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The post-corona world order

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Reviving small mines not enough, a change of approach is in order: official

By Ebrahim Fallahi

TEHRAN – Holding nearly 70 different types of minerals, Iran is ranked among the world's top 15 mineral-rich countries, however, the country's mining sector is still underdeveloped and small mines which can be considered the major drivers of the industry are lagging behind a few big companies which enjoy the government's full support.

Most of the government's major plans

regarding the mining sector have been centered on supporting the downstream sector, and mainly the steel chain, to prevent the exports of unprocessed minerals.

But in the past few years, considering the economic pressures of the U.S. sanctions, the Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry has changed its approach and is becoming more aware of the significant role of the small-scale mines in developing the country's mining sector. ➔ **4**

Iraq's reality, future require withdrawal of U.S. occupiers

By Mohammad Mazhari

TEHRAN – Deputy Secretary-General of the Iraqi Al-Nujaba Movement emphasized that the project of ousting U.S. forces out of Iraq is a reality in the future of the country and hopes of an honorable and free life will not be fulfilled without it.

The deployment change of the U.S. terrorist forces in Iraq and their focus on Ain al-Asad airbase indicate their efforts to implement new conspiracies against the

Resistance and to stay out of the reach of their missiles. However, based on the legislation of the Iraqi parliament, U.S. troops must leave the country. In an interview with Tehran Times, Deputy Secretary-General of the Al-Nujaba Movement Nasr Al-Shammari discussed this issue as follows.

How do you assess the recent U.S. moves in Iraq and do you think these can be seen as the beginning of U.S. withdrawal from the country? ➔ **7**

Ambassador lauds services to Indian nationals in Qom amid COVID-19

By Salman Parviz

TEHRAN – The Indian ambassador to Iran has lauded the performance of the Iranian Foreign Ministry as well as the local offices of the health and interior ministries for taking care of the Indian nationals in the shrine city of Qom.

According to Ambassador Gaddam Dharmendra, Indian nationals

in Qom – both pilgrims and theology students- that some of them have contracted the coronavirus disease, have received necessary services, including medical care.

"We appreciate the efforts and invaluable support of the Ministry of Health office in Qom and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs," Dharmendra tells the Tehran Times. ➔ **3**

WHO defunding 'not surprising' for those familiar with U.S. unilateralism: expert

By Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

TEHRAN – A U.S. academic believes that Trump's controversial decision to halt the World Health Organization funds is a continuation of the regime's unilateralism in the international arena.

U.S. President Donald Trump has announced that Washington would stop funding WHO, accusing the body of mismanaging and covering-up of the spread of the COVID-19 across the globe. The abrupt decision received widespread backlash from across the world where officials and activists voiced concern over the defunding amid the global fight against a pandemic.

In an exclusive interview with the Mehr News Agency, Professor David Yagoubian noted that Trump's measure "should not surprise anyone who has been following the steady path of unilateralism and belligerence that the Trump regime

has pursued since its unfortunate inception."

Here is the full text of the interview with David Yagoubian, professor of history at California State University San Bernardino:

U.S. President Donald Trump yet again implemented another unilateral measure by halting WHO funds. What do you think is his main aim?

In my view Trump's move to cut funding for the WHO is an effort to simultaneously extend his administration's hybrid warfare against China—which it clearly seeks to blame for the coronavirus pandemic to obfuscate its own horrendously slow and inadequate response—while weakening yet another international institution that does not respond to American whims and that does not solely serve American interests. Thus, while this is greatly disconcerting news indeed, the cutting of WHO funds in the middle

of a global pandemic by the United States should not surprise anyone who has been following the steady path of unilateralism and belligerence that the Trump regime has pursued since its unfortunate inception.

It seems that there is no end to U.S.' unilateralism, how do you think the world can respond to such measures?

It is truly shameful that the vast majority of member states of the United Nations, and especially those of the Security Council, prioritize their own short-term comfort, security, and economic gain over rigid attachment to and implementation of established principles and institutions that were created to perpetuate these very same things for the global collective in the long term. I am speaking of course about the UN Charter, United Nations Security Council resolutions, ➔ **9**

Number of Americans infected by COVID-19 may be 50-80 times higher: Stanford University

A study released by Stanford University medical researchers suggests a far larger segment of the population has already been infected with novel coronavirus than is reflected in official tallies.

The new study, which hasn't yet been peer reviewed, tested 3,300 residents of Santa Clara County for antibodies that would indicate they've been infected with COVID-19.

When the samples were taken, on April 3 and 4, the number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Santa Clara County was around 1,100. (That number has since surpassed 1,800.) The total population of the county is 1.9 million, which would mean a total infection rate of about 0.06%.

Based on the prevalence of antibodies found in the 3,300 people tested, the Stanford researchers

believe the actual proportion of the population who has been infected with the new coronavirus is somewhere between 2.5% and 4.2%.

That would mean the actual number of people infected in Santa Clara County could be anywhere from 48,000 to 80,640.

"Our findings suggest that there is somewhere between 50- and 80-fold more infections in our county than what's known by the number of cases than are reported by our department of public health," Dr. Eran Bendavid, the Stanford professor who headed the study, told ABC News' Diane Sawyer.

"The population prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 antibodies in Santa Clara County implies that the infection is much more widespread than

indicated by the number of confirmed cases," the study concludes.

The study hasn't stood the test of peer review, a process that can take a few weeks or several months.

It's no surprise the number of actual cases would trump the official count, as testing has been limited not just in Santa Clara County, but globally. New York City recently revised its official death toll to reflect an additional 3,700 people who are presumed to have succumbed to the virus, but were never tested.

ABC7 News reached out to the Santa Clara County Public Health Department for comment on the study. We will update this story when we hear back.



Iran's Army receives reconnaissance and combat drones

TEHRAN – Iran's Army took delivery of a "massive number" of reconnaissance and combat drones on Saturday.

Defense Minister Amir Hatami announced that a "massive number" of multi-role, reconnaissance and combat UAVs, as well as Karrarr and Ababil-3 drones produced by the Aircraft Manufacturing Industrial Company (HESA) has been delivered to the Army's Air Force and Air Defense.

The delivered drones will cover an important section of Air Defense and Air Force operations and can be used as target planes as well as for deception on the enemy's air defense networks, he explained. ➔ **2**

REPORT
Mohammad Jafari
Tehran Times journalist

How crises are hypocritically used by U.S. politicians to push country towards modern dictatorship!

The powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the federal government, are few and defined and to the State governments are numerous and indefinite, however in the historic crises, including wars and epidemic diseases, the senior U.S. politicians exploited the critical situation to ignore the mentioned constitutional rule to empower the federal government which is nothing but a modern shape of dictatorship.

The doctrine of enumerated powers—the main restraint on the new government—was most famously stated by James Madison' 45th essay on federalism, "The powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the federal government, are few and defined. Those which are to remain in the State governments are numerous and indefinite."

Rick B. Larsen, the president of Sutherland Institute, has reviewed in his analytic article published by the Information Clearing House that how senior politicians through the United States' history have used a crisis to give upper hand to the federal government in face of the States governments.

"The COVID-19 crisis offers unprecedented insight into the delicate balance between free market solutions and government overreach. We see it today in the admittedly tricky balance between personal freedom, public health and economic survival. But the real underlying problem may be more significant than it appears," wrote the president of the Sutherland Institute which is a conservative public policy think tank located in Salt Lake City, Utah.

He added, "Alexander Hamilton repeatedly warned against the reactive ingredients of populist sentiment during times of crisis and political ambition. He said when people are in crisis, they will allow – perhaps demand – expanded government. And government will gladly respond." ➔ **7**

ARTICLE
Faranak Bakhtiari
Tehran Times journalist

Coronavirus crisis: a time for lasting togetherness

In the wake of coronavirus, many people have faced difficulty earning income or finding self-protective products due to lock-down measures, but benefactors stood up and volunteering opportunities cropped up, which highly reflects that togetherness never ends.

Worldwide, more than 2,263,052 people have been infected and at least 154,827 have died since coronavirus erupted in the Chinese city of Wuhan in late December. Since Saturday, Iran reported over 80,868 infections and 5,031 deaths.

Over the past months, many NGOs, volunteer individuals or teams have been doing particularly thoughtful work on coronavirus fight, joining hands to help each other survive the difficult condition.

However, it is not possible and beyond our abilities to name all the volunteers and philanthropists who dedicated themselves to handle a pandemic of this magnitude helping those unable to pay for health care and the necessary supplies, we named some of them to remind that coronavirus is an opportunity to make the world a better place.

Mohammad Reza Hojjati, a volunteer physician who has gone far to assist the medical staff and patients, told The Tehran Times on Saturday that "Since the onset of the outbreak, I volunteered to visit patients infected with the disease in two hospitals in Tehran."

"However, after ten days of offering medical services, I showed symptoms of the disease and tested positive, so that I preferred to stay at home not to occupy a bed in the hospital and leave it for the patients suffering severe conditions," he explained.

"As soon as I recovered, I started coordination to help patients more and even the staff, so, I began searching for the benefactors and even officials to ask them for help whether a slight one."

"So far, we could provide high-quality food for the medical staff for several weeks, with the help of donors," he said.

