distancing they'll be vulnerable again," noted Dr. Mark Poznansky of Harvard Medical School.

The same is true in the United States.

"We're just looking at this first wave," noted Dr. Murray. He estimates that in June, some 95 percent of Americans will still be susceptible to the virus.

"The world's on fire with this virus," said Michael Osterholm, an epidemiologist at the University of Minnesota, and this means that even if one country succeeds in putting out the blaze, sparks will keep arriving from elsewhere to cause new outbreaks. He added: "I think the transmission will continue to occur for some time."

(Source: The New York Times)

Iran allocates \$240m for compensating corona flight cancelations

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — The Iranian government has allocated 10 trillion rials (about \$240 million) at the official rate of 42,000 rials) to help airliners refund the cost of flights, which have been canceled by the novel coronavirus.

Based on official statistics, over 70 percent of air tickets have so far been canceled in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, which has raged Iran and many parts of the globe, ISNA reported on Sunday.

The canceled trips were mostly scheduled for Noruz (the two-week New Year holidays started March 20), when travels, both international and domestic, reach record numbers.



The virus, also known as COVID-19, caused air, road and rail travel a meltdown in the country and in the world, as well.

In an act that is far different from the sole of the age-old Noruz traditions, a majority of people stayed home instead of coming together, visiting the loved ones, or spending time in nature.

Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami announced in February that customers are allowed to receive a refund when airlines cancel or significantly delay flights or they could reschedule their tickets for a later time, the report said.

United Airlines cuts 90 percent of flights out of New York City area

United Airlines is temporarily slashing the number of its flights in and out of New York City-area airports to keep employees safe during the coronavirus outbreak, a top executive told employees on Saturday.

Beginning Sunday, United will be cutting nearly 90% of flights at LaGuardia Airport in New York and Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey for three weeks, according to a message to workers by Greg Hart, the airline's chief operations officer. Affected employees will continue to receive pay and benefits, he wrote.

"As the situation in New York and New Jersey worsens, we are taking another major step at Newark and LaGuardia to help keep our employees safe and play our part in helping to mitigate the spread of the outbreak in the Tri-State area," Hart wrote.

United will be decreasing daily flights at LaGuardia from 18 to two and at Newark from 139 to 15, Hart said.

The move comes as major airlines have seen a dramatic decrease in passengers, reduced flights, grounded half their passenger jets because of the outbreak. Union leaders of the Association of Flight Attendants said in a statement that United's move was a good decision because it protects flight attendants, other airline employees and the public from exposure to the coronavirus.

(Source: Skift)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Tikal National Park

Tikal National Park is located in Northern Guatemala's Peten Province within a large forest region often referred to as the Maya Forest, which extends into neighboring Mexico and Belize.

Embedded within the much larger Maya Biosphere Reserve, exceeding two million hectares and contiguous with additional conservation areas, Tikal National Park is one of the few World Heritage properties inscribed according to both natural and cultural criteria for its extraordinary biodiversity and archaeological importance.



It comprises 57,600 hectares of wetlands, savannah, tropical broadleaf and palm forests with thousands of architectural and artistic remains of the Mayan civilization from the Pre-classic Period (600 BC) to the decline and eventual collapse of the urban center around 900 CE.

The diverse ecosystems and habitats harbor a wide spectrum of neotropical fauna and flora. Five cats, including Jaguar and Puma, several species of monkeys and anteaters and more than 300 species of birds are among the notable wildlife. The forests comprise more than 200 tree species and over 2000 higher plants have been recorded across the diverse habitats.

Research has revealed numerous constructions, carved monuments and other evidence bearing witness to highly sophisticated technical, intellectual and artistic achievements that developed from the arrival of the first settlers (800 BC) to the last stages of historic occupation around the year 900.

(Source: UNESCO)

Why Iran expects tourism boom after coronavirus

By Afshin Majlesi

TEHRAN — The novel coronavirus pandemic has brought travel to a standstill nearly all over the globe, including Iran, causing huge job and revenue losses.

For now, the question is: will there be light at the end of the tunnel?

It's widely believed that the impact of virus infection will be temporary and short-lived for a country ranked the third fastest-growing tourism destination in 2019.

Doesn't matter the taste, Iran can be a top choice of many foreign tourists who are fans of camping and eco-tours, fans of historical sites. For those who want to experience something completely new and exciting, visiting or staying with nomads is recommended. Accommodation in the country varies from luxurious five-star hotels to camping in the middle of the jungle!

Listed as one of the hottest travel destinations, Iran will bounce back quickly once the COVID-19 passes because of many reasons, eight of which are cited below:

■ Welcoming people and hospitality

Iranian people are world-famous for being courteous, warm, friendly, welcoming and eager to show off their country to foreigners.

The nation generally treat strangers as their dear guests, since "honoring a guest" is one of the pillars of the Persian culture.

Foreign travelers are continuously astounded by the warmth of Iranians, treated with nothing but sparkling smiles and offers of help of any kind. Such a phenomenon happens almost every corner of the Islamic Republic and among any class of Iranians. This centuries-old custom leaves a lasting impression much robust than any tourist attraction ever could.

■ Ancient history

Iran is home to one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations, embracing settlements dating back to 4000 BC.

The name of Iran, formerly known as Persia, mostly conjures up the first Persian Empire, ruled by the Achaemenids (550 – 330 BC) and sites such as Pasargadae and Persepolis. However, there are tens of prehistoric sites as the Burnt City in Sistan-Baluchestan, Tepe Sialk in Kashan, Susa and Chogha Zanbil in the Khuzestan province and Ecbatana in Hamedan which predate Achaemenid period.

From a wider point of view, Iranian history can be divided into Pre-Islamic and Islamic eras. The Medes unified Iran as a nation and empire in 625 BC. The Islamic conquest of Persia (633–656) that put an end to the mighty Sassanid Empire (224–651) was a turning point in the history of the nation.

■ Architecture

Iran's architecture boasts its own distinct vernacular because of its complex cultural past and occasional turbulent political environments mostly triggered by civil wars, revolts or foreign invaders.

However, the vast country offers its visitors a very changing architectural scenes from the bulbous tiled domes or historical houses of Kashan to ancient bathhouses, madrasas, and discovering the mechanism behind a windcatcher in oasis towns.

It also lures visitors by some impressive modern buildings some of which well-connected with the time-honored traditions.

■ UNESCO World Heritage sites

In Iran, there are two dozen UNESCO World Heritage Sites, 22 of which cultural ones, representing architectural, social, religious and economic achievements as well as tastes of history throughout the ancient land.

The UNESCO-designated sites include "Bam and its Cultural Landscape" that represents an outstanding example of an ancient fortified settlement that developed around the Iranian central plateau and is an exceptional testimony to the development of a trading settlement in the desert environment of the Central Asian region; "Bisotun" in western Kermanshah province, is notable for its Achaemenid-era inscription carved on a limestone cliff; "Cultural Landscape of Maymand" that is an example of a system that appears to have been more widespread



File photo depicts travelers sitting at a traditional Iranian restaurant showcasing national flags of their countries.

in the past and involves the movement of people rather than animals, according to UNESCO; the lavish "Golestan Palace" in downtown Tehran which is a masterpiece of the Qajar era (1789 to 1925), embodying the successful integration of earlier Persian crafts and architecture with Western influences; the millennium-old "Gonbad-e Qabus" which is a mudbrick tomb tower for Qabus ibn Wushmagir, who was a Ziyarid ruler and literati; "Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System" that is known as a "masterpiece of creative genius" from the era of Darius the Great in the fifth century BC, still providing water to the city of Shushtar in the southwest of the country.

