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Startups in full swing to combat coronavirus



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President Hassan Rouhani and Vice President for Science and Technology Sourena Sattari (L) pay visit on Monday, April 6, to an exhibition showcasing products for fighting coronavirus.

Non-oil GDP growth at 0.9% in last autumn: SCI

TEHRAN — Statistical Center of Iran has announced that the country's gross domestic product (GDP), excluding the oil sector, has registered a growth rate of 0.9 percent in the autumn of the past Iranian calendar year, Mehr news agency reported.

It is while last month the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati had put the GDP growth at 1.2 percent for the mentioned season, which is the third quarter of the Iranian year.

"The country's economic performance

shows that despite maximum pressure imposed by the U.S. sanctions, Iran's economy has achieved good results in the framework of the production boom strategy outlined by the leader of the Islamic Revolution", Hemmati wrote in an Instagram post at that time.

CBI put the growth for the country's agriculture, industry, construction, and services sectors at 7.8 percent, 7 percent, and 1.2 percent, respectively for the mentioned quarter.

Iraq PM-designate: Iranians not involved in govt. formation

Iraqi prime minister-designate Adnan al-Zurfi revealed on Saturday that he did not meet with new Iranian Revolutionary Guards Quds Force Commander Esmail Ghaani during his trip to Baghdad this week.

Speaking at a press conference in Baghdad attended, Zurfi revealed that he will send the government lineup to parliament and will await the legislature

to set a date to vote on it.

He rejected claims that his appointment was constitutionally flawed, vowing that he will fulfill his mission "to the end".

"Those opposed to the government can express their position at parliament alone," he added. "It is in our best interest to respect the sound rotation of power." →2

Tehran fully cooperating with IAEA, Russia says

TEHRAN — Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's ambassador to the Vienna-based international organizations, has said that Iran is fully cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"Despite the pandemic, #IAEA #verification and #monitoring activities in #Iran continue successfully. #Tehran provides all necessary cooperation. This

interaction helps neutralize unscrupulous speculations regarding the Iranian nuclear program," Ulyanov tweeted on Monday.

Ali Akbar Salehi, director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, has said that it is necessary that the IAEA not to listen to reports presented by spy agencies of countries hostile to Iran. →2

Toxicologist raises questions about origin of COVID-19

The military-industrial complex have been, for several decades, converting and harnessing microbes as "weapons of mass destruction" of people perceived to be their enemies, Romeo F. Quijano, a retired professor of the Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology from the University of the Philippines-Manila, has written in an analysis.

Quijano, in his analysis posted on April 4, has deeply reviewed different possibilities for the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, including the military laboratories' possible roles.

The novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) that is threatening modern civilization today is a disaster that was bound to happen mainly because of human folly, he says in the article posted on

the Information Clearing House website.

"This is an inevitable consequence of the dominance of a neoliberal, national security state doctrine with a military-industrial complex pushing for perpetual war and corporate globalization. This has devastated entire ecosystems, distorted medical science and disempowered communities."

Following is the text of the analysis titled "Origin of COVID-19: Ecological, Historical and Geopolitical Perspective":

This power elite doctrine is the root cause of the increasingly serious cases of emerging infectious diseases over the past 40 years or so—coinciding with the destruction of our ecosystem, gross disrespect of the intimate relationship between

humans and the environment, and the reductionist thinking about infectious diseases and health.

Despite the fact that scientific evidence clearly shows that viruses and other microbes are largely friends and have been playing a significant role in the evolution and survival of all life forms in our entire ecosystem, the power elite institutions and their agents have declared these microbes as mortal enemies that deserve to be eliminated.

Microbes and their elements are in fact essential components of the human biological entity and perform critical physiologic functions that maintain homeostasis and a robust immune system. Rather than cultivating harmony and co-existence, most humans have declared total war against them. →7

Iran starts clinical trial on effectiveness of coronavirus drug

By Maryam Qarehgozlou

TEHRAN — Iranian medical authorities have agreed on carrying out a clinical trial on the effectiveness of favipiravir, a drug originally used in Japan for the treatment of new types of influenza.

Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences has announced that a clinical trial began by Tehran's Masih Daneshvari hospital on Sunday aimed at determining favipiravir's effectiveness in treating patients infected with COVID-19.

Favipiravir, also known as Avigan, was developed by Fujifim Toyama Chemical in 2014 used for the treatment of new strains of influenza.

The announcement underlines that efforts for drug synthesis as well as the pharmaceutical formulation of favipiravir have been invested in Iran since early March and the drug will be

domestically produced in the country should the trial demonstrate its effectiveness in relieving symptoms caused by coronavirus.

Zhang Xinmin, director of China's National Center for Biotechnology Development, said on March 17 that favipiravir had shown encouraging outcomes in clinical trials in Wuhan and Shenzhen involving 340 patients.

He said those who were given the medicine in Shenzhen turned negative for the virus after a median of four days after becoming positive, while it took a median of 11 days for those without the drug, NHK reported.

"The trial also found that X-ray photos confirmed improvements in lung conditions in about 91 percent of the patients who were given the medicine. The number stood at 62 percent for those without the drug."

"It has a high degree of safety and is effective in treatment," Zhang highlighted.

According to the Mainichi, Japan's National Daily, Clinical research using favipiravir on novel coronavirus disease patients with mild to moderate symptoms began in March in the country, in the hope that the medication will be effective in preventing the virus from multiplying in patients' body.

Nevertheless, an individual related to Japan's Ministry of Health Labor and Welfare has said that "We've given Avigan to 70 to 80 people, but it doesn't seem to work that well when the virus has already multiplied."

Moreover, care is said to be needed when women who could be pregnant or men who are trying to have children, as it can subsequently cause deformities in fetuses. →9



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Antiseptic consignment dispatched to 20 provinces

Some 150,000 bottles of antiseptics, worth 10 billion rials (about \$2.8 million) were sent to 20 provinces of the country on Sunday.

The total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran reached 60,500 on Monday, of whom 3,739 have died and 24,236 recovered.

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

ARTICLE

Afshin Majlesi

Tehran Times Journalist

Susa, a top destination for history buffs

Part from what our goals for traveling could be, it lets us experience diverse wonders, cultures, history, foods and beauties from around the world. There's history everywhere, but history buffs do love specific destinations.

The UNESCO-registered Susa, which is situated in southwest of modern Iran, is one of such destinations for good reason. It was one of the city-states of ancient Elam (2700 – 539 BC), which later became a winter capital of the Persian Achaemenid kings, who ruled Iran from c. 550 to 330 BC. Elam was an ancient country in southwestern Iran approximately equivalent to the modern region of Khuzestan province.

Part of Susa is still inhabited as Shush on a strip of land between the rivers Shaur (a tributary of the Karkheh) and Dez.

Archaeological evidence suggests that Susa has been continuously inhabited from 4,200 BC placing it among the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. In addition, there are traces at Susa of a village inhabited around 7,000 BC and painted pottery dating from ca. 5,000 BC at the site.

The archaeological site includes the ruins of the Achaemenid palace complex of Darius I, the Great, and is located on a fifteen meter high artificial raised 100-hectare terrace. It has suffered greatly in the past seventy years.

Susa became part of the Persian Empire under Cyrus II, the Great in 538 or 539 BC. During the balance of Achaemenian period (to 330 BC), Susa functioned as one of the rotating capitals (a winter capital) of the Achaemenian Kings.

It is said that Alexander of Macedonia captured Susa in 330 BC and plundered the city, seizing some 40,000 talents of gold and silver from the treasury.

According to UNESCO, "the excavated architectural monuments include administrative, residential, and palatial structures" and the site contains several layers of urban settlement dating from the 5th millennium BC through the 13th century CE.

Relics unearthed from the region demonstrates that even the earliest potteries and ceramics in Susa were of unsurpassed quality, decorated with birds, mountain goats, and other animals designs. →8

REPORT

Salman Parviz

Tehran Times Journalist

Repatriation of Indian pilgrims, students in Qom ongoing

Thousands of travelers have been stranded throughout the world unable to return back to their country of origin due to flight cancellations and border restrictions amid Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. This is the story of more than 1,200 Indian pilgrims and seminary students stranded in the holy city of Qom during the Nowruz holidays.

"There are over 6,000 Indian nationals in various provinces of Iran. These include about 1,100 pilgrims mainly from the Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir and the State of Maharashtra; nearly 300 students primarily from the UT of Jammu and Kashmir; about 1000 fishermen, including from Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat," Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar said early March.

"Given the large number of Indians in Iran, it was natural that we should seek to sequence their return, taking into account their location and exposure. The initial focus is on visiting pilgrims. Many of them are in Qom, where Coronavirus incidence has been strong. The nature of their residency also increases the risks of exposure", added Jaishankar.

Iran was among the worst impacted countries in the world in terms of the COVID-19 outbreak. Since the first two cases were announced on February 19 in Qom, the number has swelled country-wide. Hence the return of these pilgrims and students became a priority for the Indian High Commission and Iranian officials.

Before the arrangement for the departure of some 1,200 pilgrims and students, they had to be tested for COVIC-19 infection. For this purpose, a six-member medical team was dispatched to Iran by the Indian Council of Medical Research on March 5, to run a medical lab and test the stranded Indian citizens for infection. A wellness center was established where the medical team conducted tests on the Indian citizens and at least 255 had tested positive for COVID-19. →7

Leader agrees to use 1b euro from national fund to contain coronavirus

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

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

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

Iran: China leading fight against COVID-19, generously aiding other countries

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman has lauded China for its role in the international struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic and praised Beijing for “generously aiding” other countries to counter the outbreak.

“The government and people of China lead the way in suppressing coronavirus & generously aiding countries across the world,” Abbas Mousavi wrote on his Twitter account on Sunday.

Mousavi said, “The Chinese bravery, dedication & professionalism in COVID-19 containment deserve acknowledgment.”

The Foreign Ministry official added that Iran has “always been thankful to China in these trying times”.

Mousavi also said countries are “stronger together”.

However, Mousavi has said Iran has not asked the U.S. for aid and will never do so.

The spokesman also said the U.S. has been trying to misuse the outbreak of the coronavirus and “bring Iran to the negotiating table.”

He added, Iran does not “recognize” U.S. sanctions and called for their removal.

As of Monday, April 6, over 60,000 Iranian were confirmed to have contracted the coronavirus and over 3,700 died.

Iran has called illegal U.S. sanctions as an example of “economic terrorism”.

Foreign Minister Zarif has said Washington’s refusal to lift bans amidst the coronavirus crisis is showing that the White House is expanding its economic terrorism to “medical terrorism” which even exceed “what would be permissible on the battlefield”.

In a letter to the World Health Organization (WHO) director general on Friday, Iranian ambassador to the UN office in Geneva Esmail Baghaei Hamaneh said that the imposition of cruel and illegal sanctions on Iran, which has impeded the ordinary’s people access to medicine and medical equipment, clearly exemplify “crime against humanity”.

Iraq PM-designate: Iranians not involved in govt. formation

1 → Zurfi’s appointment has been flatly rejected by the Fateh alliance, headed by Hadi al-Ameri, who is aligned with Iran.

Zurfi questioned the rejection, adding however, that anyone has the right to do so, but within democratic boundaries. “I am banking on lawmakers from blocs that expressed their readiness to support me,” he added on whether his designation will be approved.

On whether those rejecting him are being influenced by foreign powers, namely Iran and significantly after Ghani’s visit, Zurfi stressed that he did not meet with the Quds Force leader.

“I did not receive word from him that he really opposes my designation,” he said, Asharq Al-Awsat reported.

“I received information from the Iranians that they do not want to interfere in the government formation process.”

On how he plans to balance the tensions played out between the United States and Iran in Iraq, he said, “My policy is based on keeping Iraq away from parties seeking to settle scores on its territory.”

He stressed that he wants to establish “balanced” ties with all sides and that he wants to achieve Iraq’s interests.

On his government program, Zurfi told reporters that it prioritizes resolving the economic crisis, meeting the demands of protesters and holding early elections, and establishing balanced relations with all foreign powers.

The United States is fiercely opposed the close relationship between Iran and Iraq. The religious and cultural affinity between Iran and Iraq are so strong that more than 2 million Iranians visit Karbala, where the shrine of Imam Hussein (AS) is located, to observe Arbaeen rituals.

Iran was also on the side of Iraq in defeating Daesh, also called ISIL.

Daesh celebrated the U.S. assassination of General Qassem Soleimani, Iran’s legendary commander in the war against terrorism.

Tehran fully cooperating with IAEA, Russia says

1 → “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,” he said in an interview with the Persian-language Etemad newspaper published on Sunday.

In an IAEA’s report released in March, it is claimed that the agency 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.

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.

Ulyanov said in a tweet in March that there is nothing extraordinary in report of the IAEA about Iran’s nuclear program.

“As always, #IAEA reports on #Iran today were leaked to mass media immediately after or even before they were circulated among the Governors of the Agency. Alarming publications in the press. Calm down. There is nothing extraordinary,” he tweeted.

Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran’s ambassador to IAEA, told reporters that Iran is countering a “bad and dangerous precedent” in the IAEA which tries to “give credibility to fake reports by spy services.”

The ambassador held the U.S. and Israeli spy agencies for such a claim by the IAEA.

“Unfortunately, once again the United States and the regime of Israel, by putting pressure on the Agency, are trying to undermine the relations and active and constructive cooperation between Iran and the Agency” in order to derail the agency from its professional task, the Iranian diplomat said.

Carleton University professor: U.S. refusal to ease sanctions on Iran ‘regrettable’

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

Iran is one of the countries hit worst by the Coronavirus. As of Monday, April 6, the total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran has reached 60,500, of whom 3,739 have died and 24,236 recovered.

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

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

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

Spanish Foreign Minister Arancha Gonzalez Laya told reporters that the issue was discussed in a meeting on Friday, according to ISNA.

She noted that the sanctions must be removed when there is human rights urgency like outbreak of the coronavirus.



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

“The continued imposition of crippling economic sanctions on Syria, Venezuela, Iran, Cuba, and, to a lesser degree, Zimbabwe, to name the most prominent instances, severely undermines the ordinary citizens’ fundamental

right to sufficient and adequate food,” Hilal Elver, UN special rapporteur on the right to food, said in a statement.

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

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

sanctions regimes around the world.

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

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

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

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

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

In a letter to the World Health Organization (WHO) chief on Friday, Iran’s ambassador and permanent representative to the UN office in Geneva Esmail Baghaei Hamaneh said that the imposition and intensification of U.S. sanctions on Iran amidst the coronavirus pandemic amount to a “crime against humanity”.

Human Rights Watch urges Washington to lift sanctions on Iran

By staff and agency

The Human Rights Watch has urged the United States’ government to ease sanctions on Iran in the coronavirus crisis.

“Broad U.S. -imposed economic sanctions are negatively affecting the Iranian government’s ability to adequately respond to the mounting health consequences of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic,” says a report published on website of the Human Rights Watch on Monday.

U.S. President Donald Trump, who abrogated the UN-endorsed 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA) in May 2018, has slapped the harshest ever sanctions in history against Iran in line with his “maximum pressure” policy toward Tehran. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said such illegal sanctions are even exceeding “what would be permissible on the battlefield”.

The HRW says Washington “should take immediate action to ease U.S. sanctions and expand licensing of sanctions-exempt items to ensure Iran’s access to essential humanitarian resources during the pandemic.”