"We also could find manufacturers to provide the health workers with gowns, face shields, and masks, adding, we are currently coordinating to receive tablets for the patients to provide them with on-line contact with their families during the hospitalization period." ➔ **9**

The post-coronavirus world order

By **Mahmood Monshipouri**

At the earlier stages of the struggle against the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, governments across the globe are still in a reaction mode and politicians are making decisions as they go. Experts are rushing to express different views and contemplate the ramifications of the spread of this infectious disease. Meanwhile, the world faces lethal cost of containing and eventually controlling this virus in terms of economic decay and public health crisis of a magnitude unforeseen in the past.

More specifically, however, poverty-stricken countries and those still engulfed in a civil wars, including refugees, migrant workers, and asylum seekers, will wind up getting the short ends of the stick. Most predictions point to the epic event of our time surpassing the great depression of the 1930s, with deadly consequences, including the rise of extremism, mass suffering, socioeconomic inequality, economic collapse, and possibly social unrests. It is not clear when the world exits from national lockdowns and “stay at home” strategy. If there is an agreement among experts, it is that going back to normal is impossible in the short term, as parts of the world await a long recovery.

What would the world be like in the post-coronavirus pandemic era?

Some experts, such as Stephen M. Walt, argue that populist politicians will exploit this pandemic as yet another opportunity to blame refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers for the outbreak. Clearly, they push for closing borders and adopting anti-globalization measures in the name of nationalism and economic protectionism. Others argue that the pandemic will strengthen the state and bolster nationalism. Different governments will adopt emergency measures to curb the crisis and many will be reluctant to give up these newfound powers when the crisis is over. The coronavirus, Walt continues, will also expedite the “shift in power and influence from west to east” (Foreign Policy, March 20, 2020). The result will be a world that is bereft of social justice, shared prosperity, environmental sustainability, and basic freedoms. Consequently, U.S. competence will be disputed, and its global influence likely to sharply decline.

Similarly, Richard N. Haass, the author of A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order (2017) argues that the post-coronavirus world will not be dramatically different from the one that came before it. “COVID-19,” Haass continues, “will not so much change the basic direction

“The pandemic is certain to heighten friction between the United States and China.”

of world history as accelerate it.” The world that emerges from this crisis, Haass insists, will be familiar: “Waning American leadership, faltering global cooperation, great power discord”—features that have come to accurately describe the U.S. declining leadership role in the world (Foreign Affairs, April 7, 2020). Well before this virus overwhelmed the globe, Haass asserts, there had already been a drastic drop in the appeal of the US model. The pandemic is certain to heighten friction between the United States and China, while also reinforcing the democratic recession that has characterized the world since the 9/11 attacks on the United States. Now more than ever, the possibility of a new Cold War between the United States China looms large. There will be greater support for a larger government role in society, particularly in the form of curbing movement of populations or providing economic aid. Under such circumstances, civil liberties and political freedoms will be significantly restricted.

Still others argue that abandoning democratic norms will come with a hefty price, underscoring the need to assess the performance of authoritarian regimes in terms of alleviating poverty, protecting rights, and tackling socioeconomic and racial disparities. The need for global coordination becomes so urgent that it would require cooperation at all levels—international, national, and local. Each country has much to learn from the experiences of the rest. An ardent defender of liberal internationalism, G. John Ikenberry posits that in the future, while we may see the increasing great power rivalry in a divided and violent world, nation-states are likely to cooperate to achieve security and prosperity for all. It is plausible that in the long term, Ikenberry writes, “democracies will come out of their shells to find a new type of pragmatic internationalism (quoted in The Guardian, March 28, 2020). While most liberal democrats acknowledge that this global pandemic could widen the divisions between countries and possibly fuel anti-migrant sentiments, there is a good chance it will buttress international cooperation, support for the international organization such as UN, and a willingness to seek negotiations rather than military and economic clash.

Meanwhile, in the absence of global leadership and cooperation, traumatic effects of coronavirus will leave unresolved the possibility of the return of the liberal order narrative, making a critical assessment of the pandemic’s disruptive consequences all the more urgent. US Senator Bernie Sanders, along with several other democrats, have asked the Trump administration to lift sanctions on Iran in light of the fact that the country is facing a humanitarian disaster in its campaign against coronavirus. There are evidence that the sanctions have reduced Iran’s capacity to curb the outbreak. Absent global cooperation and sustainable/coordinated efforts, the future waves of this virus will be even more threatening.

Mahmood Monshipouri is professor of University of California, Berkeley

Iran’s Army receives reconnaissance and combat drones

1 → Hatami said the multirole drones have a speed of 900 km/h and a range of 1000 km, and can be deployed for a duration of 180 minutes without interruption at an altitude of 40,000–45,000 feet.

Ababil-3 drones are mid-range combat drones with the capability of carrying various electro-optic and combat equipment, he said.

The defense chief added that the drones are mainly used for gathering and transmitting optical data and can also be deployed for combat operations with an operation range of 150 km.

Hatami also said that jet-powered Karrar drones have the capability of carrying and dropping loads and have been upgraded to add combat and self-destruction capabilities.

Iranians are victims of U.S. sanctions, says Vanderbilt University professor

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Thomas **d e s k** Alan, a professor at Vanderbilt University, has said that the Iranians are victims of the United States’ sanctions and policies.

In an interview with ILNA published on Saturday, Alan said that the U.S. sanctions have made it difficult for Iran to fight the coronavirus.

“The President of the United States must remove the sanctions for humanitarian reasons,” the professor insisted.

Chris Murphy, the U.S. senator from Connecticut, warned on Monday that the Trump administration could be partially responsible for “the death of innocent people” if it continues its current policies towards Iran amidst the coronavirus epidemic.

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

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

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

He had penned a March 26 letter, signed by ten other Democratic senators, asking the Trump administration to ensure that Iran



and Venezuela can import medical supplies and other humanitarian goods to deal with the coronavirus outbreak.

Murphy wrote on his Twitter page on April 6 that Iranians are dying of coronavirus partly because of U.S. sanctions.

“Innocent civilians are dying there in part because our sanctions are limiting humanitarian aid during coronavirus,” he tweeted.

Fan Hongda, a professor of international relations at Shanghai International Studies University (SISU), has said that the United States sanctions on Iran violate human rights.

“Iran is fighting the coronavirus and faces shortage in medicine and medical equipment because of the United States’ long term sanctions. This issue has affected the Iranian people’s health seriously,” he told IRNA in an interview published on Thursday.

He added, “Instead of helping the countries to fight the coronavirus, the United States has imposed sanctions on Iran and put pressure

on other countries not to help Iran.”

Despite the U.S. pressure, China has not stopped sending aid to Iran, he noted.

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

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

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

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

On March 31, a UN human rights expert

‘Iran believes prevention of foreign interference will guarantee peace in Afghanistan’

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iranian analyst **d e s k** Mohammad Molazehi is of the opinion that prevention of extra-regional interference will guarantee peace in Afghanistan.

“Iran wants more active role by influential regional players and prevention of extra-regional players’ interferences. Iran believes neighbors of Afghanistan can guarantee peace in the country,” Molazehi told IRNA in an interview published on Saturday.

Afghanistan has been facing a political crisis since last September’s presidential elections. The Election Commission has declared Ashraf Ghani as the winner but Abdullah Abdullah has also proclaimed himself winner.

Molazehi said that it is not possible for a country to have two governments.

“Talks to settle political crisis in Afghanistan have started. It seems that Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani have reached preliminary agreement in the way that 50 percent of the government officials be appointed by Abdullah and 50 percent by Ghani,” he stated.

Mohsen Rouhisefat, an expert on international affairs, has said that the Afghan leaders and political groups must take steps in settling the political crisis in their country.

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

He noted that Iran supports such approach.

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

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

the reconciliation council.

Abdullah’s aides will hold their final discussions to finalize Abdullah’s proposed plan, according to sources.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In report on Friday headlined “Ghani, Abdullah ‘near deal’ to end deadlock over power”, Afghanistan Times reported that the two rivals are expected to put an end



to the political tensions.

“Once our plan is final and consultations end, we will share the plan with the mediators to share with the opposite side. The situation now requires both sides to be flexible so that we can solve the problems and we hope our plan lead us to a political understanding,” Abdullah’s spokesman Feraidoon Khozon said Friday.

He didn’t provide details of the plan, but another aide of Abdullah had earlier said that their plan would offer an equal power sharing with Abdullah being the chief executive.

In a tweet on Thursday, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said he had discussed “the peace process in Afghanistan” with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in a telephone conversation on Wednesday.

Zarif had earlier talked about the political developments in Afghanistan with his Qatari, Turkish and Russian counterparts.

‘Citizens must observe health protocols to return to Iran’

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Foreign **d e s k** Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on Saturday that all the Iranian citizens in other countries must observe healthcare protocols while returning to the country.

“The Ministry of Health has set a series of healthcare protocols for entering the country on these days and we have presented them to the Iranian citizens through our embassies,” ISNA quoted him as saying.

He noted, “A flight was made within this

framework, however, unfortunately, the process was disrupted and certain people did not observe the protocols when they entered the country.”