■ Natural beauties

Many Westerners commonly think of Iran as a vast desert country. It's true that eastern parts of Iran are dominated by deserts and semi-arid lands. However, it is home to lush green forests, plunging waterfalls, caves, hot springs, canyons, valleys, islands, wetlands, and sea coasts to name a few.

Some of the beautiful natural wonders in Iran are Mount Damavand; Torkaman Sahra; Dasht-e Lut (Lut Desert); the Dasht-e Kavir or Kavir-e Namak (the Great Salt Desert); Maranjab Desert; Masal Forest; Latun Waterfall; Badab-e Surt; and Qeshm Island.

■ A safe country to visit

The matter of security is essentially considered as a complex question for many foreigners willing to visit a host country.

When it comes to media outlets, in particular, some Western ones, Iran is a country that is often portrayed as unwelcoming.

However, many visitors to Iran describe it as one of the safest countries they've ever been to.

"Violent crimes against foreigners are extremely rare and, indeed, if you do your best to fit in with local customs, you are unlikely to be treated with anything," Anna Karsten, one of the travelers to the country, says.



Foreign travelers visit the "towers of silence" which are nested on hilltops on the outskirts of Yazd in central Iran.

Study offers new insight into the impact of ancient migrations on the European landscape

Neolithic populations have long been credited with bringing about a revolution in farming practices across Europe. However, a new study suggests it was not until the Bronze Age several millennia later that human activity led to significant changes to the continent's landscape.

Scientists from the University of Copenhagen and the University of Plymouth led research tracing how the two major human migrations recorded in Holocene Europe -- the northwestward movement of Anatolian farmer populations during the Neolithic and the westward movement of Yamnaya steppe peoples during the Bronze Age -- unfolded.

In particular, they analysed how they were associated with changes in vegetation -- which led to Europe's forests being replaced with the agricultural landscape still much in evidence today.

Their results, published in PNAS, show the two migrations differ markedly in both their spread and environmental implications, with the Yamnaya expansion moving quicker and resulting in greater vegetation changes than the earlier Neolithic farmer expansion.

The study -- also involving the University of Gothenburg and the University of Cambridge -- used techniques commonly applied in environmental science to model climate and pollution, and applied them to instead analyse human population movements in the last 10 millennia of European history.

It showed that a decline in broad-leaf



forest and an increase in pasture and natural grassland vegetation was concurrent with a decline in hunter-gatherer ancestry, and may have been associated with the fast movement of steppe peoples during the Bronze Age.

It also demonstrated that natural variations in climate patterns during this period are associated with these land cover changes.

The research is the first to model the spread of ancestry in ancient genomes through time and space, and provides the first framework

for comparing human migrations and land cover changes, while also accounting for changes in climate.

Dr Fernando Racimo, Assistant Professor at the University of Copenhagen and the study's lead author, said: "The movement of steppe peoples that occurred in the Bronze Age had a particularly strong impact on European vegetation. As these peoples were moving westward, we see increases in the amount of pasture lands and decreases in broad leaf

forests throughout the continent. We can now also compare movements of genes to the spread of cultural packages. In the case of the Neolithic farming revolution, for example, the two track each other particularly well, in both space and time."

The research made use of land cover maps showing vegetation change over the past 11,000 years, which were produced through the University of Plymouth's Deforesting Europe project.

Scientists working on that project have previously shown more than half of Europe's forests have disappeared over the past 6,000 years due to increasing demand for agricultural land and the use of wood as a source of fuel.

Dr Jessie Woodbridge, Research Fellow at the University of Plymouth and co-author on the study, added: "European landscapes have been transformed drastically over thousands of years. Knowledge of how people interacted with their environment in the past has implications for understanding the way in which people use and impact upon the world today. Collaboration with palaeogeneticists has allowed the migration of human populations in the past to be tracked using ancient DNA, and for the first time allowed us to assess the impact of different farming populations on land-cover change, which provides new insights into past human-environment interactions."

(Source: Science Daily)

Medical services free of charge for coronavirus patients in Iran

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Health Minister Saeed Namaki has instructed medical university chancellors across the country that medical services for coronavirus patients should be free of charge, IRNA reported on Sunday.

He also emphasized that patients who are not under insurance coverage or are

underprivileged and also foreign nationals should not pay for the healthcare services and the costs will be compensated by the national health insurance system.

The total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran has reached 58,226, of whom 3,603 have died and 22,011 recovered, Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Sunday.



COVID-19 crisis: washing hands for 20 seconds, not wasting water for 20 seconds

1 → Emphasizing the need for regular hand washing to prevent the infection, he noted that these days it is recommended to wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, but not to waste water for 20 seconds.

He went on to say that a glass of water is enough to wash the hands properly, emphasizing on the multiplication of water consumption following the outbreak of the coronavirus.

Waste management must be a priority

Darvish went on to say that lack of proper waste management has caused leachate to enter water reservoirs and cause the qualitative decline of surface and groundwater resources.

Credits spent on dam construction should be allocated to waste management, because the water contamination is serious, highlighting that masks, gloves, and plastic bags should be packed separately and labeled "sanitary waste".

Municipalities should also use separate vehicles for hazardous waste so that it is possible to recycle dry waste and produce compost from wet waste, he recommended.

He also explained that waste is a national asset that we should not easily lose; these days, as the use of detergents increases, we can use environmentally friendly detergents, adding, of course, the manufacturers of these detergents need government support.

Detergents can be harmful

Until recently, it was widely believed that antiseptics do not cause any harm, and do not affect human health or the environment. However, after conducting numer-



ous studies and tests, some of their risks which can be caused by the excessive use of household antiseptics have emerged.

Moreover, a recent American study has revealed a major surprise that might make using antiseptics a real public health hazard. The study revealed that they help to create advanced types of germs and bacteria that are difficult to eradicate, according to the Biblex website.

Excessive consumption of detergents is a risk factor for the environment in addition to water and soil resources; wastewater from these substances enters our life cycle and can come up with a health hazard, Mohammad

Khaleqi, head of Bojnourd department of environment told IRNA in March.

Soil erosion, a serious environmental challenge

Considering soil erosion to be the most important environmental challenge in the country, Darvish said that unfortunately, deforestation has increased the rate of flood and soil erosion.

Some 2 billion tons of soil is eroded annually in the country while producing a centimeter of rich soil lasts for 800 years, he lamented.

Referring to Iran's soil erosion rates being above the global average, he stated that the destruction of forests and soil erosion endangers biodiversity, especially the Hyrcanian forest species such as beech, hornbeam, chestnut-leaved oak, and maple are highly endangered.

Air pollution kills 35,000 people annually

Elsewhere in his remarks, Darvish said that air pollution is another environmental challenge, which claims 35,000 lives per year and costs billions of dollars.

He called education the first and best serious step in protecting the environment, noting that if the next generation is to protect the environment, they must be raised environmental enthusiasts so that nature schools can play a significant role.

"NGOs can pass on environmental research findings to the public," he suggested, concluding that universities also must care about the environment, and the media must produce and publish rich environmental content.