Following is an excerpt of the report:

On March 19, the spokesperson for Iran’s Health Ministry tweeted that every hour almost 50 people contract the virus and every 10 minutes one person dies because of COVID-19 across the country. As the burden on the country’s debilitated health care system has dramatically increased, the broad U.S. economic sanctions resulting in severe international banking restrictions have drastically constrained the ability of the country to finance humanitarian imports, including medicines and medical equipment.

After the Trump administration announced its intention to leave the negotiated nuclear agreement in 2018, Iran’s currency, the rial, depreciated significantly. The restrictions on financing, combined with the sharp depreciation of the rial, have resulted in severely limiting Iranian companies and hospitals from purchasing essential medicines and medical equipment from outside Iran that residents depend upon for critical medical care. Moreover, renewed U.S. sanctions have directly impacted families’ purchasing power, contributing to inflation rates of around 30 percent in the past year.

A doctor with close knowledge of the government’s response to the outbreak told Human Rights Watch that obtaining necessary medical equipment has become more difficult under sanctions.

While the U.S. government has built exemptions for humanitarian imports into its sanctions regime, Human Rights Watch research in October 2019 found that in practice, these exemptions have failed to offset the strong reluctance of U.S. and European companies and banks to risk incurring



sanctions and legal action by exporting or financing exempted humanitarian goods. On January 30, the U.S. Department of Treasury and the Swiss Secretariat for Economic Affairs announced the transfer of medicine through a newly established humanitarian channel as a “trial run.” The U.S. Treasury had announced the establishment of the channel on October 25 after its designation of Iran’s central bank under its counterterrorism authority on September 20, a move that had seriously threatened the flow of exempted humanitarian trade to Iran.

On March 6, the U.S. Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued guidance that transactions involving Iran’s foreign exchange assets held abroad, when used to buy humanitarian items, would not face U.S. sanctions. However, because waivers are no longer available for purchasing Iranian oil and sanctions against Iran’s Central Bank, Iran’s access to currency to purchase needed medical supplies on the international market has become further restricted.

OFAC has issued general licenses that permit the export of “certain food items, medicines, and basic medical supplies to Iran” without requiring further specific authorization. These provisions also authorize financial transactions to support Iranian imports of these categories of goods from the United States or from a third country. General licenses, however, are capped at \$500,000.

But the definition of drugs under U.S. export regulations – which includes prescription and over-the-counter medicines and medical devices – excludes certain vaccines, biological

Rouhani calls for necessary measures to resume economic activities

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said late on Sunday that all required measures must be adopted to resume economic activities in the country with the priority given to people’s health.

Talking to his cabinet members, Rouhani said, “People’s health is the country’s first priority, but employment, production and businesses in a year that is named ‘Surge in Production’ must be considered as well.”

“Although the government has the responsibility to support less-privileged classes of the society, it has the responsibility to provide all necessary requirements for jump-starting businesses,” he said, according to his office’s website.

“Therefore, all necessary measures must be taken for jump-starting the country’s economy by observing health protocols with people’s health prioritized,” he said, Mehr reported.

During the session, the Health Ministry presented a report on the process of containing the outbreak of coronavirus in the country.

According to the figures released on Monday, the COVID-19 has infected 60,500 individuals and taken the lives of 3,739 people in Iran.

Earlier on Sunday, Rouhani had also pointed to the necessity of resuming economic activities, saying, “Both economic activities

and health protocols can be carried out together. All our administrative, productive and economic activities must continue, provided that all health protocols are followed by everyone.”

“All low-risk jobs in all provinces across the country can resume activity from April 11,” the president said. “But high-risk jobs, such as sports complexes, will remain shut down until April 19. Further decisions regarding these professions will be made afterward.”

Iran says U.S. moves in Iraq endangering regional peace, stability

TEHRAN (MNA) — Iran has reiterated its stance against the United States’ illegal presence in Iraq, saying the US terrorists’ recent movements are endangering the peace and stability of Iraq and the whole region.

“The US’ recent measures can be deemed dangerous for us and the whole region, and pose a much more threat to the regional peace and stability,” Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on Monday.

“We consider the US moves volatilizing the region, and we hope Washington will finally follow the demands of the Iraqi people and leave the country,” he added.

Mousavi’s comments came as the US has been increasing its military movements in neighboring Iraq. According to reports, the US has been deploying Patriot missile batteries in Iraq.

“The US movements [in Iraq] are against the demands of the Iraqi nation and parliament and it also is a clear breach



of the country’s sovereignty,” Mousavi added.

Referring to the US official’s claims that should anything

happen in Iraq against them, the US will take measures against the Islamic Republic, Mousavi said, “What currently is going on in Iraq is their internal affair and is related to their nation, government and domestic resistance groups.”

“Should any threat be posed [against them], the Iraqis themselves will give a firm response,” he stressed.

Eight groups of Iraqi Resistance Movement in a joint statement on Saturday said that the US military forces in Iraq are considered as ‘occupier’ and announced that they would turn Iraq into hell for occupiers.

In a joint statement issued by Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq Movement, Al-Awfiya, Kata’ib Jund al-Imam Movement, Al-Nujaba Resistance Movement, Sayyed al-Shohada, Imam Ali, Ashura and Al-Khorasani battalions, the resistance groups declared that the US forces in Iraq will be treated with the language of force and the operations that have taken place are nothing but a simple response.

Tehran: Certain countries exploiting coronavirus circumstances

Over 30 countries have helped Iran fighting coronavirus, says Foreign Ministry spokesman

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on Monday that certain countries are exploiting the dire coronavirus circumstances by politicizing the issue.

“We are concerned about people’s sadness. Certain governments and countries have tried to politicize the coronavirus issue” and exploit the situation, Mousavi said on Monday during his first press briefing in the new Iranian year which was held online.

“We hope that this New Year would be a year filled with happiness and blessings for the Iranian nation and all nations,” he said. “We hope that in this New Year we would overcome the coronavirus issue and all other viruses, including the violence virus.”

Mousavi thanked Iranians living abroad for sending humanitarian aid through Iran’s embassies across the world.

He said more than thirty countries and some international organizations have helped Iran in its battle against the coronavirus.

However, he denounced the U.S. for “cruel, illegal sanctions” against Iran.

“The sanctions are cruel and they should be lifted,” he said. “If the U.S. does not want to help, at least it must not create obstacles.”

“What is important for Iran is that the sanctions are cruel and illegal and everyone agrees on this,” the spokesman said.

“We ask all independent and civilized countries of the world to disregard the unilateral, illegal and bullying sanctions of the U.S.”

Iran has repeatedly said the U.S. sanctions, which were imposed after the Trump administration unilaterally withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal, are hampering its efforts to contain the coronavirus outbreak.

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



“Our request from the American regime’s rulers is not help ... [rather] we want the sanctions to be ended.”

“As the signers of this declaration, we request Your Excellency as the UN’s Secretary-General, and its subordinate 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.

Iran’s Vice President Es’haq Jahangiri said on Saturday that if the obstacles created by the “brutal” U.S. sanctions are removed, Iran can control the spread of coronavirus in a better way.

“We are in the midst of brutal U.S. sanctions,” Jahangiri said.

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.”

During his press conference, Mousavi said Iran does not seek humanitarian help from the United States, adding, “Our request from the American regime’s rulers is not help ... [rather] we want the sanctions to be ended.”

“Our message is loud and clear and it has been expressed in different languages,”

he remarked.

“We ask other countries not to accompany the U.S. in its bullying. However, this would depend on their political and economic power and their courage.”

The spokesman also said the U.S. has demonstrated that it has no mercy to its allies and friends either.

“A warning should be given to the international community that they should stand up to the U.S. unilateralism,” he added.

On Friday, Berlin’s top security official accused Washington of using “wild west methods” to divert and obtain a delivery of face masks originally destined for the German capital.

Berlin State Interior Minister Andreas Geisel denounced the diversion of the masks as an “act of modern piracy,” according to Reuters.

German media had reported that thousands of masks purchased from manufacturer 3M had been diverted to the U.S. as they were being transferred between planes in Thailand en route from China.

German officials have confirmed that about 200,000 FFP2 masks — an equivalent of the U.S. N95 mask standard — were seized at a Bangkok airport and did not reach their destined location.

The officials said that the masks had already been paid for by Germany.

“This is no way to treat trans-Atlantic partners,” Geisel said in his remarks addressing Washington on Friday. “Even in times of global crisis, there should be no wild west methods.”

The Berlin official added that the German government should demand that the U.S. respect international rules.

Reuters said the U.S. embassy in Berlin did not immediately provide any comment on the matter.

We will defeat coronavirus: Army chief

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Army Chief Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi has said that Iran will defeat the coronavirus.

“With the help of God and the people’s efforts and cooperation, we will defeat the coronavirus,” he said during a phone conversation on Monday with Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani.

Mousavi also wished recovery for Larijani who has tested positive for coronavirus. The public relations department of the Majlis issued a statement on Thursday announcing that Larijani 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,” the statement said.

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 to recover.

In separate phone calls, Chief of the Guardian Council Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati and the council’s spokesman Abbasali Kadkhodaei also wished Larijani quick recovery.

The Health Ministry announced on Monday, April 9, that so far 60,500 Iranian citizens have tested positive for the virus. It also said of this figure 3,739 have died.

Iranians familiar with art of living in crisis, says top security official

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council has said Iranians have mastered the art of living in crisis.

In a post on his Twitter account on Monday, Ali Shamkhani said Iran should employ a homegrown scheme for the battle with the coronavirus that would entail “exclusive and indigenous initiatives”.

“The economic consequences of the coronavirus are severe, but ‘doctors and workers’ are two main pillars of the strategy for overcoming the crisis,” he pointed out.

“The phony ‘economy-health’ bipolarity should not halt us. We have learned the art of living in crisis for years,” Shamkhani added.

Iran’s Health Ministry spokesman announced on Monday that more than 24,000 coronavirus patients have recovered from the disease so far and been discharged from the hospital.

Kianoosh Jahanpoor said the number of people tested positive for COVID-19 across the country has reached 60,500 following the detection of 2,274 new cases since Sunday.

Health Ministry: Iran never forgets China’s support in coronavirus struggle

TEHRAN (FNA) — Iranian Health Ministry Spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour underlined that his nation will never forget the supports and aid rendered by other countries, including China, in the fight against the coronavirus epidemic.

“The Iranian government and nation appreciate the governments and nations which have stood beside them, especially when coronavirus grew into a global pandemic, and of course, the historical memory of Iranians will not forget this part of the story either,” Jahanpour wrote on his twitter page on Monday.

“Therefore, China’s supports for the Iranian nation in these hard days cannot be forgotten,” he added.

Jahanpour advised the enemies of good relations between Tehran and Beijing not to “become excited” by little differences which sometimes happen between the two countries.

In relevant remarks on Sunday, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Seyed Abbas Mousavi also lauded China’s role in the international struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic and its efforts assisting other countries counter the outbreak.

“The government and people of China lead the way in suppressing coronavirus& generously aiding countries across



the world,” Mousavi said in tweet.

“The Chinese bravery, dedication & professionalism in COVID-19 containment deserve acknowledgment,” he said, adding that Iran has “always been thankful to China in these trying times”.

As of Sunday, confirmed cases of COVID-19 have topped 1.2 million cases across the world.

China, where the outbreak began last year, however, reported only 30 new infections on Saturday as infections surged in the United States and Europe.

Taking a break from what is appears to be the peak of the outbreak, China has sought to assist countries grappling with the pandemic by providing medical aid and supplies.

Iran, which sent several aid shipments to China during the height of the coronavirus outbreak in the country, was sent its ninth aid shipment from China on Sunday.

The shipment contained about one million items consisting of masks, protective clothing and medicine.

Speaking to Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani last month, President Xi Jinping said the Iranian government and people offered sincere and friendly support and assistance to China when the virus first emerged in the country.

“To help Iran fight the epidemic, China has sent materials and medical experts to Iran,” he said.

Official pens letter to ISESCO over coronavirus pandemic concerns

TEHRAN (MNA) — The Director of Iran’s Seminars Ayatollah Alireza Arafati on Monday penned a letter to the Director General of Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) Dr. Salim bin Mohammad Al-Malik, stressing the need for removal of sanctions amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The religious leaders in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Qom express their deep concern about the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic and pray for a quick solution to this serious challenge and other crises in today’s world. According to the teachings of Islam, Holy Quran, and tradition of the Holy Prophet of Islam, the religious body and Marja have never been and will never be tricked by bipolar falsification between science, religion, healing and prayers, he wrote.

Religious scholars, in addition to paying attention to the origin of the existence and necessity of self-purification,

consider the following health protocols and recommendations of personal and social health as a duty.

Undoubtedly, confronting this challenge and other crises in today’s world, such as injustice, discrimination, inhumane sanctions, environmental problems, war, terrorism, producing and stockpiling Weapons of Mass Destructions (WMDs), require international consensus and cooperation especially unity and amity of elites and scientific communities of the Islamic world in line with minimizing the negative consequences of this pandemic.

For this purpose, the theological seminars are calling for a thorough revision in the contemporary approach to the environment and countering the irresponsible policies of some countries especially industrialized countries and the need to pursue the lifting of sanctions and occupation of the Islamic world and renunciation of arrogant powers from terror and terrorism.



As a religious and scientific body, while inviting all to comply with the common human, rational and Islamic teachings, we voice our readiness to establish nec-

essary cultural and scientific cooperation with relevant organizations to tackle the pandemic as well as other challenges facing the world today.

Military chief thanks those involved in coronavirus fight

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri, the armed forces chief of staff, has offered his gratitude to the country’s medical staff, armed forces, Basij forces and people for their contribution in the fight against



the coronavirus outbreak.

In a message on Monday, General Baqeri likened the efforts and struggles to the sacrifices of the soldiers who defended Iran during the eight years of war in the 1980s that former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein waged against Iran.

According to the latest figures released on Monday, the COVID-19 has infected 60,500 individuals and cost the lives of more than 3,739 people in Iran.

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 Esmaeil 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 evildest 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 treatment 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.

U.S. bullying better revealed during outbreak: spokesman

TEHRAN (MNA) — The Iranian government spokesman has said Washington has shown more of its bullying behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic.



“The bullying of the United States is being more portrayed during the coronavirus outbreak era and the U.S. administration does not pay attention to ethical policies,” said Ali Rabiei on Monday in a presser held through video conference.

The remarks come as U.S. has refused to lift illegal sanctions against Iran even amid the pandemic despite calls from many countries and international bodies. Meanwhile, the European signatories of the JCPOA, which have promised to secure Iran’s economic interests after US withdrawal from the deal, have recently announced the completion of the first transaction of a financial channel, dubbed INSTEX, which aims to ease trade with Iran by ditching U.S. sanctions.

“There is progress regarding INSTEX but this is not enough,” said Rabiei. “European countries should take more steps towards fulfilling their commitments.”

He also pointed to the status of Iran’s loan request from the International Monetary Fund, saying, “We have not yet received an official negative response from the body.”

Iran has requested a \$5 billion loan from the IMF to finance the fight against COVID-19 outbreak in the country but the international body has not yet confirmed Iran’s request.

Iran is one of the hardest-hit countries by the virus with more than 60,000 infections and above 3,700 deaths as of Monday.

Eurozone struggles to forge deal over economic crisis

Euro area ministers are struggling to forge a compromise on a comprehensive rescue package as southern member states push for the issuance of joint debt to help pay for the post-coronavirus recovery.

Finance ministers are due to hold a call on Tuesday afternoon at which they will attempt to agree an emergency package to cushion sovereigns, businesses and individuals from the pandemic.

The three-pronged plan, focused on the European Stability Mechanism, the European Investment Bank and a new European Commission unemployment reinsurance scheme, totals about half a trillion euros.