Iran’s embassy in Rome issued a statement on Thursday announcing Friday’s flight to Iran was cancelled due to a number of passengers’ failure to observe the healthcare protocols on Wednesday’s flight.

Mousavi said on Friday that Tehran and Rome are consulting to evacuate the

Iranian students in Italy.

“We are consulting to have one flight from Rome and two from Milan to Tehran,” Mousavi explained.

He said that the Iranian students in Italy have been informed about healthcare protocols before, during and after their trip.

The Iranian Health Ministry announced on Saturday that that 73 coronavirus patients lost their lives in the country over the past 24 hours, a considerable decline compared with 89 deaths the day before.

Warning to U.S. warships in the Persian Gulf

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — In a report published by the **d e s k** Vatan-e-Emrooz daily on Saturday, it was said that the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) gave a military warning to the U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf.

The U.S. has released a video which shows a commander aboard an Iranian speed gunboat gets close to the U.S. vessels and gestures towards the U.S. forces by raising his index finger which can be interpreted as giving a warning, the report said.

It said Iran’s warning shows the country is prepared to seriously respond to any military adventurism by the U.S.

U.S. Navy issued a statement on Wednesday claiming that 11 Iranian IRGC boats had closed in on up to six U.S. naval vessels in the Persian Gulf “in dangerous and harassing approaches”.

The statement also said the incident took place in the “northern Arabian Gulf”, a historically flawed and provocative expression commonly adopted by anti-Iran groups instead



of “Persian Gulf” term, according to Press TV.

According to Aljazeera, the Iranian vessels came within 10 yards of the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Maui.

The Iranian boats left after about an hour, the statement added.

In a tweet on Thursday, Foreign Minister Mohammad

Javad Zarif reminded Washington that by its presence in the Persian Gulf, the U.S. Navy is 7,000 miles away from home.

He mentioned a 2-year-old tweet of himself that read, “US Navy can’t seem to find its way around our waters. Perhaps because it hasn’t figured out its name: Persian Gulf, as it’s been called for 2,000 yrs longer than US has existed.”

Defense Minister Amir Hatami said on Friday that the U.S. “illegal” and “aggressive” presence in the Persian Gulf has weakened security in the region.

“It is the United States’ illegal and aggressive presence that weaken security in the Persian Gulf region. They [the U.S.] has come near Iran’s borders from other end of the world and make unfounded claims,” he told reporters on the sidelines of a parade held to mark the National Army Day.

He added, “The Iranian people are insightful and know who is right. We are in our home and they have come from other end of the world to cause problems for the regional countries through threats and sanctions.”

Larijani denounces ‘inhumane’ Israeli siege of Gaza

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said on Friday that the Israeli continuation of its siege against the Gaza Strip demonstrates the regime's inhumane nature.

Larijani made the remarks in a phone talk with chief of the political bureau of the Islamic resistance movement Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, according to Mehr.

He also spoke on the phone with Secretary General of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement Ziad al-Nakhala. The two Palestinian leaders called Larijani, who tested positive for coronavirus earlier this month, to wish him quick recovery.

Larijani also termed the United States' illegal sanctions as inhumane.

He pointed out that the post-coronavirus world can be an opportunity to revisit the rights of nations and human identity, urging the “arrogant” powers to learn from the crisis and change their behavior.

The Majlis speaker reiterated the Islamic Republic's support to the oppressed people of Palestine and their rights.

He called on the Palestinian people to maintain their unity and use their legal and human potential against criminal acts



of the Zionists.

For his part, Haniyeh wished good health and swift recovery for Larijani.

He expressed gratitude to Larijani, de-

scribing him as “a permanent supporter of the resistance in the region, especially the oppressed people of Palestine.”

During his phone talk with Nakhala,

Larijani stressed that Iran will continue its crucial role in supporting regional people against the tyrannies of the U.S. and the Israeli regime.

He also wished health and success for the members of the Islamic resistance movement, saying the victory against the Zionist regime will be achieved through the efforts of the Islamic movements and the divine help.

In remarks in July 2019, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei said the Islamic Republic has no hesitation when it comes to supporting Palestine.

In a meeting with a high-ranking Hamas delegation in Tehran, Ayatollah Khamenei described the Palestinian issue as “the first and foremost issue of the Muslim world” and hailed the resistance of the Palestinian people and political groups, including Hamas, as “wonderful.”

“Victory will not be achieved without resistance and struggle and, based on a definite divine promise, we believe that the issue of Palestine will surely end in favor of the Palestinian people and the Islamic world,” the Leader stated.

U.S. political parties competing in hatred towards others: commentator

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Mohammad Marandi, a professor at the University of Tehran, has criticized Washington's obsession with China, saying both U.S. political parties are competing in hating other countries and peoples.

“With Russiagate competition for receiving US hatred was intense,” Marandi tweeted on Saturday. “It's now harder with the latest China obsession.”

“The 2 failing factions of the US regime compete in hating so many nations, peoples, international bodies & agreements...they neglect showing their teeth at Iranians,” the political commentator added.

The tweet was a response to U.S. President Donald Trump who has accused China of lying about its coronavirus death toll.

“China has just announced a doubling in the number of their deaths from the Invisible Enemy,” Trump said in a tweet on Friday. “It is far higher than that and far higher



than the U.S., not even close!”

Last month, Trump referred to the coronavirus as “the Chinese virus” on Twitter.

“The United States will be powerfully supporting those industries, like Airlines and others, that are particularly affected by the Chinese Virus. We will be stronger than ever before!” Trump tweeted on March 17.

The racist tweet caused outrage in China. A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman warned the U.S. should “take care of its own business” before stigmatizing China.

Trump defended his comment, ignoring criticism that it is racist. “It's not racist at all,” Trump said during a news conference, explaining his reasoning after a reporter told him many consider it racist. “It comes from China, that's why.”

China experts argue that labelling the virus this way will only increase tensions between the two countries and encourage xenophobia.

Ambassador lauds services to Indian nationals in Qom amid COVID-19

1→ According to the ambassador, Qom's governor general has said services provided to foreign nationals in Qom have won the praise of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 outbreak in-person interview with the Indian envoy was not possible.

The following are the comments Tehran Times got from our queries to the office of Ambassador Dharmendra:

■ **Evacuation of Indian students and pilgrims from Qom:**

More than 1,100 Indians have returned to India in the month of March. These include around 800 pilgrims who were in Qom and hail from the Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir and the state of Maharashtra; some 300 students primarily from the UT of J&K also returned to India.

Currently, there are around 5,000 Indian nationals who are staying in Iran. Many of them are on long term stay and are pursuing their religious studies in Qom and Mashad. There are also some 1,000 fishermen and some 150 seafarers mainly in the provinces of Hormuzgan and Bushehr.

As regards, those individuals who tested positive for COVID-19, they are recovering in a quarantine facility set up in Qom with the support of the Qom's Governor General's office and the Qom authorities.

■ **Indian envoy's meeting with Qom Governor General:**

Ambassador Gaddam Dharmendra visited Qom on 5th April and paid a courtesy-call on Governor-General Bahram Sarmast. Ambassador Gaddam briefed the governor general about Indian pilgrims in Qom and assured of their early evacuation. India is currently under a nation-wide lockdown and all commercial international air flights have been suspended.

Governor-General Sarmast briefed the Ambassador about the measures being taken by Iranian authorities, including setting up facilities to accommodate Indian pilgrims in Qom, arranging of visits by Iranian doctors to check the pilgrims and liaison with local hospitals to admit the serious cases. Governor-General Sarmast also informed that the World Health Organization (WHO) had praised the approach of the Qom administration towards foreign nationals.

As of now, there are about 340 Indian nationals in Qom. India does not wish to be a burden on Iran and the Embassy is, therefore, meeting all expenditures towards the cost of boarding and lodging of the pilgrims. We appreciate the efforts and invaluable support of the Ministry of Health office in Qom and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We also thank the DG of Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs in Qom province for his coordination between various offices and helping in the evacuation of pilgrims to India.

The India-Iran Rupee special purpose payments mechanism to finance bilateral trade continues to be operative.

■ **Chabahar Port and INSTC:**

In a globalized and inter-connected world, connectivity paradigms are assuming great salience. India and Iran have committed to deepen bilateral co-operation on connectivity projects. The Shahid Beheshti port in Chabahar and the Chabahar-Zahedan rail line are two such projects on which there is a high-level commitment to deepen bilateral co-operation. This was reiterated most recently during a meeting between Prime Minister Modi and President Hassan Rouhani in New York in September last year on the sidelines of the annual United Nation's General Assembly sessions.

India and Iran are also working together within the framework of the International North-South Transport Corridor and with other INSTC member countries. India has proposed to the INSTC Secretariat the establishment of a Joint Venture “Multimodal Transport Corporation”. India had also called for the inclusion of Chabahar port in the INSTC.

The Shahid Beheshti port has already handled 6000 TEUs and 800,000 tons of bulk cargo till date. Iran has added Shahid Beheshti port to the Chabahar Free Zone which is expected to further increase traffic. For its part, India has offered discounts to shippers who utilize the Shahid Beheshti port for their cargo.

There have been some challenges in procuring equipment due to the ongoing COVID global pandemic crisis. However, we are proceeding ahead with placing orders for port handling equipment.