Coronavirus: Animals around the world benefit from drop in tourism

As the coronavirus pandemic spreads, lockdowns are extended and restrictions on global travel continue to tighten, one of the industries hit hardest by the lack of travelers has been animal tourism.

For many zoos and aquariums, the lack of guests has both opened up and forced them down new avenues. Some are now holding live streams for the public, expanding interactions with zookeepers through spaces like Facebook Live, and allowing their permanent animal residents to check in on some of their longtime neighbors.

Elsewhere, whole swathes of animal industries dependent on global tourism have been thrust into crisis mode, and many animal conservation efforts are facing uncertainty with the unprecedented decline in human and animal movement alike, The Independent reported.

Natasha Daly, a writer for National Geographic who covers animal welfare, wildlife conservation and animal exploitation, says it's too soon to tell how conservation will be affected by the lack of tourism. But she's encouraged by the reality that for many people, humanity's relationship to nature is now in front of mind.

"This crisis has put the issues of the wildlife trade and the ways that people exploit animals for all sorts of things - it has thrust it into the



spotlight," Ms. Daly said. (Netflix's wildly popular documentary series Tiger King has only added to the attention.) "So, I think that maybe more people than ever are aware of some of the issues involved in the wildlife trade, just because it's dominated the headlines over the last few months."

That dominance has become especially notable on social media, where news of animals acting in never-before-seen ways has become a salve.

Posts about swans returning to Venetian canals and elephants passed out after drinking corn wine in the fields of China were showered with hundreds of thousands of likes, endorsing the idea that the lack of human activity had reversed the course of nature and given animals

a break from our disruptive ways.

The only problem with the feel-good stories is that they were fake. And Ms. Daly - the author of the piece debunking them - says that although she was heartened to see that people care, fake nature stories can be harmful to our understanding of how we can help going forward, no matter how good it feels in these troubling times.

"The bottom line is that these things we're cheering on must be true," she said.

There are plenty of posts that are. In one of the more heartwarming videos (with nearly 15 million views on Twitter), a pair of rockhopper penguins at the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago was shown wandering around the empty facility, interacting with various underwater exhibits and even waddling past the reception desk.

Meanwhile, at the Fort Worth Zoo, a Patagonian mara spent quality time with a trio of otters on the other side of the glass, and the Toronto Zoo shared a photo of donkeys and llamas getting up close and personal with a couple of polar bears.

Andrew Lentini, senior director of wildlife and science at the Toronto Zoo, says it's important that the animals still be able to do walkabouts as a part of their training and care, but many of them miss guest interaction and the joys of people-watching. "One of our oldest

residents here is an orangutan named Puppe who just loves to watch people and particularly loves children," Mr. Lentini said. "She'll often go right up to a mom and a young child. She just loves to watch them, and not having guests here, she misses that a little bit."

Mr. Lentini says the biggest change in day-to-day operations has been safeguarding the staff and maintaining precautions like social distancing for some of their animals, including the great apes, who may have a similar susceptibility to Covid-19 as humans.

With reopening pushed further down the calendar, Mr. Lentini says the zoo is focused on maintaining its mission to connect people with animals and its dedication to conservation science. The zoo has received positive feedback from its social media outreach and online programs, such as a virtual zoo school. Mr. Lentini says his goal, with the zoo's continuing work, is to give people hope.

"It's not business as usual," he said. "We rely on our guests to really help support the zoo, not just in our mission but also through their attendance here. So, without that, we're making some changes to really control our spending - just spending on essential items that are critical for our operation - and we'll continue to adapt as this goes on."

(Source: Washington Post)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

‘City-friendly schools’ scheme launched in Tehran

The “city-friendly schools” scheme was launched in the capital to promote environmental protection and urban development issues among students, ISNA reported on Wednesday. Mojtaba Daneshvar, director general of citizenship education at Tehran Municipality, said that the project covers more than 550 schools, consisting of 160,000 students. It aims to familiarize students with the rights and duties of citizens, the environment, waste, transportation and traffic, safety and security, crisis management, he explained. The training programs will be in the form of workshops, role plays, cultural and educational camps, production of educational content such as books, brochures and posters, he concluded.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“agro-, agri-, agr-”

■ **Meaning:** soil or field

■ **For example:** The workshop presents information on sustainable **agricultural** systems.

PHRASAL VERB

Hand something down

■ **Meaning:** to give or leave something to people who will live after you

■ **For example:** The ring was handed down to her from her grandmother.

IDIOM

Broad strokes

■ **Explanation:** if something is described or defined with/in broad strokes, it is outlined in a very general way, without any details

■ **For example:** “In a few broad strokes he summed up the situation.”

آغاز طرح "مدارس دوستدار شهر" در تهران

طرح «مدارس دوستدار شهر» با هدف آشنا کردن دانش آموزان با حقوق و تکالیف شهروندی، محیط زیست و پسماند، حمل و نقل و ترافیک، و ایمنی و مدیریت بحران در مدارس منتخب شهر تهران آغاز شد.

به گزارش ایسنا مجتبی دانشور، مدیرکل آموزش‌های شهروندی شهرداری تهران، گفت این طرح بیش از ۵۵۰ مدرسه شامل ۱۶۰ هزار دانش‌آموز را در بر می‌گیرد.

برنامه‌های آموزشی این طرح در قالب برگزاری کارگاه‌های آموزشی، تولید محتوای آموزشی در قالب کتاب، بروشور و پوستر، اجرای نمایش و برگزاری اردوهای فرهنگی و آموزشی خواهد بود.

Prophet Muhammad’s advice against contagious diseases

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The coronavirus epidemic has made the governments and media to raise public awareness by providing the most accurate tips to prevent disease transmission, while the prophet of Islam, Muhammad (PBUH), had suggested good hygiene and quarantining some 1,400 years ago.

“Those with contagious diseases should be kept away from those who are healthy,” according to the prophet. He also strongly encouraged human beings to adhere to hygienic practices that would keep people safe from infection.

Moreover, “cleanliness is part of faith,” and “the blessings of food lie in washing hands before and after eating.”



Perhaps most importantly, he knew when to balance faith with reason. In recent weeks, some have gone so far as to suggest that prayer would be better at keeping you from the coronavirus than adhering to basic rules of social distancing and quarantine. How would Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) respond to the idea of prayer as the chief—or only—a form of medicine?

Consider the following story, related to us by ninth-century Persian scholar Al-Tirmidhi: One day, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) noticed a Bedouin man leaving his camel without tying it. He asked the Bedouin, “Why don't you tie down your camel?” The Bedouin answered, “I put my trust in God.” The Prophet then said, “Tie your camel first, then put your trust in God,” according to an article released by AhlulBayt news agency.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) encouraged people to seek guidance in their religion, but he hoped they take basic precautionary measures for the stability, safety and well-being of all.

In other words, he hoped people would use their common sense.

‘Largest ever’ hole in ozone layer opens over North Pole

A hole has opened in the ozone layer above the Arctic and looks set to become the largest on record for the region.

Maps of the Arctic Hemisphere from NASA's Ozone Watch, created with satellite data, show the hole growing in size from late last year until now.

The hole looks set to break up in the coming weeks but not before setting a new record in ozone layer depletion at the North Pole.

“From my point of view, this is the first time you can speak about a real ozone hole in the Arctic,” Martin Dameris, an atmospheric scientist at the German Aerospace Center, told Nature.