But the fate of the package is unclear as Italy, Spain, France and their allies urge additional longer-term measures involving the common issuance of additional public debt to fund post-coronavirus spending. Their move has reawakened a longstanding north-south divide in Europe over mutualizing public debt, with Germany and its northern allies resisting.

Mário Centeno, president of the Eurogroup, warned ministers over the weekend not to let the dispute jeopardize the detailed rescue package that was already on the table. But he also sought to win round southern Europe by saying that he would accelerate the debate on future joint tools to pay for post-corona economic rebuilding.

"We certainly need fresh money after this period to leverage a recovery plan," he said in an interview with a group of newspapers published on April 4, urging ministers to be "creative".

The Eurogroup is aiming to back a report containing proposals for EU leaders to consider when they hold their next virtual summit later this month. Here are the key elements that ministers will discuss.

■ Deploying the European Stability Mechanism

EU and finance ministry officials have been working out how to unlock the lending power of the European Stability Mechanism, the euro area's sovereign bailout fund. The plan is for an ESM credit line of as much as €240bn, open to all countries.

But the ESM was established in 2012, during the European debt crisis, when Germany and others insisted that Greece and other economically beleaguered countries sign up to tough conditions, such as fiscal targets and economic reform programs, in exchange for Eurozone support.

Klaus Regling, the ESM's managing director, has been working on proposals to overhaul the terms attached to its Enhanced Conditions Credit Line, a form of precautionary financial support that stops short of a bailout.

The main requirement would be that money is used to cover health-sector expenditure or to counter the economic fallout of the pandemic. And there would be a commitment to respect the EU's surveillance framework for national budgets — which is an obligation for all EU member states in any case.

But Eurosceptics in Italy have demonized the ESM, saying any lending by the mechanism would inevitably come with harsh reform requirements. Italy and its allies will only want to sign up to a package including the ESM if ministers also open up the prospect of greater joint debt issuance down the road.

■ Boosting European Investment Bank lending

The Luxembourg-based lender has already proposed a plan to mobilize as much as €40bn of financing, which would be used for bridging loans, credit holidays and other measures aimed at damping the impact of the lockdowns on small and medium-sized enterprises.

Member states are also discussing a pan-European guarantee fund of €25bn that would leverage support of up to €200bn — a big boost to the bank's firepower.

■ Introducing EU unemployment reinsurance

The European Commission has proposed an instrument called SURE that would provide loans to economies that face a sudden and severe increase in spending on short-time working schemes, such as those modelled on Germany's Kurzarbeit program.

The idea would be for the commission to tap capital markets and raise €100bn of loans, backed in part by guarantees from member states.

Provision of guarantees would require buy-in from a number of member states' parliaments, which could slow down the process of getting it up and running. Some northern member states remain suspicious of the plan, given their traditional opposition to new European projects aimed at transferring budgetary resources elsewhere.

■ Planning for economic reconstruction

The three elements of the package are focused on alleviating the current emergency, but EU capitals are increasingly focused on what comes next.

The key question is how governments can kick-start their economies through stimulus measures including large public investment projects, while financing their spending via public borrowing at the lowest possible rates. Part of the answer will be an overhaul of the EU's upcoming seven-year budget to front-load investment spending, but some states say this alone will not suffice.

This is where the idea of mutual debt issuance comes in. Nine member states including France, Italy and Spain have proposed the issuance of coronabonds, which would be sold by a European institution with the backing of all member states and used to fund spending programs in individual member states.

Last week, France added some flesh to the idea with a paper arguing in favor of an "exceptional and temporary" joint fund that would help countries kick-start their recoveries.

But the concept of collective debt issuance remains highly contentious in a range of northern European member states, meaning officials have in recent days struggled to find a way of bridging the divide between the two camps ahead of Tuesday's meeting.

(Source: Financial Times)

Industry minister outlines plans for 'Surge in Production'

ECONOMY

TEHRAN — Iranian industry, mining, and trade minister outlined his ministry's main programs for supporting the domestic production in the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 20), which is named the year of "Surge in Production", Tasnim news agency reported.

Reza Rahmani elaborated on the ministry's seven main axes of surge in production that are going to be pursued under 40 major programs.

Developing technology and promoting knowledge-based industries, development of domestic production in line with the Leader's stresses on surge in production, managing imports and development of non-oil exports, improving the business environment, development of financing and investment and finally development of logistics were reported to be the seven major axes of the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry's works in the current year, which is named "Surge in Production" by the Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei.



Stressing the role of knowledge and technology in the improvement of domestic production, Rahmani noted that the ministry has it on the agenda to support

'Annual wheat production estimated to reach 14m tons'

ECONOMY

TEHRAN — Iran is estimated to produce 14 million tons of wheat in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2021), IRNA quoted Esmail Esfandiari-Pour, the advisor to Agriculture Minister as saying on Sunday.

The official said the COVID-19 pandemic is not going to affect the wheat harvest in the country which has been already started in the southwestern province of Khuzestan.

According to the official, the wheat harvest season is approximately 4.5 months in Iran

starting in early April up to mid-August.

Based on the agriculture ministry data, Iranian farmers produced nearly 14.5 million tons of wheat in the previous Iranian calendar year, 1.2 million tons more than the figure for its preceding year.

According to Esfandiari-Pour, who is also the head of the government program to buy wheat from farmers, Iran's use of improved seed technology over the past five years has boosted the country's self-sufficiency in wheat by more than 30 percent.

Good precipitation across Iran has also resulted in a prosperous harvest in various agricultural sectors across the country.

Iran's wheat harvest is enough to make the county self-sufficient in the production of this strategic crop for the fifth year in a row, according to the official.

Irrigated wheat covers only one-third of the total wheat area, thus the bulk of the wheat crop depends on seasonal precipitation. Most of the rain-fed wheat crop is concentrated in the northwest.



Flare jacket of South Pars phase 11 to be installed soon



ECONOMY

TEHRAN — The flare jacket of South Pars gas field's Phase 11 is going to be installed in the Persian Gulf in near future, Shana reported, quoting the managing director of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC) which is in charge of developing the field.

"The Phase 11 jacket will be installed in the early months of the current [Iranian calendar] year (started March 20, 2020)," Mohammad Meshkinfam said.

According to Meshkinfam, the field's daily gas production capacity has surpassed 700 million cubic meters.

He went on saying that the offshore operations of the field's phases, except for the phase 11, were completed last year.

South Pars is the world's largest gas field, covering an area of 3,700 square kilometers of Iran's territorial waters in the Persian Gulf. It adjoins Qatar's North Field, which

measures 6,000 square kilometers.

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.

Once fully operational, the South Pars will produce a total of 10.6 million tons of ethane per year.

The Islamic Republic of Iran will continue the implementation of important oil projects including the development of joint oil and gas fields in the current Iranian year.

The country, being among the world's top four countries that have the largest proven deposit of crude oil and natural gas, shares the broad offshore field with Qatar in the southern Iranian region of the Persian Gulf.

Annual loading, unloading of basic commodities up 136% in Chabahar Port



ECONOMY

TEHRAN — Loading and unloading of basic goods in Iran's Chabahar Port have increased 136 percent during the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19) compared to its preceding year, according to an provincial official.

Behrouz Aqaei, the head of Ports and Maritime Department of Sistan-Baluchestan Province (where the port lies), also referred to bolstering trade between Iran, India, and Afghanistan through Shahid Beheshti Port of Chabahar as another prominent measure taken via the Iranian southeastern port city, ILNA reported.

In January, the official had announced that through construction of new warehouses and also renovating the existing ones, warehouse capacity and standards are planned to be elevated

in Chabahar.

Aqaei said that given the programs of the country for the imports of basic commodities the capacity of the warehouses in this port should be increased, the website of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) published.

The official put the cost of the project for renovating three multi-purpose warehouses of the ports at 540 billion rials (about \$12.8 million) to be provided through internal sources of PMO.

He also announced that two multi-purpose warehouses are under construction in the port through private sector's investment and under build-operate-transfer (BOT) contracts.

Back in December 2019, Aqaei had said that 17 countries had expressed willingness for contribution to the development of Chabahar Port.

Stocks jump on virus slowdown hopes



Eurostoxx 50 gained 2.6%.

In Asia, Australia's benchmark index rose 3.3%, Japan's Nikkei added 2.4% after a slow start while South Korea's KOSPI index climbed 2.1%. Hong Kong's Hang Seng index was 0.9% higher.

That sent MSCI's broadest index of Asian shares outside of Japan up almost 1%, on track for its best performance in a week. Markets in mainland China were closed for a public holiday.

Worryingly, the number of new coronavirus cases jumped in China on Sunday while the number of asymptomatic cases surged too as Beijing continued to struggle to extinguish the outbreak despite drastic containment efforts.

"Focus in markets will now turn to the path out of lockdown

While oil prices skidded on Monday after Saudi-Russian negotiations to cut output were delayed, keeping oversupply concerns alive, stocks jumped as investors were encouraged by a slowdown in coronavirus-related deaths and new cases.

In currency markets, sterling fell 0.4% early in Asia after British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was admitted to hospital following persistent coronavirus symptoms 10 days after testing positive for the virus.

Brent crude fell as much as \$4 after Saudi Arabia and Russia postponed their meeting, initially scheduled for Monday, to Thursday even as the virus pandemic pummels demand.

Equity investors, however, took solace as the death toll from the coronavirus slowed across major European nations including France and Italy.

"With a very light calendar globally today, there is enough momentum to keep the equity rally running through the course of the day and also into European time," said Jeffrey Halley, Senior Market Analyst, Asia Pacific, OANDA.

"All bets are off after that although I could see a couple of days of positive sentiment ahead, especially if those mortality rates keep falling."

U.S. stock futures rose 3.2% during Asian trading after U.S. President Donald Trump expressed hope the country was seeing a "levelling off" of the coronavirus crisis.

Futures for London's FTSE were up 1.7% while those for

and to what extent containment measures can be lifted without risking a second wave of infections," National Australia Bank analyst Tapas Strickland wrote in a note.

"Key to a strong rebound in China will be the ongoing lifting of containment measures with Wuhan — the epicentre of the outbreak — set to lift containment measures on April 8."

Strickland, however, noted many in China were still subject to social distancing and isolation restrictions to prevent a resurgence in infections.

The pandemic has claimed more than 68,000 lives and infected over a million people globally. The United States has the highest number of reported cases, at over 300,000.

Concerns about heavy damage to the global economy have pushed investors into the perceived safety of government bonds where yields are at or near all-time lows.

Elsewhere in currencies, the dollar gained 0.4% against the yen to 108.93.

The euro was barely moved at \$1.0810 while the risk sensitive Australian dollar was up 0.3% at \$0.6014. The pound was last down 0.2% at \$1.2238.

In commodities, Brent crude futures was down nearly 3%, or \$1, at \$31.14 a barrel while U.S. crude slipped 4.4%, or \$1.24, to \$27.09.

Spot gold added 0.2% to \$1,619.1 an ounce.

(Source: Reuters)

‘Moscow and Riyadh are ‘very, very close’ to an oil deal’

Russia and Saudi Arabia are “very, very close” to a deal on oil production cuts, according to the chief executive of Russia’s sovereign wealth fund RDIF.

“I think the whole market understands that this deal is important and it will bring lots of stability, so much important stability to the market, and we are very close,” said Kirill Dmitriev, CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund.

A virtual meeting between OPEC and its allies was scheduled to happen on Monday, but is now “likely” to take place on Thursday instead, sources familiar with the matter told CNBC. Reductions in oil output were expected to be discussed at the meeting.

Oil futures pared earlier losses after the report on Monday in Asia, with U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude down marginally by 0.71% at \$28.14 and Brent crude down 0.09% to trade at \$34.08. When asked if Riyadh and Moscow



will get together by the end of this week for some kind of deal, Dmitriev said: “Well actually look, a very positive message. I think they’re very, very close.”

He pointed to comments by Russian President Vladimir Putin last week when he proposed a combined production cut of 10 million barrels per day, according to a Reuters report.

“(Putin) talked about how important this oil deal is, so Russia is committed,” Dmitriev told CNBC’s “Capital Connection” on Monday.

He added that Russia is working closely with U.S. authorities to have American producers participate in the output cut.

“I think it’s Russia, Saudi Arabia, U.S., other countries that need to step in to stabilize the markets and to bring stability in the world that is about to see probably the greatest recession ever.”

(Source: CNBC)

Oil falls after Saudi Arabia, Russia delay meeting



Oil prices fell on Monday, after Saudi Arabia and Russia delayed a meeting to discuss output cuts that could help reduce global oversupply as the coronavirus pandemic pummels demand.

Brent crude fell more than \$3 when Asian markets opened but recovered some ground with traders hopeful that a deal between the top producers was still within reach.

At 0814 GMT, Brent was down \$1.10, or 3.2 percent, at \$33.01 a barrel. U.S. crude was 84 cents, or 3 percent, lower at \$27.50 a barrel, off a session low of \$25.28.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, a group known as OPEC+, is expected to meet on Thursday, instead of Monday, to discuss cutting production.

“Perhaps it is best that the meeting was delayed for producers to cement a minimum of common ground before the actual discussions take place on Thursday,” said BNP Paribas analyst Harry Tchilingirian, although he said initial disappointment at the delay had driven down prices in Asian business.

OPEC+ is working on a deal to cut oil production by about 10 percent of world supply, or 10 million barrels per day (bpd), in what member states expect to be an unprecedented global effort.

precedented global effort.

The countries are “very, very close” to a deal on cuts, one of Russia’s top oil negotiators, Kirill Dmitriev, who heads the nation’s wealth fund, told CNBC.

But Rystad Energy’s head of oil markets Bjornar Tonhaugen said even if the group agree to cut up to 15 million bpd, “it will only be enough to scratch the surface of the more than 23 million bpd supply overhang predicted for April 2020.”

Still, sentiment was lifted by Saudi Arabia’s decision to delay releasing its crude official selling prices to Friday to wait for the outcome of the OPEC+ meeting.

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

Rig counts in the United States fell by 62 last week, energy services firm Baker Hughes Co BRK.N said on Friday, marking the biggest weekly drop in five years, as U.S. energy companies slashed spending on new drilling due to a coronavirus-related slump in economic activity and fuel demand.

(Source: Reuters)

Aramco’s bondholders get dragged down by Saudi oil-price war



The oil-price war isn’t doing any favors for Saudi Aramco’s bondholders one year on from the state-owned company’s debut on international capital markets.

Trumpeted at the time as one of the most anticipated offerings of the year, the \$12 billion of bonds have just clocked an 8.2% loss in March, their worst ever monthly performance, as crude prices more than halved. The outlook isn’t good either. Baltimore-based T. Rowe Price, which manages \$1.2 trillion, says the securities will remain under pressure as long as the world’s top oil producers fail to agree on supply curbs.

“It’s been, for the market, a reality check,” said Willem Visser, a T. Rowe fixed-income analyst. “Aramco tries to project itself as being a triple-A rated credit that’s bigger and better than the other oil majors, but people forget about the political risk.”

Aramco’s \$3 billion of bonds due 2029 now trade with a higher yield than the government’s debt of similar maturity.

That contrasts with a year ago, when the energy giant issued its Eurobonds. The notes priced with a lower yield than those of the government itself, a rarity in corporate bond markets.

Equity investors have also been hit. Aramco listed around 1.5% of its stock in the Saudi

capital of Riyadh in December. Its market value has fallen from a peak of \$2 trillion to \$1.67 trillion. The stock briefly traded above the 32-riyal listing price on Sunday, only to turn negative and finish 0.5% lower at 31.50 riyals.