■ **India-Iran bilateral trade:**

The India-Iran Rupee special purpose payments mechanism to finance bilateral trade continues to be operative.

Overall, the potential for bilateral trade remains bright and businesses in both countries are optimistic and confident of benefiting from each other's advantages. This is not withstanding the challenges posed by the current difficulties in expanding our trade basket. The commercial chambers in both countries are coordinating on these issues.

The major Indian exports to Iran are rice and other cereals, tea, Active Pharma Ingredients (API), animal fodder, inorganic and organic chemicals, and electrical

machinery. There is enormous potential to expand trade to include other commodities and items for export to Iran viz. Paper and paper products, textiles, engineering goods, rubber and articles, etc.

The major Iranian non-oil exports to India, until 2018, are organic chemicals, fertilizers, plastic and its articles. Once again, there is substantial potential to increase exports to India of fruits, dry fruits, saffron (to cater to the large Indian sweets market), gypsum, quicklime for cement industry, and raw hides and skins for leather industry.

India-Iran bilateral trade has shown a positive trend in year 2018-19, compared to the previous year. Subsequent to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and lifting of sanctions, India-Iran bilateral trade in 2016-17 was \$12.88 billion, which was an increase of about one percent, compared to 2015-16. But, the bilateral trade was \$13.76 billion in 2017-18, an increase of 23 percent. The trend continued in 2018-19 when bilateral trade increased to \$17.03 billion, an increase of 10.42 percent, despite the announcement of U.S. sanctions in 2018.

■ **Culture:**

India and Iran are age old civilizations, with a shared history which is rich in arts and culture. In recognition of their rich history, both countries have established an institutional framework (governmental/private) to support a diverse range of cultural activities. These include theatre; traditional and folk music; film industry; poetry and literature; fine arts including painting, graphics, calligraphy, book illustration, caricature art, etc. These are promoted through structural support viz. Institutes, auditorium, art galleries museums, display parks. Periodic competitions and awards, and expert training centers are another form of deepening bilateral cooperation. Anthropologically connected crafts of weaving (Carpets, qilims, fabric) and embroidery/needlework; metal art work, leather and wood crafts; and traditional practice to modern technologically developed ceramic art work are flourishing. Craft museums, Anthropological Museums are found in all major cities of Iran.

Anthropological activities are aimed at arriving at a better appreciation and understanding of social customs, history



and social and cultural processes. The scope is vast in both countries. Specifically, Iran has well preserved prehistoric sites in Zargos, Hamedan, Lorestan, Sistan (eg. Sialk, Susa, Elam). Several anthropological museums in all major cities act as important conservatories.

■ **Commonalities between India and Iran:**

People to people contact is an important dimension of bilateral ties. India has a vast Muslim population and has the third largest Muslim population in the world. It also shares unique religious observations of Shia sect with Iran (Eid, Muharram with Taziya, Ramadan) which provide yet another dimension of ties between our two countries. Besides, there are cultural festivities common to both our peoples viz. Nowrooz, Nature Day and Shab-i-yalda in Iran which has parallels in Indian Chaitra Navratra, Basant Panchami, and Lohri, respectively. The content of celebration, feasting, and social etiquette too has much in common.

■ **Ways to interact:**

The cultural activities can be better understood through observation/experience, available at Museums at Palaces and Monuments of historic period brings face to face with the living culture. Living and practiced culture of Iran derives from its roots (in Shahnameh; Achaemenid and Sassanian glory; in Safavid culture). Several opportunities to interact with Iranian culture are available each day in events like seminars, exhibitions, talks, fairs held regularly in all cities.

■ **Favourite subjects:**

Indo-Iranian shared heritage or cultural parallels and similarities in field of art, philosophy, literature and architecture.

■ **65 Indian workers at Kaveh steel plant, Ardestan:**

65 Indian workers have been employed at the Kaveh steel plant, Ardestan since last year. They are understood to be working in setting up the steel plant as well as a power plant. The two plants are believed to be nearing completion. The Embassy has been in touch with the workers through its helpines and been advising them to follow health protocols amid the COVID-19 outbreak in Iran. We have been informed that a Tehran-based owner of the two plants has also been taking care of their needs.

Envoy thanks Iranians for offer of cash help

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iranian Ambassador to Brussels has thanked Iranian nationals living in Belgium for offering cash help to buy medical products needed to contain the coronavirus outbreak in Iran.

“Humanitarian spirit is an important part of the Iranian people's characteristic which is displayed during difficulties, especially during the era of sanctions,” Gholamhossein Dehghani said on Saturday, according to IRNA.

Last week, Dehghani said Iran is not alone in rejecting the legitimacy of the U.S. sanctions.

“The moves could be regarded as the violation of international law,” he said in an article published by Euronews.

“Is the U.S. government stalling such relief only pending a ‘direct’ request from the Iranian side? Or, could it be a matter of the U.S. administration's policy within the broader maximum pressure campaign?”

He concluded, “Has the deluge of international demands that U.S. sanctions be lifted fallen on deaf ears only so that they could hear it directly from Iran? Or, is it due to the actual tendency among some of the top U.S. officials to make Iran buckle under the mounting pressure that is at play?”

The United States' illegal and unjust sanctions against Iran have created difficult conditions for the Islamic Republic, which is struggling against the coronavirus since the first cases were announced back in February.

So far, more than 80,000 people have tested positive for the virus and some 5,000 people have lost their lives.

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

Chris Murphy, the U.S. senator from Connecticut, warned last week that the Trump administration could be partially responsible for “the death of innocent people” if it continues its current policies towards Iran amidst the coronavirus epidemic.

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

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

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

“The continued imposition of crippling economic sanctions on Syria, Venezuela, Iran, Cuba, and, to a lesser degree, Zimbabwe, to name the most prominent instances, severely undermines the ordinary citizens' fundamental right to sufficient and adequate food,” Hilal Elver, UN special rapporteur on the right to food, said in a statement.

Ex-envoy: U.S. bid for dialogue with Iraq won't work

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Former Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad Hassan Kazemi Qomi has predicted failure for the U.S. plan for strategic dialogue with the Iraqi government unless Washington shifts its policy of pressures and threats and seeks to establish healthy relations with Iraq.

“I believe that there won't be any new dialogue, and no new development is to happen,” Kazemi Qomi said in an interview with Tasnim published on Saturday.

He said Iraqis would agree to establish genuine relations with the U.S. only if Washington respects Iraq's interests.

Otherwise, he continued, they will strongly oppose Washington's call for dialogue, especially if the White House ignores the Arab country's interests through pressures and threats.

“I believe that a new strategic dialogue will not take place unless the Americans seek a proper presence in Iraq, and this will be possible when Washington abandons its illegitimate objectives,” Kazemi Qomi said.

“But, considering that the U.S. has an aggressive nature, I believe that such a thing will not take place and the (American) threats and allurements will not work.”

The former envoy went on to say that the U.S. once adopted a strategy to widen the social gaps in Iraq in order to take control of the Arab country's security situation. “The U.S. that once claimed it had come to Iraq to establish security is now gripped by insecurity itself, because it was the Americans who created terrorist groups, including Daesh (ISIL), in Iraq and confessed to doing so later.”

Kazemi also stated that the U.S. favors an Iraqi government that would not implement the bill on the withdrawal of American military forces.

One of the White House's main concerns is to prevent Iraq's close relations with its neighbors, including Iran, he said.

“Today, Iraq's security and defense powers are based upon people, but the Americans are trying to undermine Iraq's defense strategy. This would strengthen the chance of American interference (in Iraq),” he concluded.

U.S. State Secretary Mike Pompeo announced on April 7 that the U.S. would hold a strategic dialogue with Iraq in mid-June.

“All strategic issues between our two countries will be on the agenda, including the future presence of the United States forces in that country and how best to support an independent and sovereign Iraq,” Pompeo said.

In early January, Iraq's parliament passed a resolution telling the government to end the presence of foreign troops in Iraq and ensure they not use its land, air, and waters for any reason.

The move came after the U.S. assassination of Iran's top general Qassem Soleimani, the deputy head of Hashd al-Shaabi Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, and a number of others in Baghdad.

Annual iron ore concentrate output rises 4%

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Production of iron ore concentrate in Iran reached 47,306 million tons in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), registering a four-percent rise compared to the preceding year, IRNA reported on Saturday, citing the Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry data.

As reported, the data regarding the output of major mineral production companies released by the ministry showed that last year 41.7 million tons of iron ore pellet was also produced.



In a bid to prevent the exports of unprocessed minerals, creating more value-added and meeting the requirements of domestic producers for the raw materials, Iran has levied a 25-percent duty on the exports of raw minerals (especially iron ore) since September 23, 2019.

The Industry Ministry believes that the duty is going to encourage the production of more processed minerals such as pellets and concentrate instead of selling the raw minerals.

TEDPIX posts biggest daily jump ever

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), registered its highest-ever jump on Saturday, Tasnim news agency reported.

The index gained 23,219 points in a single day to stand at 668,981, as over 5.775 billion securities worth 61.55 trillion rials (about \$1.465 billion) were traded through 830,000 deals.

The first market's index rose 17,205 points and the second market's index climbed 46,040 points at TSE on Saturday.