The ozone layer is a protective shield in the Earth's stratosphere which absorbs some of the ultraviolet radiation reaching us from the sun. Without the ozone layer, it would be nearly impossible for anything to survive on the planet.

In Antarctica, the thickness of the ozone changes with the season. The freezing winters lead to high-altitude clouds combining with ozone-damaging chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), that have been lingering in the atmosphere for decades, to thin out the layer.

The North Pole region is different, where the weather is typically warmer and doesn't create high-altitude clouds, The Independent reported.

This year, unusually cold temperatures and powerful winds formed a “polar vortex” in the Arctic, creating the frigid conditions that have led to a vast ozone depletion, about three times the size of Greenland.

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WORDS IN THE NEWS

Clearing up the rubbish in Baghdad

(May 21, 2003)

The American-led post-war authority in Iraq has been severely criticised over delays in restoring security and basic services in Baghdad. They have announced a major cleanup of the rubbish lying on the city's streets.

The streets of Baghdad are **littered** with **putrefying** mounds of rubbish that have been accumulating since the collapse of **municipal** services in March, with the arrival of **coalition forces**. I'm standing by a massive mound right now, with tin cans, boxes, **unidentifiable material** and flies buzzing around everywhere. And across Baghdad there are hundreds of thousands of cubic metres of rubbish, and this is proving to be an increasingly serious **health hazard**. The colonel in charge of the rubbish clearing operation, Keith Schollom, told me this was **literally** a mountain of a problem to be dealing with.

“There was an estimated sixty thousand tonnes of waste that piled up since the system closed down during the war. Now, don't forget **on top of that** you've still got the day-to-day waste being generated so it's an ongoing problem.”

Clearing the rubbish is important but many Baghdadis say there's still little sign of the Americans tackling the more **vital** issues of improving security and fully restoring electricity and water supplies.

Words

littered: scattered (here the substance that is scattered is litter, so the word has extra significance)

putrefying: decay or rot and produce a fetid smell

municipal: town

coalition forces: the British and American armies

unidentifiable material: a substance that is impossible to recognize

health hazard: danger to health

literally: here used to indicate that the word is being used in its most basic sense, as well as in the metaphorical sense

on top of that: as well as that

vital: very important

(Source: BBC)

Answering Ayatollah Sistani's call, Iraqis support those in need amid coronavirus outbreak

Thousands of people across Iraq have begun a full-fledged campaign to support those in need in the Arab country following a call by the country's most prominent Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani to help the people, irrespective of their race or religion, amid the deadly novel coronavirus pandemic.

Social media activists reported that volunteers have gathered in mosques and congregation halls in the capital Baghdad, the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala, the port city of Basra and elsewhere in the country to keep low-income families supplied with food, Press TV reported on Sunday.

People deliver food to the poor and seniors safely, as they are at greater risk of serious illness from COVID-19, making sure they're not left on their own.

On Friday, the Iraqi Health Ministry announced in a statement that there were 820 confirmed cases of infection with novel coronavirus and 54 deaths in the country.

Out of the 48 cases confirmed during the past 24 hours, five were recorded in Baghdad, 12 in the southern province of Dhi Qar, 11 in the Kurdish-populated eastern city of Sulaymaniyah, nine in Najaf, four in Basra, three in Erbil, one in the provinces of Kirkuk, Muthanna, Babil and Anbar each, the statement noted.

No deaths were registered during the day. Separately, Ahmed al-Sahaf, spokesman of the Iraqi Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the total number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 among Iraqi expatriates has reached 161, of whom seven have died.

Sahaf added that the highest number of the total infected cases outside the country was in Norway with 37 cases followed by Sweden, where 22 Iraqi nationals have contracted the virus.

Planned \$1 billion U.S. aid cut would hit Afghan security force funds

A planned \$1 billion cut in U.S. aid to Afghanistan would come from funds for Afghan security forces, according to three U.S. sources, a step experts said would undercut both Kabul's ability to fight the Taliban and its leverage to negotiate a peace deal with them.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the reduction on March 23 and threatened to slash the same amount next year to try to force Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and his political rival Abdullah Abdullah to end a feud that has helped stall U.S.-led peace-making efforts in Afghanistan.

After nearly 20 years of fighting the Taliban, the United States is looking for a way to extricate itself and to achieve peace between the U.S.-backed government and the militant group, which controls more than 40% of Afghan territory.

Pompeo and other U.S. officials have declined to publicly detail how the cut would be made. The State Department declined to comment on its plans.

Two U.S. congressional aides, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter, said State Department officials told Congress the \$1 billion would come from a \$4.2 billion Pentagon fund that underwrites about three quarters of the Afghan security forces' annual budget.

"The idea they would cut security forces funding goes against U.S. national security interests," said one aide, arguing the money is needed to maintain the U.S.-backed government's ability to fight the Taliban while preserving its bargaining power in peace talks.

Most of the fund pays for salaries, food, fuel, equipment and infrastructure to support Afghan troops and national police.

Congress appropriated at least \$86.4 billion for Afghan security assistance between fiscal years 2002 and 2019, according to a March 11 Congressional Research Service report.

"That's the only fund large enough to support a \$1 billion cut," said the third source, a former U.S. military official who also requested anonymity.

U.S. civilian aid is far lower, with the State Department requesting \$532.8 million this year, mainly for general economic support as well as for counter-narcotics and law enforcement.

(Source: Reuters)

Sunny weather tempts Europe; UK queen urges self-discipline

As warm, sunny weather beckoned across Europe, Queen Elizabeth II appealed to Britons on Sunday to exercise self-discipline in "an increasingly challenging time" as the country saw a record 24-hour jump in coronavirus deaths that even outpaced the daily toll in hard-hit Italy.

Britain recorded 708 new coronavirus deaths, bringing its overall toll to 4,313 as infections rose past 42,000, while Italy reported 631 deaths. Those coming down with the virus in the U.K. include Prime Minister Boris Johnson, the health secretary, England's chief medical official and Prince Charles, heir to the British throne.

There are wide fears that Johnson's Conservative government did not take the virus seriously enough at first and that lovely weather will tempt Britons and others to break social distancing rules.

In an address to the nation to be televised later Sunday, the 93-year-old queen said the pandemic had caused enormous disruptions, bringing grief, financial difficulties and daunting challenges to everybody. It was only the fourth time since her reign began in 1953 that she has given such an address.

"I hope in the years to come everyone will be able to take pride in how they responded to this challenge," she said in pre-released remarks. "And those who come after us will say that the Britons of this generation were as strong as any."

The queen's son, Charles, on Friday remotely opened a vast temporary hospital for corona patients in a London convention center after completing a week of isolation. Johnson as of Friday still had a fever but his infected pregnant fiancée, Carrie Symonds, tweeted she is "on the mend" after a week in bed.

As the sun shone and the temperatures rose toward 20 degrees Celsius (68 degrees Fahrenheit), Health Secretary Matt Hancock said sunbathing in public places was not allowed and the U.K. might even ban outdoor exercise if people still "flout the rules."

"The vast majority of people are following the public health advice, which is absolutely critical, and staying at home," Hancock told Sky TV. "But there are a small minority of people who are still not doing that - it's quite unbelievable, frankly, to see that."

Restrictions vary from country to country. In Germany and Britain, residents can get out to exercise and walk their dogs, as well as go to the supermarket, the post office and other essential tasks. Yet in Serbia and South Africa, dog walking is not allowed.