Aramco’s assets have still suffered less than its peers such as Mexico’s state oil company Pemex, said Sergey Dergachev, a senior money manager at Union Investment Privatfonds GmbH in Frankfurt. That’s because it remains “one of the strongest oil and gas names in the emerging-market universe,” he said.

While the oil crash has already caused Aramco to slash planned capital expenditure, it will be “very comfortable” with oil at \$30 a barrel, chief financial officer Khalid Al-Dabbagh told investors in March. Brent crude prices are around \$34 per barrel after rebounding 37% last week on hopes of a deal between producers. However, a meeting of the OPEC+ alliance scheduled for Monday was postponed to Thursday as Saudi Arabia and Russia traded barbs over who was to blame for the collapse in oil prices.

“We like Aramco’s fundamentals, but think the valuations are now just fair rather than attractive,” said John Bates, a corporate-bond analyst in London with PineBridge Investments Europe.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Crude oil’s wild ride doesn’t answer the serious questions

By Clyde Russell

Crude oil’s rollercoaster ride resumed on Monday, with both Brent and West Texas Intermediate (WTI) futures falling sharply amid news of a delay to a meeting of oil producers.

While news headlines are driving the short-term volatility in crude prices, it’s perhaps a worthwhile exercise to take a stand back look at what is actually happening, what is likely to happen and what’s unlikely.

Brent crude fell as much as 12 percent in early Asian trade on Monday, dropping as low as \$30.03 a barrel before recovering to trade around \$31.85, while WTI dropped as much as 11% to a low of \$25.28.

The decline was driven by a decision to delay from Monday to Thursday a meeting between the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and Russia.

The talks aim to discuss re-imposing output cuts to help deal with the massive supply overhang created by the loss of around 25 million barrels per day (bpd) of demand due to the new coronavirus locking down much of the world’s economy.

Monday’s slump in crude benchmarks came after a strong surge on April 2 and 3, with Brent gaining 38 percent and WTI 39.5 percent over the two days as the market reacted to U.S. President Donald Trump’s tweets that a deal to cut output was imminent.

It appears the mercurial U.S. leader may have been jumping the gun somewhat, although it also appears that some efforts are underway.

So, what exactly is known and what is still unknown?

Known: There are behind-the-scenes machinations to get crude producers to agree to some form of output cut.

Unknown: How far advanced are these discussions, who will be doing the cutting, will it be just OPEC and its former allies, including Russia, in the group known as OPEC+? Or will other producers such as the United States, Brazil, Canada and Norway be expected to participate?



Unknown: Will countries that produce oil, but not enough to meet domestic needs and therefore still import, such as China and Britain, also be expected to cut output?

Unknown: What will be the size of the production cut, assuming one can be agreed?

As can be seen from the above, what is known is very little, what is unknown is vastly greater, although there are plenty of analysts and commentators prepared to speculate on a whole range of possible outcomes and their ramifications.

Perhaps the most important thing to speculate on is how big any output cut will be, assumed one can be reached.

Most of the speculation has centered around 10 to 15 million bpd, raising the question as to whether that would be enough.

It certainly won’t be enough to wipe out the current supply glut, but it may be enough to slow the rate at which available storage fills, and thereby bring some stability back to the market.

■ Coronavirus demand hit

This brings us back to a few more knowns and unknowns.

Known: The new coronavirus has spread rapidly across the world and has led to a near collapse of airline and other

travel, and the shutting down of large parts of the world economy.

Unknown: There is a wide range of forecasts as to how big the hit to crude demand is going to be, and if there is a consensus, it’s that the shock will be between 20 and 30 million bpd, or between 20% and 30% of total demand.

Unknown: The assumption is that this will be a sharp, but also short, demand shock and the world economy will be open for business quickly once the coronavirus is contained. The risk is that much of the global economy remains in some form of hibernation for longer than expected, and that the recovery is uneven as some countries emerge faster than others.

Another factor at times of high volatility in crude markets is to try to separate the news that actually matters from the noise.

President Trump is a great example of an important figure who sometimes delivers news that matters, but also thought bubbles that capture attention, but are of limited value.

The tweets on the output deal may have overstated the actual closeness of a deal, but they did focus the market attention on the manoeuvres underway.

However, Trump’s comments on Sunday that he was prepared to do “very substantial tariffs” if the oil price stays depressed are perhaps less helpful.

It’s unlikely that the U.S. government would impose tariffs, given the complexity of oil supply chains and refinery operations.

The United States needs to import heavier grades of crude as the mainly light oil it currently produces would be unable to meet refinery needs, and would furthermore result in too much gasoline and not enough middle distillates such as diesel being produced.

While a challenge, perhaps the best tactic to follow in the current crude oil market is to focus on actual, real developments.

(Source: Reuters)

Oil prices could plunge below \$20 a barrel this quarter as demand craters: survey

A historic demand shock sparked by the coronavirus pandemic is set to worsen in the current quarter, undermining any coordinated effort by heavyweight producers Saudi Arabia, Russia and the United States to cut supply aggressively and rebalance the market, according to a CNBC survey of 30 strategists, analysts and traders.

Episodic spikes of \$20 a barrel or more in benchmark crude oil futures of the type seen last week cannot be ruled out as rivals Saudi Arabia and Russia attempt to reverse a damaging battle for market share and engineer a global supply deal which could cut up to 15 million barrels a day, the equivalent of about 10% of global supply.

But such price rallies are unlikely to last, according to the findings of the CNBC survey conducted over the past two weeks.

Brent crude futures, the barometer for 70% of globally traded oil, are likely to average \$20 a barrel in the current quarter, according to the median forecast of 30 strategists, analysts and traders who responded to a CNBC survey, or 12 out of 30 respondents.

However, nearly a third, or nine of those surveyed, said prices may drop below \$20 a barrel this quarter.

Amongst the more pessimistic projections, ANZ’s Daniel Hynes saw the risk of prices in the ‘mid-teens’ while JBC Energy’s Johannes Benigni warned that both Brent and US crude futures could ‘temporarily’ fall to around \$10 a barrel.

■ New normal

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the supplier of a third of the world’s oil, and its rivals outside the group are “of pretty limited relevance in this context, as they are neither likely to be willing nor able to stem the current demand shock,” Benigni said.

Bearish forecasters said two forces would keep oil prices depressed in the second quarter — skepticism that Saudi Arabia and Russia would relent in their price war and commit to the deepest cuts in the producer group’s history (with or without participation from U.S. shale producers) and a glut in the current quarter caused by a monumental collapse in global demand as the full economic severity of the global coronavirus pandemic unfolds.

“A demand drop of 10% is the New Normal with oil,” said John Driscoll, director of JTD Energy Services in Singapore and a former oil trader whose career spans nearly 40 years.

Global commodities trader Trafigura’s chief economist Saad Rahim offered a starker prediction. Oil demand could fall by more than 30 million barrels a day in April, or around a third of the world’s daily oil consumption, Reuters reported on March 31, citing his forecasts.

And even if Saudi Arabia, its OPEC allies and major producers outside the group such as Russia and the U.S. did agree on aggressive supply restraint, it’s unlikely to materially drain global inventories that are closing in on what the oil industry calls ‘tank tops’, or storage capacity limits.

■ Too little, too late

“The long and short of it is that the current rally will likely be short lived,” Citigroup’s oil strategists led by Ed Morse said in an April 2 report.

“The big three oil producers may have found a way to work together to balance markets, but it looks like it is too little too late. That means prices would have to fall to the single digits to facilitate inventory fill and shut in production.”

Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency said oil inventories would still rise by 15 million barrels a day in the second quarter even with output cuts of 10 million barrels a day, Reuters reported on April 3.

Citi expects Brent to average \$17 a barrel in the current quarter and warned Moscow, Riyadh and Washington “cannot in the end stop prices from possibly falling below \$10 before the end of April.”

Plus, travel restrictions, border closures, lockdowns and economic disruption caused by ‘social distancing’ and other measures taken by governments globally to slow the spread of the virus will exact a heavy toll on oil demand and could even linger when the virus clears, clouding the prospects of a recovery.

“As for the second quarter or even the third, I don’t see a V-shaped recovery for prices,” said Anthony Grisanti, founder and president of GRZ Energy, who has over 30 years of experience in the futures industry.

“The longer people are shut in the more likely behavior will change...I have a hard time seeing oil above \$30-35 a barrel over the next 6 months.”

■ Negative pricing

Standard Chartered oil analysts Paul Horsnell and Emily Ashford said they expect “an element of persistent demand loss that will continue after the virus has passed, driven by permanent changes in air travel behavior and the demand implications of businesses unable to recover from the initial shock.”

With demand at near-paralysis, oil and fuel tanks from Singapore to the Caribbean are close to brimming - stark evidence of the global glut.

Global oil storage is “rapidly filling – exceeding 70% and approaching operating max,” said Steve Puckett, executive chairman of TRI-ZEN International, an energy consultancy.

Citi’s oil analysis team and JBC Energy’s Johannes Benigni even warned of the risk of oil prices turning negative if benchmarks drop below zero, effectively meaning producers pay buyers to take the oil off their hands because they’ve run out of storage space.

“Theoretically, the unprecedented stock-build might mean negative oil prices in places, should the world or some regions run out of storage and if higher-cost production is stickier than thought,” Citi analysts said.

Despite the bearish consensus, nine survey respondents held a more constructive view. Within that group, six forecasters expected Brent crude prices to stabilize around the mid-to-late twenties in the second quarter while one called for \$30 a barrel.

Tony Nash, founder and chief economist at analytics firm Complete Intelligence, and independent energy economist Anas Alhajji topped the range at \$42- and \$44 a barrel, respectively.

U.S. shale producers, who need \$50 to \$55 a barrel crude oil to just break-even, are struggling to maintain operations in a depressed price environment. That’s led to cutbacks in production and capital spending, job losses and bankruptcies across the U.S. shale industry and globally.

The oil market is underestimating such a shake out and its future impact on rebalancing the global oversupply, Alhajji said. “Shut-ins are already taking place. Companies made major spending cuts and many will cut again.”

Markets are also downplaying the extent of the post-virus rebound on oil demand, Alhajji and Nash claimed, though determining the endpoint to the pandemic is near-impossible.

“We expect initial excitement over demand in May as the West comes back online, then it falls slightly as expectations are moderated going into June,” Complete Intelligence’s Nash said.

(Source: CNBC)

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

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

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

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

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Toxicologist raises questions about origin of COVID-19

➔ This belligerent attitude is also a result of a largely mistaken understanding of infectious disease and illness propagated by a reductionist medical paradigm which fails to recognize that illness is in fact a disruption of the harmony between humans and their physical, chemical, biological, spiritual and social environment.

Thus, the distorted, corporate-controlled medical science have pushed for mass vaccinations with the aim of total elimination despite scientific evidence that mass vaccinations do more harm than good. Furthermore, the military-industrial complex have been, for several decades, converting and harnessing microbes as “weapons of mass destruction” of people perceived to be their enemies.

It is logical to consider that a secret bio-weapons program is a major proximal causative driving factor that created this coronavirus pandemic. There were in fact numerous clear warning signals that this was bound to happen but these were ignored and nonchalantly dismissed. As early as 1970, a World Health Organization (WHO) group of consultants in their comprehensive report on chemical and biological weapons noted that “a virulent mutant (microbe)... could spread rapidly to produce an uncontrollable epidemic on a large scale.” In addition, they warned that there was the “ever-present risk of an accidental escape.” Indeed this prediction was prescient. A list of biolab accidents compiled by the Stop the Biolab Movement in Boston, USA showed more than 50 biolab accidents from 1985-2007, occurring mostly in the US, including 7 accidents involving the United States Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID).

Despite the clear dangers to public health, the US Federal government has dramatically increased US research and development activity and infrastructure focused on biological weapons agents. More than two dozen large new high-containment research facilities were funded specifically to work with bioweapons agents, according to the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation. “When more dangerous research is performed by more people in more locations, there are simply more opportunities for significant biosafety or biosecurity breaches to occur... Worse, if the accident involves an agent such as the 1918 influenza virus, which was reconstructed at the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) in 2005, it could start a global pandemic,” it added.

USAMRIID itself recorded a total of 128 incidents occurring from 2016 to 2018, with seven incidents of potential biological exposures. Some risk of exposure to infectious agents and/or toxins may have occurred, and has resulted in precautionary medical surveillance of the personnel involved.

On July 2019, the CDC issued a cease and desist order to USAMRIID after problems were found in its biosafety level 3 and 4 laboratories. The USAMRIID located at Fort Detrick, Georgia is known to be the highly secretive epicenter of U.S. bioweapons research, with a history of illicit human experiments and research on the production of genetically-modified organisms for deployment as weapons of war.

US military secret biolabs have in fact been most advanced in doing research on pathogenic microorganisms including SARS and other coronaviruses. In 2018, the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA) began spending millions on such research. Some of those Pentagon-funded studies were conducted at known U.S. military bioweapons laboratories bordering China, and has resulted in the discovery of dozens of new coronavirus strains as recently as April 2019.

At the same time, DARPA also embarked on a secretive research to disperse infectious genetically modified viruses that have been engineered to edit crop chromosomes directly



in fields. Ostensibly, the research program aims to allow farmers to adapt to changing climate conditions. However, independent scientists warned that DARPA's program could create uncontrollable and potentially dangerous genetically engineered viruses—using insects as the vehicle for a Horizontal Environmental Genetic Alteration Agents (HEGAAS), or, in other words, using insects to disperse them—in a “new class” of biological warfare.

Genetic engineering technology facilitates horizontal transfer and unnatural recombination of genetic material across species barriers—precisely the conditions favoring the creation of new viruses and bacteria that cause diseases. Many scientists have warned that increased commercial exploitation of genetic engineering in both agriculture and medicine have actually unleashed the potential for creating viruses and bacteria more virulent than nature's worst.

Despite ostensibly justifiable objectives and avowed compliance to biosafety protocols, unexpected results do happen with potentially disastrous consequences. This was aptly demonstrated in 2001 when Australian scientists trying to make a mouse contraceptive vaccine for pest control instead accidentally created a virus that kills every one of its victims, by wiping out part of their immune system.

Scientists funded by the U.S. government, however, did a similar thing intentionally in 2003, supposedly to study how to counter a killer virus. Dr. Mark Buller, a virologist at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) and working for the U.S. Biodefense Program under the USAMRIID at Fort Detrick, has created, through genetic engineering technology, a mousepox strain that kills 100 percent of vaccinated mice, even when they were also treated with the antiviral drugs.

Notably, in 2015, Dr. Ralph Baric and his team at the University of North Carolina, who also created a virus using genetic engineering, with the surface protein of the SHC014 coronavirus found in horseshoe bats in China, and the backbone of one that causes human-like Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in mice. The study demonstrated the ability of the SHC014 surface protein, in a genetically engineered coronavirus, to bind and infect human cells, validating concerns that this virus—or other coronaviruses found in bat species—may be capable of making the leap to people without first evolving in an intermediate host. Interestingly, scientists from the Key Laboratory of Special Pathogens and Biosafety, Wuhan Institute of Virology

in China were collaborators in the study.

In the following year, Dr. Baric and his team (this time without the scientists from Wuhan, China), published another study

entitled “SARS-like WIV1-CoV poised for human emergence.” The results “indicate a significant threat posed by WIV1-CoV. Both full-length and chimeric WIV1-CoV readily replicated efficiently in human airway cultures and in vivo, suggesting capability of direct transmission to humans. In addition, while monoclonal antibody treatments prove effective, the SARS-based vaccine approach failed to confer protection. Together, the study indicates an ongoing threat posed by WIV1-related viruses and the need for continued study and surveillance.”