The past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19) witnessed a very fruitful performance for the country's stock market.

As TSE Head Ali Sahraei has announced, the value of trades at the Tehran Stock Exchange jumped 2.6 folds, while Return on Investment (ROI) reached 180 percent in the previous year.

On February 24, TEDPIX posted a record high to surpass half a million points. It climbed 4,831 points to 503,735, when over 6.354 billion securities worth 49.299 trillion rials (about \$1.1 billion) were traded at TSE.

TSE is one of the four major stock exchanges of Iran, the other three exchanges are Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME), and Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX). The lucrative status was also witnessed in these markets in the past year.

While growth and development in the Iranian stock market have been started in recent years, the previous year was in fact a time of flourishing for the country's stock exchanges.

Different factors contributed to the past year's prominent success in the stock market.

One important factor was proper ground laid in the stock market and providing better conditions for traders.

The other factor was the status of parallel markets, such as those of foreign currency, gold coin, and housing in the past year that made making investment in the stock market an obviously better and more profitable choice for the investors.

And on Wednesday, Iran's stock market held its largest-ever IPO. Social Security Investment Company (SSIC, also known by its Persian acronym Shasta), Iran's major state-owned investment company, offered eight billion shares, which account for 10 percent of its stakes, for sales at the Tehran Stock Exchange.

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

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

IMF chief says its forecast that 170 global economies will shrink may be too optimistic

The International Monetary Fund recently announced the "Great Lockdown" recession will drag global GDP lower by 3% in 2020, but its managing director now thinks the gloomy outlook could be too positive.

The coronavirus pandemic is set to leave 170 countries with lower GDP per capita by the end of the year, but the projection "may be actually a more optimistic picture than reality produces," Kristalina Georgieva told the BBC in an interview.

"Epidemiologists are now helping us make macroeconomic projections. Never in the history of the IMF have we had that," she added. "And what they're telling us is that the novel coronavirus is a big unknown, and we don't know whether it may return in 2021."

Uncertainty around the virus' future has left the world's experts in the dark, but the IMF's latest report lays out bleak outcomes for prolonged outbreaks. Should the pandemic last through 2020, the world economy will emerge with extremely modest gains the following year in a sluggish rebound.

The combination of a longer initial pandemic and a 2021 resurgence would yield an even worse downturn, the organization said. Global GDP would sharply contract in 2021 and leave "additional scarring" as credit health deteriorates.

The IMF saw a far more optimistic scenario as recently as January. The pre-outbreak economic situation was poised to improve GDP per capita in 160 countries. Yet the pandemic has quickly plunged the world into "a global recession we have not seen in our lifetimes," the director said, leaving governments racing to avoid a total meltdown.

The organization has pledged to use its \$1 trillion lending capacity to aid nations through the health crisis, but Georgieva emphasized the importance of nations getting ahead of the economic damage. Major economies have already unleashed trillions of dollars in stimulus and central bank easing, but rampant aid needs to be kept in check for long-term recovery, she added.

"It is the time that governments should spend as much as they can afford and more, but keep the receipts. We don't want to lose accountability and transparency during this crisis," Georgieva said. (Source: Business Insider)

Reviving small mines is not enough, a change of approach is in order: official

1 → Earlier this month, the ministry announced its plans for the promotion of domestic production in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 20) which has been named the year of "Surge in Production" by the Leader of Islamic Revolution Seyed Ali Khamenei, among which five major programs were defined regarding the promotion of the mining sector.

Although these plans are a positive sign of the government's willingness for taking a more holistic approach toward this sector but a close look at the programs reveals that there is still a long way ahead.

To explore how the government and especially the Industry Ministry could offer support for this sector, Tehran Times interviewed Sadjad Ghoroghi, who is the deputy head of Iranian Association of Producers and Exporters of Mineral Products and also a board member and the deputy head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA)'s Mines and Mining Industries Committee.

■ Small mines and the industry

According to Ghoroghi, currently, more than 10,000 licenses are registered by the industry ministry for mining operations across Iran, more than 96 percent of which are for small-scale mines.

"Small mines are the heart of the industry and they are the main driver of this sector," the expert said.

Unfortunately, due to their dispersal and the difficulty in attracting capital and investment, such production units are vulnerable

during the economic hardships and they are most likely to be bankrupted when faced with such situations.

In the past few years, after the imposition of the U.S. sanctions on the country, attracting foreign investment become much harder for the mining sector and access to machinery and technical services also become very limited; as a result, many of the country's small mines were forced to reduce their operations and even completely close down.

The government, however, saw the solution in focusing more on the bigger production units and supporting the downstream sector for exporting products with more value-added to offset the losses in the country's oil revenues.

In September 2019, the government levied a 25-percent duty on the exports of raw minerals (especially iron ore), an act which meant the upstream sector (which is mainly comprised of small mines) were technically deprived of their right to export and generate revenue and were left with no choice but to sell their products to the big companies (which already have the government support) for much lower prices.

■ The time for change

Asked about the effectiveness of the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry's plans for reviving the small mines, Ghoroghi said: "Such project-oriented programs are by no means enough, it doesn't do any good to identify some idle mines and provide them with some facilities to reopen and then force them into a cycle of generating less revenues."

Having products with more added value is

Iran, Qatar agree on energy, investment co-op

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran's Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian and Qatar's Minister of Commerce and Industry Ali bin Ahmed Al Kuwari agreed on cooperation in energy and investment spheres between the two countries during a video conference.

As the next meeting of Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Committee, which was scheduled to be held in Iran's Isfahan City in the current Iranian calendar month of Farvardin (March 20-April 19), has been canceled due to the coronavirus outbreak, the two ministers, who are the co-chairmen of the committee, discussed areas of bilateral cooperation through video conference, Iran's Energy Ministry's news portal (Paven) published.

The two sides also stressed that the meeting of the joint economic committee will be held as soon as the coronavirus pandemic ends and then seriously follow up the objectives of bilateral trade.

Meanwhile, they decided that until then both sides pursue the discussed issues through more video conferences.

In a joint press conference with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in Tehran in January, Iranian President



Hassan Rouhani said that Iran has stood and will stand beside Qatar in the future.

"At a juncture of time, certain regional countries imposed restrictions on Qatar, but Iran stood beside Qatar and will stand based on its duties as a neighbor," Rouhani added.

He said that the two countries have a very good relationship in various areas of economy, science, and culture.

For his part, the Qatari emir said that Doha will never forget Tehran's help in difficult days.

"We praise the Islamic Republic of Iran's stance in recent years, especially when Qatar was under blockade," the emir said.

Sheikh Tamim also called for the expansion of relations.

Over \$16.5b needed for industry ministry's 'surge in production' plans

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani said the country's production units need 700 trillion rials (over \$16.6 billion) of investment to realize the "surge in production" intended by the Leader.

"Unlike other ministries, we don't need the government's direct investment to carry out industrial projects; the mentioned 700-trillion rials resources are not going to be given to the ministry, but will be injected directly into various production units across the country," Rahmani told Tasnim on Saturday.

"The needed funds will be provided through banks, stock exchange, the National Development Fund (NDF), and investment funds," he said, adding "we expect the growth in the country's industrial sector to become positive by the end of the current [Iranian calendar] year (ends on March 20, 2021)."



Referring to the great capacities of the country's industrial and mining production sectors, the official said: "Industry

UAE, China, Netherlands top foreign investors in Iran's industry

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry's reports on foreign investment in the country's industry, mining and trade sectors indicates that during the last Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), \$854 million of foreign investment projects were ratified and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), China, and the Netherlands had the biggest share of the investments.

As reported by ISNA, the largest portion of all the mentioned investments was made in Zanjan province and the tobacco group had received the biggest foreign capital.

Food and beverage products, non-metallic mineral products, petrochemicals, and oil products were other areas of interest for the foreign investors.

According to this report, last year, 82 foreign investment projects were approved in the industry, mining and trade sectors, of which 33 were funded completely by foreign investors and 48 were conducted in partnerships with domestic companies.

The largest volume of investment (\$837 million or 98 percent) was made in the industrial sector while in the trade and mining sectors, \$16 million (1.88 percent) and \$1 million (0.12 percent) were reported,



respectively.

Zanjan, Khorasan Razavi, Kermanshah, Hormozgan, and Tehran were among the provinces in which most of the country's foreign investment was made. They accounted for 18, 15, 13, 8 and 7 percent of the total foreign investment last year, respectively.

Back in May 2019, President Hassan Rouhani ordered executive bodies to take immediate steps to remove obstacles to domestic and foreign investment in the country.

The decision came as the U.S. has introduced the harshest ever sanctions against Iran in line with the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" on the country, a policy that analysts and politicians say is intended to paralyze the country's economy.

China's GDP plunge is a message that this is not a drill

By William Pesek

China's dramatic gross domestic product plunge has the economics community obsessing over the wrong question.

The what-happened discussion about the 6.8% drop in first-quarter GDP is kind of pointless. Beijing's coronavirus lockdown on top of the two-year-long trade war proved too much even for a government with any number of tools to ramp up growth.

The better question, really, is who is this message from China's first contraction since 1992 aimed at? Here are some nations to consider:

Clearly, Japan for starters. Asia's No. 2 economy already had a similarly-sized GDP reckoning in the October to December period.