(Source: AP)

PMU anti-terror forces vow to end U.S. 'occupation' of Iraq

Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), better known by their Arabic name Hashd al-Sha'abi, have blasted the U.S. forces based in their country as "occupiers", pledging to bring the occupation of the Arab country to an end.

In a joint statement on Saturday, Hashd al-Sha'abi groups said from now on the U.S. troops in the Arab country will be dealt with as "occupation forces".

The statement cited the U.S. refusal to withdraw its forces from Iraq and its "continued aggression" against the country as the reasons for their decision.

"You have proven to everyone that you are occupation forces and that you only respect the language of force; on these bases you will be dealt with as occupiers," the statement reads.

It also said that the Iraqi resistance forces' military operations are a basic response to the U.S. aggression, Press TV reported.

"Be aware that all operations which have been carried out against you so far were only a minor response to your aggressions as the decision to carry out operations [against U.S. forces] had not been taken back then," it added.



They stressed that the recent U.S. threats to target the resistance forces are aimed at covering up their own failures.

The statement was signed by Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, Kata'ib al-Imam Ali, Harakat al-Awfya, Saraya Ashura, Harakat

Jund al-Imam, and Saraya al-Khurasani.

In late March, the other PMU group Kata'ib Hezbollah blew the lid off a plot by the U.S. military to carry out massive aerial operations — backed by ground troops — against bases of the elite anti-terror force, which is currently busy helping the government in the fight

Trump: 'Going to be a lot of death' in U.S. next week from coronavirus

Man shot dead in Philippines for flouting coronavirus rules

U.S. President Donald Trump told Americans to brace for a big spike in coronavirus fatalities in the coming days, as the country faces what he called the toughest two weeks of the pandemic.

"There's going to be a lot of death," Trump said at a briefing with reporters.

He pushed back on criticism that the federal government has not done enough to get ventilators that many critically ill coronavirus patients need to survive to the states, saying some governors are asking for more machines than they will need, Reuters reported.

"Fears of shortages have led to inflated requests," Trump said of submissions his administration has received to dole out equipment from the strategic national stockpile.

The United States has the world's highest number of known cases of COVID-19, the flu-like respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus. More than 306,000 people have tested positive in the United States and over 8,300 have died, according to a Reuters tally.

White House medical experts have forecast that between 100,000 to 240,000 Americans could be killed in the pandemic, even if sweeping orders to stay home are followed.

"We are coming up to a time that is going to be very horrendous," Trump said at the

White House. "We probably have never seen anything like these kind of numbers. Maybe during the war, during a World War One or Two or something."

■ 'Like a fire'

In the grimmest day yet for the U.S. state hit hardest by the pandemic, coronavirus-related illnesses killed 630 people in the last 24 hours in New York state, Governor Andrew Cuomo said on Saturday.

The disease has now killed 3,565 people in New York and the situation is particularly worrying on Long Island, east of New York City, where the number of cases "is like a fire spreading," Cuomo told a news conference.

Health experts calculate that New York, home both to bustling Manhattan and hilly farm country stretching to the Canadian border, might be around a week away from the worst point in the health crisis which has killed about 60,000 people worldwide.

■ Man shot dead in Philippines

In a tragic event, a 63-year-old man was shot dead in the Philippines after threatening village officials and police with a scythe at a coronavirus checkpoint, police said on Saturday.

The man is believed to have been drunk when he threatened village officials and police manning the checkpoint in the town of



Nasipit in the southern province of Agusan del Norte, a police report said.

"The suspect was cautioned by a village health worker ... for not wearing a face mask," the report said. "But the suspect got angry, uttering provoking words and eventually attacked the personnel using a scythe."

According to al Jazeera, the suspect was shot dead by a police officer who was trying to pacify him.

The incident is the first reported case of police shooting a civilian for refusing to follow restrictions to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus.

against a new coronavirus pandemic.

The PMU statement was concluded with a message to the Iraqi people, in which the resistance groups vowed that they will not let the U.S. occupy the country and rob its resources.

The statement comes in line with earlier calls by the Iraqi Parliament and military for all foreign troops to leave the Arab country as soon as possible.

Iraqi lawmakers unanimously approved a bill on January 5, demanding the withdrawal of all foreign military forces led by the United States from the country following the assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, along with Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy head of the PMU, and their companions in a U.S. airstrike authorized by President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport two days earlier.

Since then, the U.S.-led coalition has handed over to the Iraqi army a number of bases it had occupied in the Arab country. However, it has also deployed further military equipment, including C-RAM systems and Patriot missile defense systems, to protect its remaining forces in the country.

■ Duterte's warning

President Rodrigo Duterte had warned on Wednesday he would order the police and the military to shoot anyone who created trouble.

"Follow the government at this time because it is critical that we have order," he said in a late-night televised national address.

"And do not harm the health workers, the doctors ... because that is a serious crime. My orders to the police and the military, if anyone creates trouble, and their lives are in danger: shoot them dead."

(Source: agencies)

Warring sides accuse each other as blast hits oil pipeline in Yemen

An oil pipeline pumping station has been attacked in the central Yemeni province of Ma'rib, with the country's warring sides blaming each other for the incident.

Sources close to the Saudi-backed former regime in Yemen on Sunday accused Yemen's Houthi fighters of targeting the station, according to the Saudi state news agency (SPA).

Hussein al-Ezzi, an official in the capital Sana'a, said Saudi-backed militants had attacked the Kofel pumping station in what he described as a dangerous escalation.

The pipeline is operated by Saudi-backed Safer oil company but no oil has been pumped through it for years.

Yemen's oil output has collapsed since 2015 when Saudi Arabia intervened in Yemen to try to restore the government of former president Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi to power after he resigned and later fled to Riyadh.

Yemen's armed forces are seeking to liberate Ma'rib after taking control of the neighboring strategic province of al-Jawf, which borders Saudi Arabia.

The Yemeni ground advancements come amid clashes between UAE-backed southern separatists and Saudi-led mercenaries in Aden.

On Friday, the former governor of Yemen's southwestern Ta'izz province said that the United Arab Emirates is manipulating the demographic composition of the province to weaken pro-Saudi forces, exposing further rift in the Saudi-led coalition.

"Forces affiliated to the UAE have rented certain homes in the coastal areas of Ta'izz and are financially supporting certain individuals who seek to overthrow the [Saudi-installed] government," Ali al-Moamari was cited by Al-Jazeera as saying.

The UAE joined Saudi Arabia in 2015 in the war seeking to install the pro-Saudi former president Hadi and crush the Yemeni popular Ansarullah movement.

However, with the Saudi-led campaign being brought to a standstill due to the Yemeni resistance, widening rifts have emerged between Saudi-led mercenaries loyal to Hadi and UAE-affiliated forces.

Tensions reached a climax last summer when months of bloody infighting broke out, resulting in heavy casualties between the two sides before a power-sharing settlement was signed in November.

London-based al-Araby al-Jadeed newspaper reported

that a booby-trapped explosion targeted Saudi-backed forces in Aden on Sunday.

The attack occurred when a convoy of Saudi armored vehicles was on its way from Aden international airport to the headquarters of coalition forces.

No casualties were reported, but the blast destroyed a Saudi armored vehicle.

The paper said that the attack was the first military action against Saudi forces since they were replaced by Emirati forces in October.