It should be noted that as early as 2012, Dr. Baric had received a \$2.4 M grant from the NIAID “to identify key immune regulatory genes and networks that control disease severity, better understand how immune compartments ‘talk’ to one another and determine disease outcomes after infection.

Several US agencies—particularly, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and its subsidiary, the NIAID, and USAMRIID have been collaborating on research projects, ostensibly to develop strategies to fight rapidly evolving pathogens that pose a threat to public health. However, other scientists have expressed their worry that human error could lead to the accidental release of a virus that has been enhanced in the lab so that it is more deadly or more contagious than it already is.

In fact, in 2015, the U.S. government banned such “gain of function” research involving the flu virus, viruses causing Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and SARS, following a research study that genetically modified the H5N1 influenza virus so that it could spread between ferrets (a model for studying flu in people), raising fears that the virus could jump to humans, and after US government laboratories working with pathogens had several accidents. The ban was lifted in 2019.

Given the foregoing context, it is not surprising that a new coronavirus, SARS-CoV2 (which causes the disease COVID-19), has emerged and is now causing a serious pandemic wreaking havoc all over the world. The official narrative of the U.S. Center for Disease Control, WHO, most governments and the mainstream media is that SARS-CoV2 has its origin in bats and is linked to a large seafood and live animal market in Wuhan, China, the epicenter of the pandemic and where it was reportedly first discovered. Even the Chinese Center for Disease Control initially announced that SARS-CoV2 started at the seafood market in Wuhan.

Later, though, a spokesman for China's

ministry of foreign affairs claimed that COVID-19 may have been brought into China by US soldiers who were in Wuhan 14 days before the first case of SARS-CoV2 infection was discovered, and that the origin might be the United States. He cited reports that Japanese and Taiwanese epidemiologists and pharmacologists have determined that the new coronavirus could have originated in the U.S., since that country is the only one known to have all five types – from which all others must have descended. Wuhan in China has only one of those types, rendering it in analogy as a kind of “branch” which cannot exist by itself but must have grown from a “tree.” Part of the proof of this assertion is that the genome varieties of the virus in Iran and Italy have been sequenced and declared to have no part of the variety that infected China and must, by definition, have originated elsewhere. It would seem the only possibility for origination would be the U.S. because only that country has the “tree trunk” of all the varieties.

It may therefore be true that the original source of the COVID-19 virus was the U.S. military biowarfare lab at Fort Detrick. This would not be a surprise, given that the CDC completely shut down Fort Detrick. This assertion seems to have been corroborated by the testimony of the CDC director in Congress, admitting that some deaths in the U.S., which later proved to be positive for SARS-CoV2 virus, have been miscategorised as the flu. According to a Taiwanese virologist, the virus outbreak may have begun earlier than assumed, saying, “We must look to September of 2019,” or months before SARS-CoV2 was discovered.

The assertion that the SARS-CoV2 may have originated from a lab is being disputed by the director of the NIH and some scientists working for the NIAID, who claim that SARS-CoV2 emerged naturally from animals. In a statement published in The Lancet, a group of scientists said, “We...strongly condemn conspiracy theories suggesting that COVID-19 does not have a natural origin.

Scientists from multiple countries have published and analyzed genomes of the causative agent, SARS-CoV-2, and they overwhelmingly conclude that this coronavirus originated in wildlife.” However, one could easily discover that the studies from which their conclusion was based can be traced back to studies done under the U.S. biodefense program, largely through the aforementioned NIAID. The Chinese study done at the Wuhan Institute of Virology cited by the group to support their claims was led by Zheng-Li Shi who actually collaborated earlier in 2015 with Dr. Baric at the University of North Carolina in creating, using genetic-engineering technology, an extremely lethal SARS-like coronavirus that demonstrated the ability to infect human cells.

As what happens in many controversial issues, scientists from different camps often have conflicting viewpoints on the same observable phenomenon. One must dig deeper into the controversy, taking into account other relevant information, including the integrity and credibility of sources of information and potential technical and other biases, in order to come up with a rational judgment of what might be closer to the truth. The emergence of SARS-CoV2 virus must also be viewed in a broad context, taking into account not only the technical-scientific view but more importantly, the ecological, historical, and socio-geopolitical factors involved. At this point, the preponderance of evidence seems to favor the assertion that SARS-CoV2 emerged from biowarfare research activities, most likely a result of genetic engineering manipulation.

Repatriation of Indian pilgrims, students in Qom ongoing

Indian ambassador meets Qom governor general

➔ Arrangements were made for the return of most of Indian citizens who had tested negative. Those who tested positive are still in Qom. The Indian Embassy with the help of Iranian authorities have made arrangements for hotels and other expenses. These individuals are presently self-isolating in various hotels in Qom for the past two weeks.



The aircraft carrying Indian passengers stranded in Iran landed at Mumbai airport. (Photo: Vijay Bate)

They are currently waiting for another test and it is being hoped that they will test negative this time.

Indian Ambassador Ghaddam Dharmendren visited Qom on Saturday to expedite their departure. During the trip the Indian envoy also met with the Qom Governor General Bahram Sarmast.

IRNA quoted Sarmast as saying that the settlement and quarantining of Indian citizens in some 50 hotels in Qom, as well as their treatment were put on the agenda of Iranian officials as well. The report also quoted Dharmendren as saying that India is seeking to lift the burden of treatment of Indian citizens from the Iranian government.

Flight arrangements

India is currently blocking all international commercial airlines except those carrying Indians stranded abroad, including Iran, which come under special category.

Meanwhile, the Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar on March 8 said efforts are underway for the return of Indian pilgrims from Iran's Qom city and follow up arrangements are being discussed with the Iranian authorities.

On March 7, Indian government said that they will ease the travel ban on Iran to bring back some of the Indian citizens, and till March 9, 389 people had been evacuated after their COVID-19 test results came out negative.

On March 12, Dharmendren made the announcement on twitter of three flights scheduled to take the Indian pilgrims back. The Indian envoy informed that a group of 120 stranded pilgrims were scheduled to leave for India on Friday, March 13 and a third flight was being scheduled for the following Saturday on March 14.

The Indian government informed the Lok Sabha (Indian parliament) on March 18 that there were 255 Indian citizens currently in Iran who had tested positive. Secretary of Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Damu Ravi announced that “We have evacuated about 590 people from Iran where the situation is severe. Indians infected with virus in Iran have been segregated and taken care of very well. We believe they will recover and will bring them back.”

Over the past two weeks, more than 800 Indian students and pilgrims have been evacuated on Mahan Air flights, reports Andalu Agency. The last flight went on March 28, after which operations were again suspended.

In the midst of all this unfortunately on March 19 India confirmed the death of one of its citizens in Iran who had tested positive.

Indian Embassy officials and staff have worked tirelessly for the evacuation process and are the unsung heroes of this story. By travelling to Qom they risked their lives to help with the evacuation of the stranded Indians. Also worth mentioning is that seminary students in Qom also helped in rendering assistance to the stranded pilgrims.

War-hit Syria among most vulnerable lands amid COVID-19 outbreak

A long-run bloody civil war coupled with a variety of sanctions have currently turned Syria into one of the most vulnerable countries worldwide in face of coronavirus pandemic which knows no border.

Certain international bodies have thus far expressed their concerns over the virus outbreak in Syria and its catastrophic impacts on the country's people, especially those who are still displaced across the country.

For instance, the head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) issued a warning on March 31 that the low number of coronavirus cases recorded in Syria are merely “the tip of the iceberg”.

The country, warned Mark Lowcock, can expect “a devastating impact”.

“All efforts to prevent, detect and respond to Covid-19 are impeded by Syria's fragile health system,” Lowcock told the UN Security Council.

He was further quoted by the Middle East Monitor as saying that Syria is largely unprepared for the impact and that by the end of 2019, only around half of its health care facilities and hospitals were actually fully functional.

The UNOCHA official also outlined the significant obstacles to battling the virus within Syria, including frequent population movement, the difficulty in acquiring medical supplies and protective equipment, and in particular the difficulty in enforcing social distancing within crowded refugee camps which have “low levels of sanitation services.”

Lowcock said that the humanitarian needs “remain enormous,” with over half of the population having been forced to flee from their homes and over 11 million people – including almost 5 million children – needing urgent humanitarian aid.

He acknowledged the current struggle that displaced Syrians are enduring, as nearly 8 million lack reliable access to food and 500,000 children are chronically malnourished as a result.

The rampant child malnutrition, he added, is rarely possible to recover from fully.

Trump ignored Fauci's surprise outbreak warning in 2017

According to an analytic report, Anthony Fauci, the US government's top infectious disease specialist, had warned in early 2017 that a “surprise outbreak” would occur, but President Donald Trump administration had ignored the warning.

Nina Golgowski, in an analytic article published by Huffingtonpost on April 5, disclosed that Dr. Anthony Fauci had warned in early 2017 that a “surprise outbreak” would occur during the Trump administration, and he said that more needed to be done to prepare for a pandemic.

“There is no question that there will be a challenge to the coming administration in the arena of infectious diseases,” he said in a speech titled “Pandemic Preparedness in the Next Administration” at Georgetown University Medical Center. He delivered it just days before Trump was inaugurated on Jan. 20, 2017.

Fauci, who has overseen the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) since 1984, warned that looming health challenges would involve both chronic diseases – ones already ongoing – as well as “a surprise outbreak.”

Doctor Anthony Fauci has served as the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases since 1984.

Doctor Anthony Fauci has served as the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases since 1984.

“No matter what, history has told us definitively that [outbreaks] will happen,” he said. “It is a perpetual challenge. It is not going to go away. The thing we're extraordinarily confident about is that we are going to see this in the next few years.”

Fauci ticked off a list of measures needed to prepare for

such a crisis, including creating and strengthening global health surveillance systems, as well as public health and health care infrastructure; practicing transparency and honest communication with the public; coordinating and collaborating on both basic and clinical research, and developing universal platform technologies to better facilitate the development of vaccines.

“The mistake that so many people have made ... is a failure to look beyond our own borders in the issue of the globality of health issues, not only things that are there that will come here but surprises that we'll have,” he said in his prescient remarks.

Despite Fauci's early warnings and calls for action, a report analyzing the Trump administration's response to the coronavirus pandemic found that federal agencies waited until the middle of last month to order vital medical supplies and equipment to fight the coronavirus, despite warnings about its pandemic potential being made in January. As the virus has spread across the country, reports persist of mass shortages of supplies in hospitals and medical centers.

“We basically wasted two months,” Kathleen Sebelius, who served as the Health and Human Services secretary during former US President Barack Obama administration, told The Associated Press of the government's response.

Fauci has also expressed exasperation over the efforts to stem to tide of COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus. A couple of days ago, he spoke out against states that have not issued a stay-at-home order to help prevent the virus from spreading.



“I don't understand why that's not happening,” he said on CNN of stay-at-home orders in all 50 states. “The tension between federally mandated versus states' rights to do what they want is something I don't want to get into. But if you look at what is going on in this country, I do not understand why we are not doing that. We really should be.”

As of April 6, more than 1.2 million cases of coronavirus have been confirmed worldwide, although testing shortages suggest the actual number could be significantly higher. More than a quarter of confirmed cases are in the United States, where at least 333,000 people have tested positive for the virus and 9,516 have died.

Qazvin ancient sites on agenda for possible UNESCO registration

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – Qazvin province's tourism department announced on Sunday that it "seriously" pursues efforts to have ancient sites of Sa'd-al Saltaneh caravanserai and Alamut castle registered on UNESCO World Heritage list.

"Global registration of Qazvin's Alamut castle and Sa'd-al Saltaneh caravanserai will be seriously pursued in [the current Iranian year] 1399 (started on March 20)," provincial tourism chief Alireza Khazaeli said, ILNA reported.



People visit Sa'd-al Saltaneh caravanserai in an undated photo

A choice for a daydream experience, Sa'd-al Saltaneh is one of the biggest roofed caravanserais of the country located in the city center of Qazvin dating back to the Qajar era (1789 to 1925). It's a place for discovering tens of Højreh or shops, cafes, yards, and a stunning mosque. It's a place for visitors who want to experience the culture, culinary and hospitality of Iran.

Also known as the castle of the Assassins, the 12th-century Alamut castle is nestled on top of a peak. It was once a shelter for



A view of Alamut castle

the followers of Hasan-e Sabbah (1070–1124) who was a spiritual leader of an Islamic sect. In the early 1930s, British-Italian explorer and travel writer Freya Stark described her exploration of the place in her book "The Valleys of the Assassins".

The provincial capital, which has the same name, is a major tourist destination with wonderfully restored historical sites, some quirky museums and a handful of decent eating options. Famed for carpets and seedless grapes, the city was once the capital of the mighty Persian Empire under Safavids from 1548-98.

Currently, Iran has 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 story of 4000-year-old cypress in Abarkouh

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – A 4000-year-old cypress in Abarkouh is a must-see attraction while visiting the central Iranian city. The evergreen tree is inscribed on the National Heritage List.

The cypress is situated next to a wall in southern parts of Abarkouh, some 140 kilometers west of the ancient city of Yazd and it is 1500 meters above sea level. Scientists have estimated that the tree dates back to 4000 years ago which is known as the oldest living being in the country.



It is 25 meters high. Abarkouh Cypress is a symbol of life and elegance in the region, and one of the most exotic wonders of the world. After thousands of years it is still green and healthy.

This tree has been presented as an outstanding tree in the world. For being always green Zoroastrians believe that the tree has always had a significant importance.

In Abarkouh the cypress is called Zoroastrian cypress as well. It has been said in historical myth that the tree was planted by the Iranian prophet Zoroaster thus adding to the importance, beauty and holiness of the tree.

In antiquities such as the period of Achaemenid empire carvings of cypress symbolize the tree.

We can see bent cypress in a special type of handmade fabric called Terme. In miniature painting cypress is a tree that is painted most often.

Venetian merchant and explorer Marco Polo described the tree as one of the most stunning cypress trees he had ever seen in Iran.

I advise all travelers to pay a visit to the cypress and other historical monuments in this city, especially when it is located in the center of tourism and cultural attractions of the golden triangle of Yazd, Isfahan, and Shiraz.

Susa, a top destination for history buffs

➔ 1 The finest pottery was found in the lowest strata and belonged to two different civilizations, both Neolithic, according to Britannica.

The archaeological site, identified in 1850 by W.K. Loftus, consists of four mounds. One held the citadel and was excavated (1897–1908) by Jacques de Morgan, who uncovered, among other objects, the obelisk of the Akkadian king Manishtusu, the stele of his successor Naram-Sin, and the code of Hammurabi of Babylon. A second mound to the east was the location of the palace of Darius I and was excavated (c. 1881) by Marcel Dieulafoy. A third mound to the south contained the royal Elamite city, while the fourth mound consisted of the poorer houses.

After the fall of the Achaemenid Empire and the reign of Alexander the Great, who married in Susa, the city became part of the Seleucid empire. It was now called Seleucia on the Eulaeus. A palace in Greek style was erected, next to Darius' palace. The administrative center, however, was in the southern part of the city, where nearly all Greek and Parthian inscriptions were discovered. In the Parthian age, the city minted coins.

During the Sasanian age, the city had a large Christian community. It was sacked by the Sasanian king Shapur II, who transferred the population to Iwan-e Karkheh, but Susa was sufficiently recovered in the early seventh century to fight against the Arabs, who nevertheless captured the city which remained important until the thirteenth century CE.