Shinzo Abe's "bazooka" moment didn't age well. On April 7, the same day Japan's prime minister was declaring a COVID-19 "state of emergency," he unveiled a record \$1 trillion stimulus plan, or about 20% of GDP. Only, the memo Abe's team transmitted to CEOs,

households and investors got lost in translation. Just about everyone has since decided the spending plan is too little too late.

So, Team Abe decided it needed to clarify its determination to support domestic consumption. Last week's plan was to extend handouts to households that can prove a direct coronavirus loss, while risking infection by visiting jam-packed administrative offices. Given Japan's notorious bureaucracy, and the high odds of rejection, many probably wouldn't bother to apply.

Now, Tokyo is looking to give 100,000 yen (\$930) to everyone. Yet, this too will strike many as paltry relative to steps being taken in Europe, Australia and South Korea to backstop wages—so long as employers don't initiate mass layoffs. Abe's government hasn't even broached this issue yet.

The Bank of Japan, meantime, is taking a wait-and-see approach at a time when there's not a millisecond to waste. Central banking is a confidence game, and the BOJ long since stopped instilling any. It's time Abe and BOJ

Governor Haruhiko Kuroda joined forces for a duel assault on the fallout to come. Fallout that would make that 7.1% GDP loss in the fourth quarter seem tame.

Second, Korea. One could make an argument that Seoul also needs to read China's memo. It, too, is wearing some sizable blinders as COVID-19 fallout hobbles pretty much all vital export markets.

The good news is that President Moon Jae-in's governing party won a landslide in parliamentary elections this week. With Moon now enjoying the largest majority of seats in three decades, his team has a solid mandate to take his income redistribution plan out for a ride.

Since May 2017, Moon put North Korean peace above economic reform. It's high time he reined in the family-owned conglomerates, or chaebols, that tower over Korea and stymie the vibrant startup scene needed to create new energy, jobs and income. Sadly, the failure to act sooner means Korea entered the battle against coronavirus fallout on weak footing.

Seeing China, Korea's biggest customer, crater is the wakeup call Moon needed to raise the nation's economic game.

Australia, too, finally. Officials Down Under are being too stingy as they roll out an \$80 billion rescue plan that's clearly inadequate to the challenge. Arguably, no economy constitutes a bigger leveraged bet on China than resource-rich Australia.

Over the last 20 years, government after government promised to diversify the economy. Each, however, doubled down on China, sending ever more tanker ships filled with iron ore, copper, coal, gold, beef and wine to the most populous nation.

This latest stimulus plan from Prime Minister Scott Morrison's government does nothing to redirect growth engines. And at just 3.3% of GDP this fiscal year, Canberra's coronavirus spending spree is woefully inadequate to the carnage to come. That will still be true next year if that jolt is expanded to about 6% of GDP.

(Source: Forbes)

Public investment funded Parand power plant development project: Mapna

ENERGY TEHRAN — Managing Director of Iran's Mapna Group, which was in charge of the Parand power plant development project near the capital Tehran, says the completion of the project became possible only due to the people's investment.

"Nearly 70 trillion rials (about \$1.6 billion) of investment has been made to put the Parand Combined Cycle Power Plant into operation, and a big part of this investment was provided through people's small investments in the stock market," Abbas Aliabadi told IRNA on Friday.

The project was completed without the need for attracting foreign investment or borrowing from the National Development Fund (NDF), and only by relying on the people's capital and the sale of Sukuk bonds which makes it very valuable, he explained.

Aliabadi further underlined the need for the conversion of the country's thermal power plants into combined-cycle ones as one of the most important measures that should be taken in the country's energy sector.



Mentioning the positive impacts of the development of the Parand power plant, the official said: "One of the most important advantages of this project is going to be its environmental impacts, since reducing the temperature of the gases emitted by the

power plant will have a very good effect on the environment."

He also emphasized the reduction of fossil fuel consumption as another important outcome of the development projects, adding that the power plant's efficiency

has improved significantly.

Sustainability of the electricity grid, creating new job opportunities, preventing the outflow of capital and using the saved fuel in other parts of the country were also mentioned as other positive outcomes of the mentioned project.

The nominal capacity of electricity generation at Iranian power plants has reached 85,500 megawatts [85.5 gigawatts (GW)] following the completion of the development of the Parand power plant which added 480 MW to the country's total power generation capacity.

Currently, combined cycle power plants account for the biggest share in the country's total power generation capacity followed by gas power plants.

MAPNA Group is a group of Iranian companies involved in development and execution of thermal and renewable power plants, oil & gas, railway transportation, and other industrial projects as well as manufacturing main equipment including gas and steam turbines, electrical generator,

Asian LNG prices sink again as coronavirus disrupts demand

Asian spot prices for liquefied natural gas (LNG) sank this week as the coronavirus pandemic further dampened demand, prompting buyers to push back cargo deliveries.

The average LNG price for June delivery into northeast Asia LNG-AS was estimated at around \$2.30 per million British thermal units (mmBtu) on Friday, \$0.20 per mmBtu lower than the estimate last week.

The current price is almost half that for June a year ago, Reuters data showed. LNG and gas stocks had already been high all over the world, a trader said. "Coronavirus has made the bad much worse. The market is down due to low offtake by usual buyers," he added.

Several buyers around the world are trying to defer cargo deliveries, industry sources said, which has led to several floating cargoes and prompted some sellers to offer unwanted volumes in tenders.

"That's why there are so many sell tenders on the market," the LNG trader said.

In a tender this week, Australia's Ichthys LNG plant sold a cargo for loading in early May below \$2/mmBtu on a free-on-board (FOB) basis, sources said.

Brunei's LNG export plant sold an early June cargo at \$2.30/mmBtu on a FOB basis and also separately sold a cargo on a delivered ex-ship (DES) basis for May 8-9 at around \$2.10 per mmBtu. There was an offer from Indonesia's Tangguh LNG plant this week for five cargoes for the May to July period.

Indonesian exporter Pertamina also offered two June cargoes.

In an unusual move, Royal Dutch Shell issued a five-year strip tender offering four cargoes a year from 2021 onwards



with an option to extend for another five years.

On the S&P Global Platts Market on Close window on Friday, commodity trader Gunvor bought an early-June cargo from Vitol at \$2.05/mmBtu, but other bids and offers in the window were higher.

***Some buyers seek cargoes

There were also some buyers on the market looking to purchase volumes as the LNG prices are at historical lows.

Turkish state energy company Botas was seeking seven cargoes for delivery over May to June.

Kuwait Petroleum Corp (KPC) was looking to buy a cargo for delivery in May.

German energy company EnBW was seeking four cargoes for delivery in northwest Europe in the third quarter of this year.

In China, Shenzhen Energy issued a tender for a June cargo.

A trader said there were signs of "going back to normal" in China, adding that some demand might return in India after the lockdown in the country was eased in some areas next week.

But he added that, so far, some Indian's buyers were still trying to defer cargoes.

Japanese buyers might also try to defer cargoes, three sources said, but this could not be immediately confirmed.

(Source: Reuters)

Shell commits to \$6.4b gas project despite energy slump

Royal Dutch Shell will push ahead with a planned A\$10bn (\$6.4bn) gas project in Australia, despite the coronavirus pandemic prompting one of the worst downturns in the energy industry in decades.

The decision on Friday to approve the long-delayed first stage of the Arrow Energy development in Queensland comes on the back of tens of billions of dollars in capital expenditure cuts in the oil and gas sector.

It is Shell's first big investment decision since the coronavirus crisis and tensions between Saudi Arabia and Russia caused oil prices to crash below \$30 per barrel. Natural gas prices are currently at historic lows.

Shell said in a statement that Arrow would bring up to 90bn cubic feet per year of new gas to the market at peak production. Construction will start this year with the first gas sales expected in 2021. The project is a joint venture with PetroChina.

Analysts said the decision to go ahead with the coal seam gas joint facility was surprising given the weak state of the global energy market and could be due to pressure from Australian policymakers and the fact the project could be completed over several stages.

The government has exerted tremendous pressure on producers, particularly Arrow, which is the largest undeveloped gas resource on Australia's east coast, said Saul Kavonic, an analyst at Credit Suisse.

"There has been a laser-like focus from policymakers on producers to make sure they provide enough gas for the east coast market amid previous concerns of shortages. Domestic gas prices have fallen along with liquefied natural gas prices during this crisis but they are forecast to rise again," he added.

Some of the gas from the development will be sold as LNG through the Shell-op-



erated QGC plant in Gladstone, on the north-eastern state of Queensland's central coast. A portion will supply the domestic market, which some analysts have predicted could face shortages in the next few years.

Government legislation enacted in 2018 enables Canberra to restrict overseas LNG sales when domestic supplies run short, which has threatened the A\$50bn a year export industry.

The first stage of the Arrow project will involve investment of about A\$1bn. Subsequent phases will require additional board approvals, according to a person with knowledge of the development.

Graeme Bethune, chief executive of EnergyQuest, a research firm, said the QGC plant has experienced writedowns on its gas reserves, meaning the Arrow development was required to maintain production levels.