No individual or group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Both the UAE-sponsored separatists and the Saudi-backed militants loyal to Hadi serve the Riyadh-led military coalition and have been engaged in a bloody war on Yemeni people since March 2015.

Ties between the two sides have soured over a number of issues, including what the Yemenis view as the UAE's intention to occupy Yemen's strategic Socotra Island and gain dominance over major waterways in the region.

(Source: press TV)

9 people, 3 Indian soldiers killed in Kashmir fighting



■ New Kashmir domicile law, raising fears of demographic manipulation

Meanwhile, India has introduced a new law that would make its citizens eligible to become permanent residents of the Indian-administered Kashmir, raising fears of demographic change

in the Muslim-majority, Himalayan region.

According to Press TV, the new law, which was announced by the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs on Wednesday and which reportedly is not subject to parliamentary review, will deem any person who has resided in the Indian-con-

trolled Kashmir for a period of 15 years or studied at certain school grades there as "domicile" of the territory.

The new law will also provide domicile status to the children of central government officials who have served in the Indian-controlled Kashmir for a total period of 10 years.

It will also open local jobs to non-residents.

The introduction of the law comes almost eight months after the Indian government stripped the disputed region of its limited autonomy. On August 5 last year, New Delhi revoked Article 370, a constitutional provision that had come into effect in 1949 and had granted special status to Kashmir, allowing it to have its own flag and constitution, among other rights.

In the lead-up to the revocation, India sent thousands of additional troops to the disputed region, imposed a curfew, arrested political leaders, and shut down telecommunication lines.

Residents in the Indian-controlled Kashmir fear that the new law would alter the demographic status of the region, with experts saying it will lead to "demographic flooding."

AFC does not recognize the new Acting Secretary General of FFIRI

By Farrokh Hesabi

TEHRAN — The appointment of the new Acting Secretary General of the Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) has triggered a new controversy.

Last week, Mehdi Mohammad Nabi was named as the Acting Secretary General of the FFIRI, replacing Ebrahim Shakouri, who had started his work in December 2018.

However, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) sent a letter to FFIRI about the violation of the provisions of the FFIRI Statutes in the process of appointing the new Acting Secretary General.

In the letter sent by the AFC, it is mentioned that concerning Article 34.1 of FFIRI Statutes, "President shall compile the agenda. The agenda must be sent out to all members of the Executive Committee at least seven days before the meeting."

But it seems that the members of Executive Committee were not informed about the agenda nor invited to the meeting.

"AFC has been informed by credible sources that the members of the Executive Committee were not sent the invitation, agenda and other supporting documents before the so-called Executive Committee meeting," the letter read.

The growing disagreement between the members of the FFIRI Executive Committee in recent months has divided them over the proper implementation of the Statutes provisions.

Some of the effects of such a divide can be seen in the issue of the appointment of the new Acting Secretary General.

The AFC, in its letter, also insisted that, according to the FFIRI Statutes 'General Secretary shall take part in the meetings of the Executive Committee with the role of a secretary without a right to vote. The AFC



has received confirmation that Mr. Ebrahim Shakouri was neither informal nor did he take part in the so-called Executive Committee Meeting on 26 Mardi 2020.'

Ebrahim Shakouri, in an interview with the Iranian state-run TV, confirmed his absence from the meeting.

"I was not present in the last meeting of the Executive Committee because I didn't know when the meeting would take place," he said.

Another problematic matter is related to

Mehdi Mohammad Nabi, who was a member of Persepolis Board of Directors at the time of the Executive Committee Meeting/Appointment. According to the AFC, it 'contradicts with the Article 60.2.6 of the FFIRI Statutes'.

The AFC has clearly stated that certain provisions of the FFIRI Statutes have been violated prior to the appointment of Mr. Mehdi Mohammed Nabi as the new Acting General Secretary.

"Hence, we would like to re-iterate AFC's firm position that we will continue

to recognize Mr. Ebrahim Shakouri as the Acting General Secretary of the FFIRI," the letter said.

Now, there is one football federation with two acting Secretary General! To put an end to this bizarre situation, the FFIRI must adhere to all the procedures mentioned in the statutes for the appointment of a new General Secretary or Acting General Secretary to avoid any further compliant and legal challenge and to protect the integrity of the appointment.

Former Nassaji, Sanat Naft striker Founeke Sy passes away

PLDC — Ex-forward of Iranian football teams Nassaji Mazandaran and Sanat Naft Abadan Founeke Sy has reportedly died in a car accident.

Founeke Sy died at the age of 33.

The Malian striker also played in Iranian football club Iran-javan Bushehr.

In Sanat Naft, he scored 20 goals in 2011-12 season in Iran Professional League.

He scored a hat-trick against Persepolis, where the Abadan based football team won the match 3-1.

He made 31 appearances for Mali national football team and was on target seven times.

Amir Ghalenoei linked with Esteghlal: report

Tasnim — Sepahan coach Amir Ghalenoei has been linked with a move to Esteghlal football team.

Ghalenoei's current deal with Sepahan runs out in the summer and the Isfahan-based football club is reportedly reluctant to pen new contract with the coach.

Iranian media reports suggest that Ghalenoei will replace Farhad Majidi as Esteghlal coach in the next season.

Ghalenoei is the most decorated Iranian coach and has won five Iran Professional League titles with Esteghlal and Sepahan but he has not won any title since 2013.

East Bengal signs Iranian winger Omid Singh

Omid Singh, who currently plays in the Persian Gulf Pro League, has signed a two-year contract with the Kolkata giant.



I-League side East Bengal has roped in Iranian winger Omid Singh on a two-year deal.

Senior club official Debabrata Sarkar confirmed the development to Sportstar on Sunday, saying, "Yes, he has already signed with us and has penned a two-year deal." The transfer fee remains undisclosed.

The 29-year-old currently plays for Naft Masjed Soleyman FC in the Persian Gulf Pro League.

Omid, whose father hails from Punjab and holds an Indian passport, made headlines in India last year when he said he was willing to give up his Iranian passport to play for the Indian national team. India coach Igor Stimac had also reportedly shown a keen interest in the left-winger.

"I liked to play for Iran national football team, but I was not invited to Team Melli. At the moment, Iran are one of the best teams in Asia and it's hard to be part of the team. Mr Stimac called me and I accepted to play for India," Omid had told Tehran Times last July, around the time of the Intercontinental Cup.

"I am not familiar with the Indian football team but I know that they have progressed a lot in recent years. David James, Robert Pires, Nicolas Anelka, Roberto Carlos and Zico have played in Indian league in the past years," he added.

East Bengal is currently second on the I-League table with 23 points from 16 matches. Mohun Bagan has already won the title and holds a 13-point lead, with the I-League currently suspended owing to the coronavirus pandemic.

(Source: Sports Star)

Iran president extends postponement of sports activities until April 18



SPORTS TEHRAN — Iran's president Hassan Rouhani said on Sunday the sports activity would be extended to April 18 in the Middle Eastern country due to the coronavirus. Iran Sports Medicine Federation and Ministry of Sport and Youth had already called off sports activities until early April. Sporting activities across the world have

come to a grinding halt due to COVID-19 pandemic which has claimed more than 50,000 lives so far.

The health ministry said on Saturday that the Islamic Republic's death toll had reached 3,452 among a total of 55,743 infected people.

The daily toll has been rising by at least 100.