Different archaeological seasons in Susa have yielded ample relics including pottery, arms, ornamental objects, metalwork, bronze articles, as well as clay tablets. Susa is also a gateway to several worthy destinations such as the UNESCO-tagged ziggurat of Tchogha Zanbil, the ruins of Achaemenid Apadana Castle, Shush Castle (Akropol), Prophet Daniel Shrine, Museum of Susa, the archaeological mount of Haft Tapeh.



Foreign travelers pose for a photo in front of the UNESCO-registered Tchogha Zanbil, a ruined Elamite-era ziggurat in southwest Iran.

■ Tchogha Zanbil, a fascinating tourist destination

The magnificent ruins of Tchogha Zanbil is amongst the topmost tourist attractions in southwest Iran considered by many the finest surviving example of the Elamite architecture in the globe.

The prehistoric mud brick complex bears testimony to the unique expression of the culture, beliefs, rituals and traditions of one of the oldest indigenous communities of Iran.

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1979, the ziggurat overlooks the ancient city of Susa (near modern Shush).

The Ziggurat was originally measured 105.2 meters in each side and protected by five huge concentric walls, three of which are presently remained.

Reaching a total height of some 25m, the ziggurat was used to be surmounted by a temple and estimated to hit 52m during its heyday.

Its construction started in c. 1250 BC upon the order of the Elamite king Untash-Napirisha (1275-1240 BC) as the religious center of Elam dedicated to the Elamite divinities Inshushinak and Napirisha.

UNESCO says that Tchogha Zanbil is the

largest ziggurat outside of Mesopotamia and the best preserved of this type of stepped pyramidal monument.

The Elamite structure was given a facing of baked bricks, a number of which have cuneiform characters giving the names of deities in the Elamite and Akkadian languages.

It was never been completed as thousands of unused bricks left at the premises testify.

Tchogha Zanbil was excavated in six seasons between 1951 and 1961 by Roman Ghirshman, a Russian-born French archaeologist who specialized in ancient Iran.

Govt. to support tourist places shut over coronavirus

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – The Iranian government has drafted a plan to support tourist places, which have been shut down over the novel coronavirus pandemic in the country.

On a Sunday meeting headed by President Hassan Rouhani, the cabinet tasked the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts with compensating for private investors who have leased tourism-related sites shut down over the fears of coronavirus outbreak, CHTN reported.

Delaying to collect or pardon the leases or extending the lease period are among ways approved to compensate.

Up to the moment, the tourism ministry has temporarily ceded tens of historical places and monuments to the



private sector intending to receive better maintenance by repurposing them into thriving eco-lodges, traditional restaurants or other profitable niches.

Iran hosts some of the world's oldest cultural monuments including bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, gardens, rich natural, rural landscapes as well as 24 UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Earlier this week, the government allocated 10 trillion rials (about \$240 million (at the official rate of 42,000 rials) to help airlines 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.

IN FOCUS



A little girl picks up a lamb while standing in a lush green landscape, Gilan province, northern Iran, February 24, 2020.



An Iranian lady decorates bowls of "Nazri" Aash (thick soup-stew) to be distributed to neighbors, relatives and other people, particularly the poor. .

Startups in full swing to combat coronavirus

By Faranak Bakhtiari

TEHRAN – Since the onset of the coronavirus epidemic, startups as well as knowledge-based companies have been working round the clock to provide items to combat the outbreak.

Sourena Sattari, the vice president for science and technology, told The Tehran Times on Monday that many knowledge-based companies have been united to fight the virus. They have taken notable steps to produce face mask, diagnostic kits, and disinfectants and manufacture advanced medical equipment such as ventilators, ICU and CT scan rooms, Sattari explained.

He went on to highlight that many measures are also being taken to provide vaccines and medicines, so that currently three independent

groups are working on the vaccine and hundreds of clinical trials are being conducted daily.

"We have now reached a point where the disease is under control and this has not been achieved unless through endeavors of researchers in universities and patience of people and their support for medical and knowledge-based companies," Sattari noted.

"Now, we have to get used to this new uninvited guest. The virus has become a part of the lives of all the people worldwide and may stay forever," he lamented. "Even after the discovery of medicine and vaccines, the virus, like many other viruses, will be associated with human beings."

Certainly, the lifestyle of people, including education, entertainment, and shopping will change globally in the future, he emphasized.



"New businesses are born and emerge, while some will disappear," he said, concluding that there are many opportunities for young people who have new ideas to improve the quality of life in a world affected by coronavirus, and they should use this opportunity hopefully and in the best possible way.

In March, Sattari said that some 200,000 nano masks were produced daily in the country, hoping that the output would reach 300,000.

He said: "Iran is one of the few countries that can manufacture machinery for producing nano masks which block particles less than three-tenths of a nanometer, including viruses."

Iran starts clinical trial on effectiveness of coronavirus drug

1 → ■ Solidarity trial

Since the pandemic has started to take a toll on almost all countries worldwide World Health Organization has set up an international trial, also known as solidarity trial, which is comparing four treatment options to assess their effectiveness against COVID-19. Involving all countries affected by the virus in one trial instead of multiple small trials will generate strong evidence needed to determine the effectiveness of potential treatment.

Furthermore, according to WHO, while randomized clinical trials normally take years to design and complete, the solidarity trial will reduce the time taken by 80 percent.

As of March 27, over 70 countries have already confirmed they will contribute to the trial, with many others in the process of joining.

Based on evidence from laboratory, animal and clinical studies, the following treatment options were selected: Remdesivir; Lopinavir/Ritonavir; Lopinavir/Ritonavir with Interferon beta-1a; and Chloroquine or Hydroxy-chloroquine.

Remdesivir was previously tested as an Ebola treatment. It has generated promising results in animal studies for Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), which are also caused by coronaviruses, suggesting it may have some effect in patients with COVID-19.

Lopinavir/Ritonavir is a licensed treatment for HIV. Evidence for COVID-19, MERS, and SARS is yet to show it can improve clinical outcomes or prevent infection. This trial aims to identify and confirm any benefit for COVID-19



patients. While there are indications from laboratory experiments that this combination may be effective against COVID-19, studies done so far in COVID-19 patients have been inconclusive.

Interferon-beta-1a is used to treat multiple sclerosis.

Chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine are very closely related and used to treat malaria and rheumatology conditions respectively. In China and France, small studies provided some indications of possible benefits of chloroquine phosphate against pneumonia caused by COVID-19 but need confirmation through randomized trials.

■ **APN01, a would-be promising drug for COVID-19**
WHO has stated on numerous occasions that there are

no medications for the treatment of COVID-19 and all drugs used for the treatment of the patients are still under trial.

So far, all the drugs used for reducing symptoms associated with the virus were originally prescribed for other conditions such as HIV or malaria, but they have shown some positive effects on the treatment of COVID-19 as well by either shortening the duration of the virus or preventing it from replication at early stages.

However, according to the trial site news, the University of British Columbia investigator-led an international team that has discovered an experimental drug that effectively blocks the cellular door to SARS-CoV-2 used to infect its hosts.

This multinational research effort concludes that an investigational treatment called APN01 (recombinant human angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 or rhACE2) may be capable of inhibiting COVID-19 by reducing the SARS-CoV-2 load that penetrates the lungs and other organs. A Vienna Austria-based biotech named Aperiion Biologics will now take APN01 into clinical trials in Europe.

Worldwide, there are over 1.1 million confirmed cases of coronavirus and nearly 63,000 deaths are reported. The pandemic has affected 209 countries, areas or territories.

While the world is hoping and striving for the best treatment option as well as a vaccine to minimize or stop deaths as well as decreasing economic consequences brought about by the lockdowns we all still have to stay at home as much as possible, practice hand hygiene and cough etiquette to both protect ourselves as well as others, especially vulnerable individuals, to limit the virus transmission and reduce the pressure on the health system.

Coronavirus: Ban wildlife markets to prevent future pandemics, says UN biodiversity chief

An international ban on wildlife markets could help stop future pandemics like coronavirus from breaking out, according to the United Nations biodiversity chief.

The Covid-19 outbreak is believed to have originated in a seafood market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, where it is thought stallholders were infected during contact with animals on sale.

Previous epidemics have also begun with animal-to-human transmission, including severe acute respiratory syndrome (Sars), which infected more than 8,000 people between 2002 and 2003.

Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, acting executive secretary of the UN's biological diversity department, has said banning markets where live animals are sold for human consumption could prevent new pandemic diseases from spreading. However, she said such

restrictions should only be imposed in the right conditions.

"The message we are getting is if we don't take care of nature, it will take care of us," Ms Mrema told The Guardian.

"It would be good to ban the live animal markets as China has done and some countries. But we should also remember you have communities, particularly from low-income rural areas, particularly in Africa, which are dependent on wild animals to sustain the livelihoods of millions of people," she said.

"Unless we get alternatives for these communities, there might be a danger of opening up illegal trade in wild animals which currently is already leading us to the brink of extinction for some species."

China temporarily banned people from eating and trading wildlife for food earlier this year as the country worked to combat

the spread of coronavirus.

Humane Society International, an animal charity, has called for this ban to become a permanent fixture across the globe, according to The Independent.

"The capture and consumption of wild animals is a global trade that causes immense suffering for hundreds of thousands of animals every year, including endangered wildlife species being traded to the brink of extinction," said president Jeffrey Flocken.

"The trade can also spawn global health crises like the current coronavirus, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome and the deadly bird flu.

"Wildlife markets across the globe, but particularly in Asia and Africa, are widespread and could easily be the start of disease outbreaks in the future."

Environmental experts have warned current

practices with natural habitats and wildlife can set off outbreaks of infectious diseases in humans.

Dr Samuel Myers, principle research scientist at Harvard's Department of Environmental Health, told The Independent last month: "Other animals are an enormous reservoir of pathogens, many of which we haven't yet been exposed to."

He said the live markets in Wuhan had "an extraordinary number of exotic species alive in cages, all in proximity to each other and to humans in a way that you would never find in the natural world".

Dr Myers, who is director of the Planetary Health Alliance, added: "Once a pathogen has made that jump from animals to humans, it has the capacity to spread around the globe very quickly with air travel."

(Source: The Guardian)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ↔ B

Home to home program to be launched to combat COVID-19

The Ministry of Health is to start a home to home program on Tuesday with the aim of finding people suspected of having coronavirus from around the country.

Some 300,000 teams of specialists will visit homes in collaboration with health centers for COVID-19 screening, Health Minister Saeed Namaki said, IRNA reported.

"As one of the leading countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region, we have started a big move and have prepared a plan that will be implemented as part of the national campaign to defeat COVID-19," he explained.

"We are also preparing the health centers and we will identify sporadic cases, and all suspected cases will be referred to health centers for further treatment."

The number of coronavirus cases in the country has risen to 1501, with 66 deaths so far.

آغاز طرح بیماریابی خانه به خانه برای مقابله با کرونا از فردا

وزارت بهداشت طرحی را با هدف یافتن افراد احتمالی مبتلا به ویروس کرونا از فردا در سراسر کشور آغاز می کند.

به گزارش ایرنا، سعید نمکی وزیر بهداشت گفت ۳۰۰ هزار اکیپ با همکاری مراکز درمانی برای غربالگری کرونا و بیماریابی خانه به خانه مردم از روز سه شنبه به خانه های مردم مراجعه می کنند.

او افزود: حرکت بزرگی را شروع کرده ایم و طرحی را آماده کرده ایم که در قالب بسیج ملی شکست کووید ۱۹ به عنوان یکی از پیشنهادها کشورهای شرق مدیترانه اجرا می کنیم.

نمکی گفت مراکز بهداشتی و درمانی را نیز آماده می کنیم. در اسرع وقت موارد پراکنده بیماری را شناسایی می کنیم و موارد مشکوک به مراکز بهداشتی و درمانی ارجاع می شوند و تحت پیگیری قرار می گیرند.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“by-, bye-”

■ **Meaning:** near or past

■ **For example:** I took a pleasant **byroad** which follows the coast.

PHRASAL VERB

Open out

■ **Meaning:** if a road, path, or passage opens out, it becomes wider

■ **For example:** Beyond the forest the path opened out into a track.

IDIOM

Cross someone's path

■ **Explanation:** to meet somebody, usually unexpectedly or by chance

■ **For example:** Ms. Bridgewater was my English teacher but haven't crossed her path since I left school.

Hemmati appointed new head of IRCS

SOCIETY

d e s k

TEHRAN – President Hassan Rouhani has appointed Karim Hemmati as the new head

of the Iranian Red Crescent Society for four years.

Hemmati replaced Ali-Asghar Peyvandi, who resigned in

December 2019.



Rouhani called on Hemmati to attract participation of people and NGOs more than the past to interact with the International Committee of the Red Cross and related institutions to provide timely humanitarian services to those in need and victims of natural disasters, highlighting that take action to deal with coronavirus outbreak.

Hemmati has also worked as the deputy health minister for legal and parliamentary affairs.

Scientists just laid out a detailed plan to replenish marine life by 2050

If you're not familiar with UN Sustainable Development Goal number 14, its aim is to "conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development" – and scientists just put together a 30-year plan to achieve that.

Despite rapid warming, increasing acidification, plastic pollution, growing dead zones and other environmental concerns that humankind is responsible for, these scientists think that our underwater ecosystems can be restored and become thriving again.

There's a lot of work ahead of us, but the new plan points to the resilience of many marine species as a glimmer of hope for the future. If we can give these species a chance to recover, marine life can be replenished within a generation, the team suggests.

"We are at a point where we can choose between a legacy of a resilient and vibrant ocean or an irreversibly disrupted ocean," says marine scientist Carlos Duarte, from the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) in Saudi Arabia.

"Our study documents recovery of marine populations, habitats and ecosystems following past conservation interventions. It provides specific, evidence-based recommendations to scale proven solutions globally."

Duarte and his colleagues looked at a wide variety of studies, reports and statistics to gauge the health of the oceans, finding that half of marine life populations have suffered a decline over the last four decades.

They mention nine key components to form the basis of a recovery plan: salt marshes, mangroves, seagrasses, coral reefs, kelp, oyster reefs, fisheries, megafauna, and the deep sea. Focus on these, the researchers say, and marine life should follow.

If we get this right, everyone benefits – salt marshes and sea grasses can lock away carbon in the atmosphere, for example, while mangroves have proven to be effective barriers against floods and waves.

The team pointed to previously successful conservation efforts to rescue species, from elephant seals to green turtles, as evidence that all is not lost when it comes to keeping underwater ecosystems going.

"Despite humanity having greatly distorted our oceans, recent interventions have led to a number of remarkable success stories," says biological scientist Catherine Lovelock, from the University of Queensland in Australia.

"The world has come together before to implement moratoriums on whaling, create a Law of the Sea, prevent pollution from ships, and limit industrialised fishing – all with positive outcomes. For the sake of our oceans, let's go further."

The team also identified six "recovery wedges" to focus on, namely protecting species, protecting spaces, harvesting wisely, restoring habitats, reducing pollution and – crucially – mitigating climate change.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

All-Italian European champions league final

(May 28, 2003)

Italian fans traveled to England in their thousands for the European champions league final in Manchester in the north of England today. For the first time it was an all-Italian final. Juventus of Turin plays AC Milan. Both clubs have billionaire owners. Milan is owned by the Italian Prime Minister and Juventus is supported by a major motor manufacturer.

Last **season** Italian fans were miserable at their country's lack of success. Their **clubs** failed to reach the **quarter-finals** of the European champions league, and the national teams were **knocked out** of the World Cup by South Korea. This season they had three **semi-finalists** – a return to the 1990s when an Italian **club** featured in nine out of ten finals. Today's match will produce the first Italian **champion** for seven years, and more success for the club's owners.