He said the threat of the government introducing a gas reservation policy — whereby part of production is reserved for domestic use — may have prompted Shell's decision to move ahead despite poor market conditions.

The company may also have been concerned the government could cancel its development licenses if it did not go ahead with the project within a certain timeframe, said Bethune.

(Source: Financial Times)

Just how big is the biggest-ever slump in world oil demand?

How low can you go? That seems to be the question bothering the world's big-three oil forecasting agencies as they grapple to come to terms with the size of the slump in oil consumption triggered by the international response to the Covid-19 virus.

The International Energy Agency, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and the U.S. Energy Information Administration have all updated their oil market forecasts in the past week and they make grim reading. As recently as February, all three saw the world's thirst for oil increasing by close to 1 million barrels a day this year. Now they are projecting a drop in annual average demand of anywhere between 5 million barrels a day and more than 9 million.

The IEA is the most bearish of the three agencies by some margin. Having been the least optimistic of the three about the strength of growth earlier in the year, it's now way out in front of the others in its estimation of the demand destruction caused by the grounding of planes, parking of cars and suspension of large parts of the economies in much of the world.

■ Collapse

On an annual average basis, the Paris-based IEA now expects global oil demand to be 9.3 million barrels a day lower this year than it was last year. That's equivalent to losing the entire consumption of India and the whole of Africa. OPEC is a little less gloomy, seeing demand falling year-on-year by 6.85 million barrels a day, while the EIA looks positively optimistic, with its drop of 5.25 million barrels.

But if you think the annual average figures are bad, the quarterly ones are truly horrifying.



■ 2Q blues

The IEA sees a loss of oil demand in the current quarter that's equivalent to the entire consumption of the U.S. and Canada, or about 23 million barrels a day. The EIA and OPEC are not quite so gloomy, but even they see a drop greater than all the oil used in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the U.K. and Japan.

All three expect things to get better, or at least not to be quite so bad, in the second half of the year. By then the IEA and OPEC agree that global oil demand will (only) be down by about 5 million barrels a day compared with the same period last year. OPEC and the IEA have very similar views on oil demand in the second half of 2020, while the EIA is noticeably more optimistic. That optimism may reflect the views of an administration that seems determined to ease the lockdown

on its citizens as soon as possible.

In the face of these demand forecasts, it's little surprise that the OPEC group of countries agreed their biggest-ever output cut and managed to bring almost all of their OPEC+ allies along with them. It's also clear that the cuts by themselves are not nearly big enough to offset the immediate slump in demand.

If the OPEC members adhere strictly to their part of the deal -- which is itself a tall order -- the group will pump about 23.4 million barrels a day in May and June, assuming the three members exempt from the cuts -- Iran, Libya and Venezuela -- continue pumping at last month's levels. That's down from a possible 31.8 million barrels a day in April, if Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE all boost output as they have threatened until the cuts

come into effect. That would give an average second-quarter production level of 26.2 million barrels a day.

■ Too much oil

OPEC over-production in the second quarter could be anywhere between 6.5 million and 17.7 million barrels a day, which would have to go into storage.

Comparing that production level with the three agencies' assessments of the world's need for OPEC crude in the second quarter reveals the alarming size of the potential stockbuild. OPEC's own supply demand forecast suggests that stockpiles will build at an average rate of 6.5 million barrels a day this quarter, while the EIA sees them filling at a daily rate of 8.6 million barrels.

But the IEA sees the world needing just 8.5 million barrels a day of crude from OPEC in the second quarter. That would be equivalent to Saudi Arabia pumping in line with its agreed target in April as well as for May and June and none of the group's other members pumping anything at all.

Assuming the deal is implemented in full from May 1, the IEA's numbers imply global stockpiles building at an average rate of 17.7 million barrels a day during the whole of the second quarter. That would require 1.6 billion barrels of storage space for crude by the end of June.

On the basis of those figures, even with the full OPEC+ cuts and the loss of an additional 4.5 million barrels a day of non-OPEC supply, oil prices will still have to fall far enough to persuade more producers to shut in more production before we run out of places to store all the crude that nobody wants.

(Source: Bloomberg)

African union and IRENA to advance renewables in response to covid-19

The African Union Commission (AUC) and the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) have agreed to work closely to advance renewable energy across the continent to bolster Africa's response to Covid-19. The two organizations will focus on innovative solutions to drive the development of renewable energy including decentralized systems, and to increase access to energy across the continent.

The cooperation aims to bolster Africa's response to the pandemic by, inter alia, improving the ability of rural health centers and communities to deal with the health challenge using renewable energy to power critical services such as medical equipment and water pumping for improving hygiene.

Africa is home to more than two thirds of the world's least developed countries and 600 million people currently live without access to modern energy services. Paradoxically, Africa possesses vast renewable energy potential that could cover nearly a quarter of its energy needs through indigenous renewable energy by 2030. The deployment of renewables-based solutions is, therefore, central to the achievement of universal access and a key enabler for the attainment

of the aspirations of the AU Agenda 2063 as well as achievement of the UN Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development. The two organizations will collaborate to make this possible.

During a virtual discussion, Amani Abou-Zeid, Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy of the African Union Commission and Francesco La Camera, Director-General of IRENA agreed that a concerted and coordinated response is essential to address the energy related response to COVID-19 and noted that renewable energy offers the most plausible and sustainable response, which will continue to uplift the quality of life for millions of Africans long after the pandemic.

Amani Abou-Zeid said "The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that energy is critical for all spheres of life and is now proving to be a matter of survival. The African Union Commission has made major strides to advance energy development in Africa through various programs and partnerships. It is now even more urgent to fast track energy access efforts on the continent".

The Commissioner went on to say, "It is time to use Africa's enormous renewable energy resources for the benefit of the African people in response to the coronavirus pandemic." She called upon IRENA and AU to work together to mobilize international support, including the private sector, to provide electricity to health facilities and associated services for fighting the pandemic in Africa, especially the rural and peri-urban areas. "It is critical that the vulnerable in society, especially women and girls, are specifically targeted in these efforts", she added.

On his part, the IRENA Director-General Francesco La Camera said "Renewable energy can cost-effectively supply the critical power needed in Africa's rural communities to supply health centers, facilitate the provision of clean water, support agriculture and facilitate other productive sectors. Such measures are critical to the continent's ability to deal with the pandemic."

"Our response to this crisis must also promote long-term sustainable development and support for the achievement of NDCs," continued Mr. La Camera. "The deployment of renewables is therefore a foresighted strategy to ensure a resilient future, in which no one is left behind."

The collaboration between the AU and IRENA complements ongoing AU programs, which include the Africa Bioenergy Policy Framework and Guidelines; Renewable energy in African island states; Development of small hydropower potential in Africa; Geothermal Risk Mitigation Facility; and the Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) as well as the Strategy for integrated approach for provision of basic infrastructure in rural and remote areas of Africa. This is in addition to other African initiatives such as Desert to Power, Coalition for Sustainable Energy Access, and the Africa Renewable Energy Initiative (AREI) – an Africa owned and led drive to scale up renewable energy – consolidating efforts from the international community to address the needs of African countries.

The AU and IRENA will also collaborate in the context of IRENA's Clean Energy Corridors initiatives in East, West and Southern Africa focused on advancing the deployment of renewables through the creation of larger and more robust power markets encouraging cross-border trade of renewable power.

These commitments build on existing cooperation between the AU and IRENA to strengthen the enabling environment for low-carbon, climate-resilient renewable energy investment as the continent seeks to raise its renewable energy ambition.

(Source: www.evwind.es)

Oklahoma judge to recommend regulators rule oil production 'economic waste'

An Oklahoma Judge will recommend the state's oil and gas regulator approve an emergency order declaring oil production in the state could constitute economic waste, a spokesman for the state's Corporation Commission (OCC) said on Friday.

The administrative law judge intends to write the recommendation in response to an application submitted by producer LPD Energy Company, the OCC said. If approved by regulators, the motion could allow companies to shut-in wells without losing leases that sometimes require drilling.

Oil prices have plunged some 60% since the start of the year and on Friday were trading under \$19 a barrel - far below most companies' cost of production. Oil producers in Texas and Oklahoma have urged state regulators to use their authority to help stabilize prices through production limits and other measures.

Oklahoma regulators could issue a ruling on LPD's application as soon as next week, the OCC said.

Trade group Oklahoma Energy Producers Alliance also filed a separate application that asked regulators to set limits on oil production. The OCC will hear arguments on that application on May 11.

Texas regulators earlier this week held a 10-hour hearing with dozens of producers, pipeline operators and environmentalists on proposed production limits. Shale producers Pioneer Natural Resources and Parsley Energy have led the call for cuts, while other major firms, such as Exxon Mobil and Occidental Corp, opposed the plan.

(Source: Reuters)

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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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Is the West wise enough to learn from Africa's experiences in fighting epidemic diseases?

By Mohammad Jafari

Instead of underestimating the African nations' capabilities in containing epidemic diseases in the recent decades, the Global North, including the US and Europe, should utilize the Global South's experiences if they really intend to cope with COVID-19 pandemic.

"It was inevitable that racism would rear its ugly head," Robtel Neajai Pailey, a Liberian academic, activist and author of two anti-corruption children's books, wrote in his article published by Al Jazeera.