Machine Sazi transfer ban confirmed



SPORTS TEHRAN — The Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) has confirmed that Machine Sazi are banned from signing any new players for the next three transfer windows.

The sanction comes after the Iranian club were found guilty for failing to pay salary of Brazilian players Luciano Pereira

Mendes and Fernando de Jesus Ribeiro.

Mendes, who currently plays in Iranian club Foolad, was named the best topscorer of Iran Professional League (IPL) with 16 goals last season. Fernando also is goal-keeper of Iran's pars Jonoubi.

Machine Sazi sit 9th in Iran Professional League table with 24 points from 21 matches.

The world's only Cup winners: Istiklol overrun Khujand in Super Cup

With the world watching, FC Istiklol came from behind to beat FC Khujand 2-1 in the Tajikistan Super Cup at Central Republican Stadium on Saturday.

Khujand, who finished 15 points adrift of Istiklol last season, threatened to cause an upset when they took the lead through a second-minute strike from on-loan FC Bunyodkor forward Sanjar Rikhsiboev, but two goals in two minutes from Manuchehr Dzhalilov and Muhammadjon Rakhimov settled the tie in the Dushanbe club's favor.

With nearly all of the world's football leagues shut down due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, the match proved popular with fans from around the globe, with thousands tuning in to watch it via a live stream.

Perennial champions in Tajikistan, and coached by former Khujand boss Vitaliy Levchenko, Istiklol came into the match as strong favorites, boasting a side which featured several key players from the Tajikistan national team.

But it was the visitors who struck first, with new arrival Rikhsiboev latching onto a direct pass before beating Tajikistan international goalkeeper Rustam Yatimov at his near post.



Istiklol responded to the challenge, keeping Khujand pinned back in their own half and almost equaling with a vicious long-range effort from reigning Tajikistan Player of the Year Alisher Dzhalilov, but Khujand reached the interval with their lead intact.

Levchenko introduced newly-signed Turkmenistan striker Vahyt Orazsahedov after the break, but it was Dzhalilov — the scorer of both goals against Khujand in the AFC Cup last month — who made the crucial contribution with a 78th minute equalizer.

Dzhalilov, Tajikistan's all-time top international goal scorer, showed he remains a lethal finisher, seizing on Khujand's inability to clear Tabrezi Davlatmir's cross by slamming the ball home from 12 yards.

Istiklol were in front just two minutes later, with Rakhimov expertly bringing down a long ball from Russian recruit Viktor Svezhov before prodding the ball beyond former PFC Lokomotiv shot stopper Mamur Ikramov to make it 2-1 with 10 minutes remaining.

Khujand pushed forward in search of a late equalizer, but an off-target volley from Dilshod Bozorov represented their last chance, leaving Istiklol to celebrate a third successive Super Cup title, and a ninth in 11 years.

The Tajikistan Football League gets underway with three matches on Sunday, with Istiklol and Khujand to begin their respective campaigns on Wednesday.

(Source: the-afc)

Diabate among signings who have lit up West Asian leagues

Esteghlal striker Cheich Diabate is among four signings who have lit up West Asian leagues this season.

With well over half the season gone across West Asian leagues, the-afc.com looks at some of the signings from the summer of 2019 who have made the biggest impact this season.

While the likes of Driss Fettouhi at Al Hazem SC, Brandley Kuwas at Al Nasr SC and Karim Ansarifard at Al Saliyah all deserve honorary mentions in this category, but there are the four new ar-

rivals who have stood out this campaign.

The only player of the four to have already experienced Asian football before this season. Cheich Diabate came through the famous Salif Keita Academy in his native Mali before joining French side Bordeaux at the age of 18. There, he spent a decade, making over 120 appearances and scoring 50 goals.

A journey of five clubs in as many years took the towering striker to Turkey, Italy and the UAE where he played

the 2018-19 season at Emirates Club. His 10 goals in 19 appearances could not rescue the Ras Al Khaima-based club from relegation, and he was again on the move, this time joining Islamic Republic of Iran giants Esteghlal.

After a slow start, where he failed to find the back of the net for three months, Diabate burst into life with a hat-trick against Tractor. He has since added five more, taking his tally to eight goals in his first 13 matches at the club.

Diabate's first experience of football

in Asia saw him bag a brace in Esteghlal's 3-0 win over Kuwait SC in the preliminary round 2 of the 2020 AFC Champions League. He then opened the scoring in the 5-0 defeat of Al Rayyan in the play-off to guide his team into the group stage.

Youssef Niyakaté (Al Wehda SC - Saudi Arabia), Kodjo Laba (Al Ain FC - UAE) and Yacine Brahimi (Al Rayyan - Qatar) are three other players in the list.

(Source: the-afc)

Kyle Walker faces Man City probe after flouting virus lockdown

Kyle Walker is facing disciplinary action from Manchester City despite apologizing after breaching coronavirus lockdown conditions even though he advised people to stay at home.

The England defender has said sorry after it was widely reported he held a party at his home last week, breaking the government's rules on social distancing.

"I understand that my position as a professional footballer brings the responsibility of being a role model," Walker said in a statement.

"As such, I want to apologize to my family, friends, football club, supporters and the public for letting them down."

"There are heroes out there making a vital difference to society at the moment, and I have been keen to help support and highlight their amazing sacrifices and life-saving work over the past week."

Football is on hold due to the coronavirus outbreak and City will now look into Walker's conduct.

A club statement said: "Our staff and players have been working to support the incredible efforts of the NHS (National Health Service) and other key workers in fighting the effects of the COVID-19 coronavirus in any way we can. Kyle's actions in this matter have directly contravened these efforts."

"We are disappointed to hear the allegations, note Kyle's swift statement and apology, and will be conducting an internal disciplinary procedure in the coming days."

(Source: AFP)

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

He who accepts the opinions of the clear-sighted, will recognize mistakes and prevent them in time.

Imam Ali (AS)

Afghan immigrants in “Golshahr” struggle to halt coronavirus pandemic

➔ Despite the difficulties they have in exile, the group works with the Afghans fellows and Iranian families in the neighborhood, teaching them to be safe during quarantine time, Ehsani noted. They are also working with dozens of Iranian medical teams screening people to identify the cases of the coronavirus infection.



A scene from Iranian filmmaker Hossein Nejadmusa's documentary “Golshahr”.

Young Iranian filmmaker Hossein Nejadmusa has made “Golshahr” over two weeks during the home quarantine in Mashhad. “We did our best to follow the health protocols, but we couldn’t postpone the shooting as the subject of the documentary,” Ehsani said.

“The film will be ready in 10 days hopefully, and it will be broadcast on IRIB in the near future as a shorter version will also be available on social networks,” he concluded.

Oliver Stone tears into U.S. over Iran, Venezuela sanctions amid Covid-19 crisis

MOSCOW (RT) — The United States government has revealed its contempt for human compassion and global solidarity by refusing to lift draconian sanctions on Iran and Venezuela during the Covid-19 crisis, director Oliver Stone has argued.

Iran has suffered immensely from the virus, Stone noted in an op-ed published by the New York Daily News, but due to U.S. sanctions the Islamic Republic is “reportedly the only country in the world that cannot buy medicines needed to fight the pandemic.”



American filmmaker Oliver Stone. (Reuters/Mark Blinch)

The outspoken Hollywood legend similarly condemned Washington’s decision to maintain – and in some cases, increase – its economic chokeholds on countries such as Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua as coronavirus strains healthcare systems across the globe.