The Italian Prime Minister and media **tycoon** Sylvia Berlusconi bought AC Milan in 1986 and the team's fortunes have **mirrored** his **colourful** career in politics. Under him the team has won the league six times and three European Cups. Victory could be important as the prime ministers reach the midpoint of his electoral term. And defends himself in court against corruption charges.

■ **Words**

season: the period football is played during the year

clubs: the football teams and all who work with them

quarter-finals: the last four matches to play

knocked out: removed from

semi-finalists: the teams playing in the last two matches

champion: first prize winner

tycoon: very rich and powerful

mirrored: reflected

colourful: unusual, unconventional

(Source: BBC)

BoJo will stay ‘in charge’ of UK govt as he undergoes MORE Covid-19 tests after night in hospital

Boris Johnson will continue to lead the UK government despite spending the night in hospital due to his Covid-19 infection, Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick has said. The PM will also undergo a series of tests later in the day.

Although Johnson is in the hospital, he is still leading the UK government, Jenrick said on Monday.

“He’s been working extremely hard, leading the government and being constantly updated, that’s going to continue,” Jenrick told BBC TV. He stressed that Johnson would “continue to be kept informed as to what’s happening and to be in charge of the government.”

The UK leader is not the only high-profile British figure to catch coronavirus. Health Secretary Matt Hancock was diagnosed with the illness but has since made a full recovery. Likewise, Prince Charles learned that he had Covid-19 several days before Johnson, and emerged from self-isolation last week.

(Source: RT)

Pakistan quarantines 20,000 following Tabligh gathering in Lahore

Pakistan has quarantined 20,000 people and is still searching for thousands more who attended a Muslim group’s gathering in the city of Lahore last month despite the worsening coronavirus pandemic, officials said on Sunday.

Authorities said they want to test or quarantine those who congregated at the event held by the missionary movement, Tablighi Jamaat, between March 10-12 over fears they are now spreading COVID-19 across Pakistan and overseas.

More than 100,000 people went to the meeting, organizers said, undeterred by government requests for it to be cancelled as the virus hit the country.

In northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, authorities have so far quarantined 5,300 tablighis, or Islamic preachers, who attended the meeting.

“Health officials are conducting tests for coronavirus, and some of them have tested positive,” Ajmal Wazir, a spokesman for the region, told AFP news agency on Sunday.

Wazir said thousands of tablighis from his province were stranded in other regions because of the closure of major highways across the country.

About 7,000 have been quarantined in the central Punjab city of Lahore, while in southern Sindh province up to 8,000 tablighis have been quarantined, government officials said.

Dozens more have been forced to self-quarantine in southwestern Balochistan province.

(Source: al Jazeera)

Israel’s coronavirus death toll hits 55, cases climb to 8,611

The coronavirus death toll in Israel climbed to 55 on Monday morning, as confirmed cases of the virus increased to 8,611, including 141 patients in severe condition.

Critically, 107 patients currently require a ventilator - an increase of less than 1% during the past 24 hours. A total of 585 people have recovered from the illness to date, J Post reported.

The first of 11 El Al planes carrying medical supplies from China landed at Ben-Gurion Airport early Monday morning, bringing medical supplies including ventilators, masks, protective suits for medical teams and other items.

■ Coronavirus Ariel Sharon Camp

Meanwhile, Israel’s Channel 12 reported, quoting military officials, that eight military personnel in the camp tested positive for the coronavirus and that more than 100 other people suspected of contracting the disease had been quarantined.

The Israeli army’s spokesman had previously said that only 125 people in the army had been infected with the virus, but Kan 11 channel reported that the number of infected people in the army is much higher

Global surge of domestic violence since coronavirus lockdowns

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned of a “horrifying global surge” in domestic violence during the coronavirus crisis and urged governments to step up efforts to prevent violence against women.

“We know lockdowns and quarantines are essential to suppressing COVID-19. But they can trap women with abusive partners,” Guterres said in a video message posted on Twitter on Sunday, al Jazeera reported.

“For many women and girls, the threat looms largest where they should be safest - in their own homes.”

In some countries, the number of women calling support services has doubled, healthcare providers and police are overwhelmed and understaffed, and local support groups are “paralyzed” or short of funds, the UN chief said.

He called on governments worldwide to make sure the prosecution of abusers continues, to set up emergency warning systems in pharmacies and groceries, and declare women’s shelters essential services.

Guterres pressed for safe ways “for women to seek support, without alerting their abusers”.

“Together, we can and must prevent violence everywhere, from war zones to people’s homes, as we work to beat COVID-19,” he said, as he called “for peace at home - and in homes - around the world.”

“I urge all governments to make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their national response plans for COVID-19.”

Countries, including Germany, have warned that movement restrictions placed on the public in a bid to prevent the coronavirus from spreading threaten to exacerbate domestic violence.

Half of U.S.-led coalition troops to leave Iraq by end of 2020: PM-designate Zurfi

By staff & agencies

Half of the U.S.-led coalition troops in Iraq will have left the country by the end of 2020, Iraq’s premier-designate Adnan al-Zurfi has said, while a timetable for the departure of the other half will agreed upon by early 2021.

Zurfi made the remarks in his first televised interview as PM-designate, conducted by state media outlet al-Iraqiya on Sunday night, Rudaw reported.

“I talked to U.S. ambassador and coalition officials in Iraq about a schedule for coalition troop withdrawal from Iraq,” he said. “Half of the U.S.-led coalition troops will withdraw from Iraq by end of 2020, while the other half will leave Iraq after we agree on a schedule by the beginning of next year.”

“Iraq does not need foreign troops on its soil.”

Meanwhile, 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.

“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-Awfiy’a, Saraya Ashura, Harakat Jund al-Imam, and Saraya al-Khurasani.

In late March, the other PMU group Kata’ib Hezbollah



file photo: Iraq’s Prime Minister-designate Adnan al-Zurfi (left) with late Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) deputy leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in 2015.

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 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.

Rockets hit near foreign oil firms in Basra amid alert in Iraq

Several rockets have landed near offices of foreign and Iraqi oil companies in the southern city of Basra, the military says, amid warnings of false-flag U.S. operation aimed at creating further unrest in the country.

Police said three Katyusha rockets, launched at around 3 a.m. local time on Monday, hit the Burjesia district which houses foreign oil workers and offices of both foreign and Iraqi oil companies, west of Basra.

No damage or casualties have been reported in the district which has been largely empty in recent weeks due to the evacuation of almost all foreign personnel over the coronavirus pandemic.

According to two officials with state-run Basra Oil Co. (BOC) which oversees oil operation in the south production and export operations had not been affected by the attack.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack yet.

Police sources said they found a rocket launcher and some unused rockets in a close farmland area.

In recent months, the high-security Green Zone in the capital, Baghdad, has been repeatedly targeted by Katyusha rockets.

The U.S. military has used such attacks as a pretext to pressure the Iraqi government to disband the country’s popular anti-terror groups, which are now integrated into Iraq’s regular armed forces, and staged airstrikes on their positions along with Israel.

The latest developments come after reports that the Pentagon has ordered military commanders to plan for an escalation of American combat in Iraq.

Last week, Iraq’s anti-terror resistance groups reiterated their readiness to counter any possible attack by U.S. occupation forces, saying that they are also on high alert for any false-flag U.S. operation.

(Source: Perss TV)

Yemeni forces take areas in eastern Jawf, uncover Daesh prisons

Yemeni army and popular committees have purged areas in eastern al-Jawf Province of Takfiri militants and uncovered homes-turned-prisons that were run by the Daesh terrorist group.

Yemen’s al-Masirah TV channel released footage that uncovered prisons run by Daesh, and the cooperation between the terrorists and the Saudi-led coalition against Yemen in al-Jawf, Press TV reported.

The video showed that Daesh terrorists had turned homes in al-Marwan district in eastern al-Jawf into prisons. It showed the basements where women and children had been tortured.

According to the report, Saudi Arabia conducted 15 airstrikes on factories used by al-Qaeda terrorists to make explosive devices and booby-trap cars shortly after the area was seized by the Yemeni forces in order to remove evidence and hide plans hatched against the Yemeni people.

■ One civilian killed, two injured in Hudaydah

On Monday, a civilian was killed and two others were injured in shelling of residential homes by Saudi mercenaries in the province of Hudaydah.

According to Yemeni media outlets, Saudi-led militants violated the ceasefire in the province 108 times on Sunday. The violations included 32 artillery and rocket attacks.

Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched the devastating war on Yemen in March 2015 in order to bring former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi back to power and crush the Houthi Ansarullah movement.

The US-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization, estimates that the war has claimed more than 100,000 lives over the past five years.

Accused of ‘piracy’, U.S. denies diverting masks bound for Germany

The United States had no knowledge of a shipment of face masks bound for Germany that officials in Berlin have accused it of diverting from an airport in Bangkok, a spokeswoman for the U.S. embassy in Thailand said.

The comment came after Berlin Secretary of Interior Andreas Geisel said on Friday that an order of 200,000 masks bound for Germany had been “confiscated” in Bangkok and diverted to the United States, calling it an “act of modern piracy”.

“The United States Government did not take any action to divert any 3M supplies that were destined to Germany nor did we have any knowledge of such a shipment,” Jillian Bonnardeaux, the spokeswoman for the U.S. embassy in Bangkok, told Reuters.

“We remain concerned about pervasive attempts to divide international efforts through unsourced, unattributed disinformation campaigns.”

Thai authorities were not reachable on



Monday as the country was observing a public holiday.

The accusation that masks were diverted

came at a time when countries are scrambling to secure protective gear to battle the coronavirus pandemic.

U.S. intends to assassinate Iraqi PMU commanders: Iraqi MP

A member of the Iraqi parliament’s security and defense committee has warned against the ulterior objectives behind redeployment of US troops to various military sites across the Arab country, saying Washington is drawing up plans to target commanders of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), better known by the Arabic name Hashd al-Sha’abi.

“The withdrawal of US forces from a number of military bases does not come in line with the parliamentary resolution calling on the government

to push out foreign troops from the country. It is rather part of redeployment plans for American forces inside Iraq,” Karim al-Muhammadawi told Arabic-language al-Masalah news agency in an exclusive interview on Monday.

According to Press TV, he added, “The real intention behind the redeployment of US soldiers in Iraq remains unknown. But it is assumed to be related to the deployment of the forces to fortified bases, especially after the installation of Patriot missile systems there.

The US is purportedly seeking to launch precision strikes against Hashd al-Sha’abi positions and intends to assassinate commanders associated with them.”

Muhammadawi further highlighted that the US has moved its troops to fortified bases in Iraq amid considerable concerns over potential public uproar if any Hashd al-Sha’abi commander targeted.

“What has happened lately could not be described as troop withdrawal. It could be simply defined as a military tactic,” the Iraqi legislator pointed out.

Three Italian coaches shortlisted to lead Iran

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** – Three Italian coaches have been shortlisted to lead Iran national volleyball team.

Trentino coach Angelo Lorenzetti, Volley Lube trainer Ferdinando De Giorgi and Allianz Powervolley Milano coach Roberto Piazza are three coaches who have been nominated to lead Team Melli.

The Islamic Republic of Iran Volleyball Federation (IRIVF) parted ways with Igor Kolakovic in late March following cancellation of 2020 Olympic Games due to the pandemic coronavirus (COVID-19).

The 2020 FIVB Volleyball Nations League (VNL) had been also postponed because of coronavirus risk.

The Montenegrin coach was under contract with the Iranian federation until 2020 Tokyo but the Iranian federation opted to part company with him after postponement of the Games.

“After the IOC decided to reschedule the Olympic Games, Mr. Davarzani (IRIVF president) decided to stop cooperation with Kolakovic,” Iran volleyball team director Amir Khoshkhabar said.

“Iran are determined to make a splash at the Games, so the Iranian federation would prefer a foreign coach, however, an Iranian coach could be chosen,” he added.

Team Melli will meet Japan, Poland, Italy, Canada and Venezuela in Pool A at the Olympic Games.

Pool B consists of Brazil, the U.S., Russia, Argentina, France, and Tunisia.

Kolakovic had replaced Raul Lozano as Team Melli coach in February 2017.



FIFA helps Persepolis to pay their debts



S P O R T S **TEHRAN**— Persepolis can pay part of their debts through the release of a fraction of their blocked money in FIFA.

FIFA has responded to the request from the Iranian club, Persepolis, to pay \$23,000 to their ex-midfielder Fernando Gabriel and another \$10,000 to the Reds’ former assistant coach Serten Cuk.

According to FIFA’s letter, Persepolis can settle the unpaid wages to their former staff through their revenues from the 2018 FIFA World Cup allocated to the clubs whose players contributed to the competition.

Persepolis had two players, namely Alireza Beiranvand and Vahid Amiri, in the Iran national team at the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia.

Earlier, FIFA had opposed the payment of money to international creditors of Persepolis, but due to the decision of

FIFA’s Disciplinary Committee, the international governing body of football has agreed to deposit money into accounts of Gabriel and Cuk.

Persepolis have about \$ 650,000 blocked funds at FIFA, which they are unable to receive due to the International sanctions.

Serten Cuk was named as Persepolis coach in June 2016 and played a role in the Iranian giants’ success in that season of Iran Professional League (IPL). A year later, he parted ways with the team. He was Branko Ivankovic’s assistant coach.

Fernando Gabriel, the Brazilian attacking midfielder, signed a contract with the Iranian team in January 2015 and left the club at the same year after playing just 13 games for Persepolis. He is the current player of Emirati side Fujairah.

Remembering Ghayeghran on his death anniversary



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** – Late legendary footballer Sirous Ghayeghran remains frozen in time for any Iranian football fans.

The fans remember him as a hero who scored one of the most memorable goals in Iranian football history against South Korea in the semi-final round of the 1990 Asian Games.

Iran eventually won the title after beating North Korea on penalties.

Ghayeghran died in a car crash along his eight-year-old son Rastin on his way home from Bandar Anzali on April 7 of the 1998 at the age of 36.

The football devotees commemorate his death anniversary in his hometown Bandar Anzali but his family has announced that the ceremony will not be held due to coronavirus concerns and requested them to stay home.

In February 1986, Ghayeghran, who was known for his long-range shooting ability, made his debut for the Iran national team against Pakistan.

One year later, he became the Team Melli captain after most of the veteran players resigned from playing due to rising dissatisfaction with the football federation.

In 1988, thanks to Ghayeghran’s leadership an underprepared and inexperienced Iran won a bronze medal in the Asian Cup tournament. He and Mehdi Foonoonizadeh came out as the two players with their trademark long-range shots, which usually compensated for Iran’s shortage in the area of teamwork.

Ghayeghran finished his international career with 43 caps and six goals.

He played in Iranian football clubs Malavan, Al Gharrafa, Esteghlal Anzali and Keshavarz.

Nabi officially named FFIRI Secretary General

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Mehdi Mohammad Nabi has been official named as the Secretary General of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) on Monday.

The appointment of the new Acting Secretary General of the Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) had triggered the controversy because FFIRI violated the provisions of the FFIRI Statutes in the process of appointing the new Acting Secretary General.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) sent a letter to FFIRI, emphasizing 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, according to Article 34.1 of FFIRI Statutes.

The members of Executive Committee attended the meeting on Monday and appointed Mohammad Nabi as replacement of Ebrahim Shakouri in this role.

Mohammad Nabi has taken on important roles in recent years in the Iranian football, including the Secretary General, Executive Advisor to the President of the FFIRI, Deputy Secretary General, head of the Competition Committee.

He has also worked as the General Manager of Gostaresh Pars Khodro club, a member of the Board of Directors and vice-president of Persepolis as well.

IOC President Bach encourages everyone to stay strong

International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach encouraged people to stay active, strong and healthy during the coronavirus crisis, before celebrating Tokyo 2020 as a festival of resilience and solidarity.

Bach made the call in a message published ahead of the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, which will take place on Monday.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the United Nations’ supported event will focus on the health benefits of participating in sporting and physical activity, especially in this time of uncertainty and social distancing.

Organizers have asked people to be active, stay healthy and demonstrate solidarity, adding that team spirit will help the world through the current challenges together.

Bach echoed the sentiment in a video message where - riding an indoor bike - he said remaining active would help people through the crisis and afterwards.

“We are all in the same situation right now, we all cannot live our normal lives. We all have every day to find new ways to stand through this crisis. There, sport and physical activity can play an important role. An important role for staying strong and for staying healthy, but also to get ready for the day after this crisis,” he said.

“For the day we are all longing for, when we can resume our professional and social life. And for the day when finally we can hug each other again and can play sport together again. So, join all the Olympic athletes, and me, by staying active, staying strong and staying healthy to be ready for this very day,” Bach stated.

Dates for the rescheduled Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games were announced on March 30.

The Games will open on July 23 next year, with the Closing Ceremony taking place on August 8.

The Olympic and Paralympic Games in Japan’s capital city was postponed last month due to the coronavirus pandemic.



The IOC and Tokyo 2020 had faced mounting pressure from athletes and National Olympic Committees to postpone the Games.

Bach has claimed Tokyo 2020 can be a “festival of resilience”, with the event marking a celebration of the world coming through the crisis.

He said the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace was another reason to become active and look forward to the Games.

“One reason more to get active, to

play sport and one reason more to look forward to the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games which, because of the situation we are in now, we will celebrate next year,” Bach said.

“But if you are staying active, if you are staying strong, if you are staying healthy, we can celebrate them all together as a great festival of our resilience, as a great festival of our solidarity, and as a great festival of the unity of humankind in all of our diversity.

“Join this campaign.

“Stay active, stay strong and stay healthy.”

Over 1.2 million coronavirus cases have been reported worldwide since the outbreak began, resulting in more than 69,000 deaths to date.

Countries have introduced strict measures, such as lockdowns, aimed at slowing the spread of the virus.

People have been encouraged to remain physically active despite the lockdowns.

(Source: Insidethegames)

World Athletics Rankings: Hadadi in fourth place

Iranian discus thrower Ehsan Hadadi sits in the fourth place in the World Athletics Rankings.

Sweden’s Daniel Stahl leads the rankings with 1464 points. Jamaican Fedrick Dacers is second in the rankings with 1419 points and Austrian thrower Lukas Weissshaidinger sits third with 1380 points.

Hadadi is fourth in the table with 1322 points.

World Athletics has undertaken to create a global Ranking System where athletes score points based on a combination of result and place depending on the level of the competition in which the result is achieved.

The ranking is then based on their average score over a certain number of competitions in a defined period of time. (Source: World Athletics)

Sardar Azmoun committed to Zenit

Tasnim – Iranian international forward Sardar Azmoun dismissed rumors linking him with a move to Napoli.

Italian media reported that Napoli monitors the situation of Zenit striker Azmoun, who has scored eleven goals and five assists so far this season.

The 25-year-old forward has represented Iran at the 2015 and 2019 AFC Asian Cups and the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

Azmoun joined leader of the Russian domestic league Zenit on a three-and-a-half-year deal in February 2019.

“I am under contract with Zenit until the next 18 months and committed to my deal,” Azmoun said.

“I’ve heard about the news linking me with Napoli but I don’t know anything about them. We have to wait to see what happens in the future,” he added.

US’ wrestler hopes for Iranians to stay safe at home

IRNA – The American freestyle wrestler Jordan Ernest Burroughs in a message which was released amid the outbreak of coronavirus in the world, expressed hope for the Iranians to stay safe at home and to take care of each other.



In his message to former Iranian-American wrestler Hooman Tavakolian, Burroughs sympathized with Iranians and his fans in Iran.

He said that Americans are also grappling with the COVID-19, adding that doctors and nurses are certainly working hard in Iran to pass the crisis.

Burroughs hoped for Iranians to stay safe at home, to take care of each other and to show respect.

The virus is so hard but “if we are united we will win”, he noted.

Earlier during the 45th round of the 2017 Freestyle World Cup which was held in the Iranian western province, Kermanshah, on February 16-17, the American delegation, led by the 2012 Olympic champion Jordan Burroughs (USA) attended the event.

This is while US President Donald Trump signed an executive order on January 27 upon which US borders were closed for 4 months to refugees. Visa issuance has also been banned for seven Muslim countries, including Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Libya, Syria, Somalia and Yemen for 3 months.

On January 28, 2017, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in response to Trump’s order said: “While respecting Americans and differentiating between them and hostile US policies, Iran will take reciprocal measures to protect citizens.”

“Unlike the US, our decision is not retroactive. All with valid Iranian visa will be gladly welcomed,” he later said.

As a result of Iranians hospitality, Burroughs said, “The Iranian people love wrestling.”

He also wrote on his Instagram: “I’m very thankful for the warm reception we received today and even more grateful that this trip was made possible. We are very happy to be here in Iran and ready to compete! world cup 2017.”

Head of Iran’s Health Ministry’s Public Relations Office Kianoush Jahanpour said on Sunday that 22,011 people out of a total of 58,226 infected by the coronavirus have survived while 3,603 have unfortunately succumbed to death.

Andrea Stramaccioni misses Iran: agent

Tasnim – Andrea Stramaccioni’s agent Federico Pastorello said the Italian coach misses Iran and Esteghlal football club.

Stramaccioni resigned as coach of Esteghlal in December after the Iranian football club failed to respect contractual obligations.

The Italian coach had led the Iranian side to first place in the Persian Gulf Pro League this season.

“Stramaccioni loves Iranian people and he misses the warmth of this country. Unforgettable,” Pastorello said in a post on his Instagram account.

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

He who adopts cupidity as motto in life will be disliked by people, and he who reveals his distress, abases himself before all, and he who is ruled by his tongue has no worth in his own eyes and those of others.

Imam Ali (AS)

Martyr Soleimani's family honored young artist for portrait of commander

A R T **TEHRAN** — Martyr Qassem Soleimani's family has honored young Iranian artist Mehran Rahmani for drawing a portrait of the commander on the IRIB TV talent show Asre Jadid.



Iranian artist Mehran Rahmani stands next to his drawing of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani on March 28, 2020.

In an Instagram post published on Sunday, Rahmani announced that he has received a Soleimani's agate ring from his family in appreciation of his brilliant performance on the TV show.

Rahmani drew the portrait of the former Quds Force chief with speed painting technique on the TV program broadcast on IRIB Channel 3 on March 28.

In an interview published by the Persian service of MNA earlier last week, Rahmani announced his plan to draw a portrait of Soleimani. "Although I am very young, I have my own goals and ideals," he said and added that his next performance will be even better.

Lieutenant General Soleimani was assassinated in a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad on January 3.

Tehran center offers free access to UN documents on Iran-Iraq war

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — The Research Center and Archives of Sacred Defense based in Tehran announced on Monday that it has recently given free access to a collection of UN documents on the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

The PDF copies of the documents translated into Persian by Mohammad-Ali Khorrami can be downloaded on <http://www.defamoghaddas.ir/portal/news/303/>, the center announced.

"Iran-Iraq War in U.N Documents" includes 1600 documents about how the war broke out and how it ended, as well as some documents about some post-war events.

Letters of the UN secretaries-general written to the foreign ministers of Iran and Iraq, as well as the statements and resolutions issued by the UN Security Council are also included.



Front cover of the first copy of "Iran-Iraq war in U.N Documents".

Japanese celebrity redesigns signature song as hand washing melody

TOKYO (Reuters) — Japanese social media celebrity Pikotaro returned as a leading twitter trend in Japan with a coronavirus hand washing song that repurposes his signature Pen-Pineapple-Apple-Pen (PPAP) to Pray-for-People-and-Peace.

The video was among the top five in a Twitter trend ranking in Japan on Monday.

Pikotaro, whose real name is Kazuhito Kosaka, wore the same gold animal print outfit he wore in PPAP video that went viral in 2016.

His hand washing video, shorter than the 2016 two minute hit that the Guinness World Record listed as the shortest song to make it into the Billboard Hot 100 chart, had also been viewed a quarter of a million times on Youtube since it was uploaded on Saturday.

Owj accepts to stream "Exodus" online over coronavirus pandemic

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Owj Arts and Media Organization has given up the public screenings of its latest production "Exodus" due to the shutdown of the movie theaters during the COVID-19 pandemic in Iran, accepting to stream the controversial movie online.

"Due to the present situation, it seems that the coronavirus crisis and its mental and social repercussions will be continuing for some time," "Exodus" media advisor Mohammad Zoqi said on Sunday.

"So, we decided to try a new movement by using the video on demand (VOD) system to satisfy people's demands before the public screenings at movie theaters," he added.

VOD is a video media distribution system that allows users to access video entertainment without a traditional video entertainment device and without the constraints of a typical static broadcasting schedule.

"We have plans to advertise the movie and we have entered into negotiations with Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting to air the commercials for the movie," Zoqi said.

"By online screenings and then the screenings at theaters and on TV, the movie will have more audiences, moreover, we will see a better return on our investment and this film will help improve people's mood," he added.

"The Owj organization and director Ebrahim Hatamikia have also always tried to make films for the people," Zoqi noted.

However, Ali Sartipi, the distributor of "Exodus", said on Monday that the Owj has agreed to stream the film online and it differs from the screening through VOD.

Sartipi said that the producer and director of the film have taken risks and added, "I hope this will be just the beginning of a new path for the future."

"Exodus", which is about a nowhere-land peasant protest against the local authority



Pantea Panahiha acts in a scene from director Ebrahim Hatamikia's movie "Exodus".

that symbolically resembles President Hassan Rouhani's government, had its Iranian premiere during the 38th Fajr Film Festival in Tehran in February.

Produced at Owj, an institution that produces revolutionary works in art and cinema, the film tells the story of a group

of cotton farmers who leave their farms to protest the local official's unfulfilled promises at the president's office in the capital.

The film failed to receive the acclaims of the critics who judged the film as falling below expectations.

Comments by the critics and journalists

provoked the anger of Hatamikia during a press conference organized after the premiere of the film.

"I'm not concerned about the storms of criticism, some people may like or dislike my film, but I'm annoyed by coarseness," Hatamikia lamented.

"International Sensory Assassin Network" pops up at Iranian bookstores



Copies of the Persian version of American writer Mary Ting's novel "ISAN: International Sensory Assassin Network" are on display in a bookstore in Tehran.

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — American writer Mary Ting's novel "ISAN: International Sensory Assassin Network" has recently been published in Persian in Tehran.

Arezu Mahmudian is the translator of the book, which has been released by Tandis Publications.

Written in 2018, the fantasy fiction book tells the story of Ava, a 17-year-old girl who lives in a world that is devastated by meteors.

Struggling to survive, Ava ends up in juvenile detention, until she is selected for a new life. She must be injected with an experimental serum and the results will be life changing. To receive the serum, which

is supposed to make her better, Ava agrees to join a program controlled by ISAN, the International Sensory Assassin Network.

While on a mission, she is abducted by a rebel group led by Rhett. Rhett told her that they have a history and her entire past is a lie perpetuated by ISAN to ensure her compliance. Unsure of who to trust, Ava must decide if her strangely familiar captor is her enemy or her savior, and time is running out.

The book has won several awards, including Benjamin Franklin Awards in Science Fiction and Fantasy, American Fiction Awards in Science Fiction: Post-Apocalyptic and International Book Awards in Science Fiction.

Singer Pink says she had coronavirus, pledges \$1 million to relief efforts

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — U.S. singer Pink said on Friday she had tested positive for COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the new coronavirus, two weeks ago and has since recovered.

"Two weeks ago my three-year old son, Jameson, and I were showing symptoms of COVID-19. Fortunately, our primary care physician had access to tests and I tested positive," she wrote in an Instagram post.

"My family was already sheltering at home and we continued to do so for the last two weeks following the instruction of our doctor. Just a few days ago we were re-tested and are now thankfully negative," Pink said in the post, alongside a picture of her with her son.

She also called for testing to be made free and more available, saying it was an "absolute travesty and failure of our government to not make testing more widely accessible."

The singer, who is known for pop songs like 'What About Us,' 'Just Give



2017 American Music Awards – Show – Los Angeles, California, U.S., 19/11/2017 – Singer Pink performs. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni/File Photo)

Me A Reason' and 'Just Like A Pill,' also announced a donation of \$1 million, split equally between the Temple University Hospital Emergency Fund in Philadelphia and the City of Los Angeles Mayor's Emergency COVID-19 Crisis Fund.

"Kuchake Jangali" composer Mohammad Mirzamani recovers from Covid-19



Composer Mohammad Mirzamani in an undated photo.

A R T **TEHRAN** — Mohammad Mirzamani, the composer of the 1980s popular TV series "Kuchake Jangali", who was tested positive for the coronavirus mid-March, has recovered and resting at home.

"It was late February where I visited my dentist and after that I had a bad cold, which lasted too long," Mirzamani told the Persian service of Honaronline on Monday.

"I had to visit my doctor several times, but I was suffering from high fever and body weakness for long and was finally diagnosed with a coronavirus infection and forced to receive supportive care in the hospital for a week," he added.

He said that he was released after a week and had to stay at home for two more weeks

in home quarantine.

"I feel better now but not truly healed. I spend my time reading books or sometimes get busy with the piano I have in my room and compose a piece of music, but body weakness still remains and I need to rest more," he added.

Mirzamani, the composer of the albums "The Rainbow of Love" with singer Abdolhossein Mokhtabad and "Farewell" with vocalist Hesameddin Seraj, asked people to take good care of themselves and stay at home during the coronavirus pandemic in the country.

According to the Health Ministry, 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 so far.

Doris Day's awards, animal artifacts haul in \$3 million at auction

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — An auction of late actress Doris Day's four Golden Globe awards and other items from her life generated nearly \$3 million over the weekend, far outpacing original estimates, Julien's Auctions said on Sunday.

Top-selling items in the live online auction included a classic 1930 Ford convertible that was seen in the opening of Day's 1980s talk show "Doris Day's Best Friends". The car sold for \$96,000. A Golden Globe award she received in 1962 went for \$25,600.

All proceeds from the sale of more than 1,100 items will benefit the Doris Day Animal Foundation that the singer and actress founded in 1978. Julien's Auctions had estimated the sale would bring in between \$300,000 and \$600,000.

Day, the cheery, girl next door who was one of the biggest stars of the 1950s and 1960s, died in May 2019 at the age of 97 in the Carmel, California, home she had made her refuge from Hollywood.

The auction featured Day's piano, gowns, furniture and dozens of artifacts



Flowers are pictured by the star of late actor Doris Day on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in Los Angeles, California, U.S., May 13, 2019. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni/File Photo)

reflecting her passion for animals including numerous ceramic dogs, birds, decorative pigs and pictures of giraffes and other critters that adorned her rustic home.

A planter decorated with brass elephants that was a gift from friend and actor Rock Hudson sold for \$15,625, as did a 14-karat gold poodle charm bracelet.