In the case of Venezuela, U.S. “coercion” led to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) denying the South American state’s request for a \$5 billion loan to help fight the pandemic, Stone contended.

The U.S. has ratcheted up its pressure on Caracas amid the global health crisis, accusing the government of drug trafficking and calling for a “transition government” to replace President Nicolas Maduro.

The award-winning filmmaker and activist said that the health crisis has shown the inhumanity of Washington’s foreign policy. Stone called for “serious moral self-reflection” in the U.S., warning that countless lives were at risk unless there is an “immediate change in course.”

Iran has registered nearly 3,500 Covid-19 deaths, with 19,700 confirmed cases, according to a tally maintained by Johns Hopkins University.

President Hassan Rouhani said last week that the crisis is “a great opportunity for Americans to apologize... and to lift the unjust and unfair sanctions on Iran.”

Number of e-book readers increasing during home quarantine

CULTURE DESK TEHRAN – FIDIBO, a major online Iranian store for audio and electronic books, has said e-book readers have significantly increased in number due to the home quarantine enforced following the coronavirus pandemic in the country.

Speaking to the Persian service of MNA on Sunday, FIDIBO Managing Director Neda Baradaran said the number of e-book readers has increased to four times higher than the number registered before the COVID-19 epidemic in the country in February.

“A large number of the readers have read our e-books due to the reading campaigns FIDIBO launched in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and several major publishing companies in early March,” she noted.

Baradaran said the FIDIBO has not considered the home quarantine a new opportunity to boost its activities and added, “Many of our books have been offered for free or at big discounts.”

She added that many of the books are in the Iranian publishers’ bestseller list.

Baradaran noted that the home quarantine forced many people to be acquainted with the FIDIBO services for the first time.

The shutdown of bookstores following the spread of COVID-19 across Iran has pushed many people into using online stores offering audiobooks and e-books.

In addition, there has been a huge increase in the number of Iranian users of streaming broadcast networks and online concerts after the shutdown of movie theaters and concerts over the coronavirus pandemic.



A design for e-books.

Iranian singers performing online concerts to entertain people in home quarantine



Rastak Music Band in an undated photo.

CULTURE DESK TEHRAN – A number of Iranian popular singers have organized online concerts to entertain people in home quarantine while all the music halls, cinema theaters and theater halls are on lockdown across the country amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Organized by the Tehran Municipality in collaboration with the Music Office of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the concerts are being performed in Tehran’s Milad Tower and being streamed on several Iranian video sharing and film streaming websites, including TVA, Aparat, Hashur and Icinema.

Singers Reza Yazdani, Ruzbeh Bem-

ani, Hamid Asgari, Reza Sadeqi, Sina Sarlak and Hamid Hami and music bands like Rastak, Juana and Gil-o-Amard are among the artists joining the program.

The online concerts have begun since March 27 and will continue until April 10.

Moreover, hundreds of Iranian artists launched the nationwide #Moshahonar movement to entertain people who stay home to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

The artists, including thespians, cineastes, painters, cartoonists and writers, announced that they would produce artworks to showcase on social networks for at least 100 days in order to make the stay at home almost tolerable.

Iranian plays streaming online amid coronavirus pandemic



A logo for theatrical performances.

TEHRAN – Theatergoers need no longer to stay in queues to watch plays in theater halls, they can sit on a couch at home and watch the plays virtually available at the Namayeshnet, the Iranian online theater platform.

Ten troupes performing at the theaters and several cultural centers in Tehran before the outbreak of coronavirus are scheduled to resume their performances, which be offered on the Namayeshnet platform, Namayeshnet director Saeid Noruzi said in a press release on Sunday.

The performances had been canceled due to the shutdown of the theaters and cultural centers in Tehran amid the coronavirus epidemic.

Namayeshnet is organizing the program

in collaboration with the Art and Cultural Organization of the Tehran Municipality, which has dedicated seven halls for the theater performances.

“We are also planning to make interviews with the actors and other crew members before the performances,” Noruzi noted.

Qader Ashena, the director of Iran’s Dramatic Arts Center, attended the first performance staged at the Tehran Theater Complex on Sunday evening.

All movie theaters across Iran have shut down over the spread of coronavirus that is also known as COVID-19. Iran has also canceled all art, cultural and cinematic events due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The performances are also available at mp4.ir, pishtazmovie.ir, and anten.ir.

Iranian narrator Bahareh Jahandoost recounts story from her life on intl. storytelling show

CULTURE DESK TEHRAN – Bahareh Jahandoost from Iran joined some world storytellers in the Bodies of Stories, a worldwide program, on Sunday to tell a true story from her life.

The Bodies of Stories has been organized by Canadian TV host and producer Brune Smith and was aired live on Zoom, a U.S.-based remote conferencing service that combines video conferencing, online meetings, chat, and mobile collaboration.

Jahandoost is a storyteller, a TV host for children’s

program, a theater director and a translator from Tehran.

She started her activities in naqqali, a dramatic style of storytelling dedicated to stories from Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh and other epic Persian stories, and has participated in several international events in different countries.

Among the storytellers participating in the program are Divya Lulla, who is originally from India but lives in Canada, David Rodriguez from San Francisco, Cattalyst from Toronto, Khun Khunaraksa from Sydney, Julie Soller from Los Angeles, and Will Clegg from New Jersey.



Bahareh Jahandoost is narrating a story in an undated photo.

“Old Man’s Heavy Sleep” to compete in Southeast Regional Film Festival

CULTURE DESK TEHRAN – “Old Man’s Heavy Sleep”, a short film by Iranian director Mostafa Rostampur, will be competing in the 3rd Southeast Regional Film Festival in the U.S. city of Jacksonville, the Iranian Youth Cinema Society has announced.

The film is about an old man who is abandoned by his family during the hard days of being old and lonely.

This year the festival is organized online. Featured productions will be displayed on the homepage of the festival starting May 20 with a link to their projects for the viewers.

All winners and runners up will be announced on May 30.



A scene from Iranian director Mostafa Rostampur’s short movie “Old Man’s Heavy Sleep”.

Actress-author Patricia Bosworth dies from coronavirus at 86

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Patricia Bosworth, an actress who once starred alongside Audrey Hepburn and later wrote biographies on several stars including Marlon Brando and Montgomery Clift, has died due to the coronavirus. She was 86.

Bosworth’s stepdaughter, Fia Hatsav, told The New York Times that pneumonia brought on by the virus was the cause of death. Bosworth died on Thursday in New York.

Bosworth played a nun opposite of Hepburn in the 1959 classic “The Nun’s Story.” Along with penning bios for Brando and Clift, she also wrote biographies on actress Jane Fonda and famed photographer Diane Arbus, who photographed Bosworth in a Greyhound bus advertisement.

Her biography on Arbus served as the base for the 2006 film “Fur: An Imaginary Portrait of Diane Arbus,” which starred Nicole Kidman.

Under the tutelage of Lee Strasberg, Bosworth studied acting at the Actors Studio alongside Marilyn Monroe, Paul Newman, Steve McQueen and Fonda. Bosworth worked on Broadway and starred in television shows including “Naked City” and “The Patty Duke.”

Bosworth turned her attention from acting to focus on a career in journalism as a successful editor and writer. She wrote for The New York Times and New York magazine, and was an editor for several publications including Screen Stars, McCall’s and contributed to Vanity Fair.