"Having previously documented the long and shameful history of unethical drug testing on communities of color across the globe, I was not surprised earlier this month when two French doctors proclaimed on national television that Africa would be the most appropriate location for a coronavirus vaccine trial. Never mind that this continent has the lowest recorded number of cases regionally," she went on to say.

For bigots who operate under the appalling assumption that black, brown, and other non-white bodies are easily expendable during times of crisis, COVID-19 presents the perfect storm. Yet, instead of expending energy on denouncing the doctors' asinine comments, as so many have already done, we should be reflecting on what Africa and other regions of the so-called Global South have to teach the world in this collective moment of reckoning.

Call me naive in the heyday of apocalyptic projections about infections and deaths to come, but I prefer to focus on the silver lining. This is in some ways why I have been rolling my eyes at countless doomsday commentaries published by Western media outlets in which so-called Global North "experts" have argued that Africa, a continent of 54 diverse countries rumored to be the final frontier of coronavirus, desperately needs saving. My response? Puh-lease!

Ordinary Africans, and their counterparts in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, are not navel-gazing or waiting around for the "mighty" Global North - itself in the bullseye of the virus - to come to the rescue. Even in the midst of constraints unheard of in Europe and North America, Global South folks are exemplifying the kind of ingenuity, generosity, solidarity, empathy and civility from which we all must learn. We should be borrowing from this playbook, not casting it aside.

Let's start with my own country, Liberia, once destabilized by a 14-year intermittent armed conflict in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. During the deadliest ever Ebola outbreak of 2014-2016, which killed more than 11,000 in West Africa alone, 22-year-old Liberian student nurse Fatu Kekula single-handedly treated three family members at home when they fell ill. She transformed



rubbish bags into aprons, gloves and masks which became her very own retrofitted personal protective equipment (PPE) - a technique that resource-strapped healthcare workers in Europe and North America are now replicating.

Indeed, the Global South has both exported innovation and disseminated much needed "staff, stuff and systems". While critiques abound, Cuba's late March deployment of 52 medical workers to Italy was a stark and important exemplar of "South to North" medical humanitarianism. Once vilified for its socialist leadership and harshly sanctioned by the West, this island nation has a long history of dispatching health missions in times of calamity and tranquility.

In keeping with Cuba's efforts in Italy, Somalia followed suit by sending 20 doctors to aid the southern European country. Lest we forget, this Horn of Africa nation is recovering from protracted warfare, including current threats from al-Shabab armed fighters, which makes its intervention all the more admirable.

Though the United States has tightened sanctions against Iran and slammed Venezuela with narcoterrorism charges, countries across the Southern hemisphere have extended olive branches of support while the pandemic nears its peak.

Having faced virulent forms of Sinophobia as the initial epicenter of coronavirus, China has begun a global campaign to distribute medical supplies and expertise to African countries such as Algeria and Nigeria, with plans to deploy personnel to Europe and the Middle East in due course. Although not without controversy, such is the beauty of "South-South" cooperation.

Whereas others parroted early on the racist edict that COVID-19 was exclusively a Wuhan epidemic, Chinese philanthropist Jack Ma, of tech giant Alibaba fame, was one of the first billionaires to spring into action when

he pledged \$14m in late January to develop a vaccine to tame the virus. Regional heavy-weight South Korea also proved its mettle by getting ahead of the curve with nation-wide testing and quarantining, earning international plaudits in the process.

In the likeness of South Korea's proactive approach to virus prevention, Zimbabwe's universities have shown that necessity is the mother of all inventions. As the country battles a chronic economic recession, including hyperinflation, with healthcare workers striking across the country, universities are manufacturing gloves, masks and hand sanitizers amidst a 21-day lockdown. Farther east, a factory in Kenya now produces 30,000 surgical masks a day to meet heightened national demand.

South Africa also has important lessons to impart. Because of the country's experience in researching and testing for HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases, it has started developing locally-made COVID-19 tests and will embark shortly on a clinical trial for a vaccine.

It has been said a disease transported by upwardly mobile jet-setters - who have the wherewithal to huddle at homes and the resources to practice physical distancing when necessary - is now killing the poor and sedentary, who do not.

Yet, Global South traders in the so-called "informal sector" have defiantly dictated that one-size-fits-all coronavirus prevention measures will not work everywhere, that they hurt vulnerable populations in low-income countries, and that "top-down", militarized lockdowns cannot be imposed on poor people without advanced warning or social protection schemes.

While some leaders in the Global South have unleashed physical brutality against their citizens under the guise of battling COVID-19, or blindly borrowed protocols from the North without understanding that

context must drive policymaking, others, like Nigeria's senators or senior members of Rwanda's executive branch of government, have donated portions of their salaries for relief to poor households.

As Global North leaders jockey for power, undercutting each other in a bidding war over respirators, the Global South is unassuming in its instructions about the necessity of civility. Because whether rich or poor, black, brown, or white, young or old, man or woman, we are all in this existential catastrophe together. And while some of us may be more equipped than others to tackle it, the virus' visa-free obliteration of borders and orders proves that no one is exempt from its ferocity.

Africa and other regions of the Global South have already demonstrated that they are far from passive centers for medical experimentation. Rather, they are the sites of home-grown solutions which should be transmitted globally.

As the celebrated Indian author and activist Arundhati Roy reminds us, coronavirus has not only exposed nature's wrath against the crudeness of capitalism, but also forced us to imagine a better world beyond flattened curves, and, might I add, racist vitriol.

The pandemic is currently exposing major flaws in higher-income countries' health systems and turning the tables on decades of travel restrictions targeting Africans. When West Africa suffered from the Ebola crisis from 2014 to 2016, the region was often painted as a weak link in the global health system, and many airlines cut flights to Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Four years later, Africa is at risk of contamination primarily from Europe, China, and the US.

As of April 14, the number of people infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) around the world reached 1,925,528, according to the data released by coronavirus research centers.

The death toll was over 119,000.

More than 451,000 patients recovered. US was leading in the world in terms of the largest number of infected people (587,155 confirmed cases). 23,644 deaths were reported.

Then came Spain which confirmed 170,099 cases so far. The total number of deaths in Spain was 17,756.

Spain was followed by Italy which reported a total of 159,516 cases. 20,465 patients died.

The next was France, overtaking Germany, with a total of 136,779 cases and 14,967 deaths. Germany confirmed 130,072 cases and 3,194 deaths.

Germany was followed by the UK which reported 88,621 confirmed cases and 11,329 deaths.

China, where the COVID-19 outbreak started, confirmed a total of 82,249 cases. The death toll here was 3,341.

Iraq's reality, future require withdrawal of U.S. occupiers

➔ Regarding the recent U.S. moves in Iraq, it should be noted that this is not about retreating, but only the re-distribution of forces so that the occupiers are far from the reach of the Resistance.

However, it is obvious that the American occupiers are delusional and they will be within reach of the Resistance forces everywhere and the only choice for them is withdrawal from the Iraqi territory, especially as it has not been long since their experience in 2011 when they had to withdraw from Iraq to the last border zone due to the pressure of the Resistance forces.

■ What are your views and prediction regarding the formation of the Iraqi cabinet? Didn't the Iraqi Shiite groups agree on Mr. Adnan al-Zurfi?

There was no Shiite consensus on Mr. al-Zurfi, and everyone agreed that he would not be confirmed and eventually he resigned as prime minister.

■ Do you think it is possible that U.S. forces withdraw from Iraq?

The reality and future of Iraq require the withdrawal of U.S. forces, moreover, the hopes of an honorable and free life will not be materialized for the Iraqi nation in the presence and domination of the American occupiers. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq considers it a sacred and religious duty to do whatever it can in this regard and the American occupiers know the power and insistence of them better than anyone.

In addition to its military equipment and fighter jets, the U.S. has about 200,000 troops in Iraq. However, the Resistance has continued its path by giving thousands of Martyrs and prisoners and has never stopped. They could oust the occupiers out of the country in the past, and today stronger than ever with more experience and more advanced weapons, they are confronting an enemy that is weaker than before. Therefore, the expulsion of the occupiers from Iraq is certain and we will see it with our own eyes.

■ what are the achievements of the Resistance groups in the fight against the coronavirus and helping the Iraqi nation in terms of health care?

If we want to list the activities and groups involved in the fight against the spread of the coronavirus, we should mention the following:

1. Health and medical staff that are directly involved in the fight against COVID-19 and helping the patients.
2. Security agencies involved in the fight against the virus by adopting necessary measures such as preventing public gatherings and commute.
3. Hashd al-Sha'abi forces that are responsible for disinfecting thousands of cities and providing food for poor families. They are also participating in the process of burying the bodies of coronavirus patients.

U.S. may scale back CIA presence in Afghanistan to save peace deal

The United States is considering the withdrawal of CIA operatives from bases in Afghanistan, as part of an effort to further reduce violence in the war-ravaged Asian country, according to The New York Times.

The paper reported on Friday that the discussions over CIA's presence in Afghanistan are part of Washington's attempt to push forward the so-called peace deal with the Taliban militant group aimed at bringing peace to the country, which is nearing a breaking point.

Under the deal which was signed in the Qatari capital, Doha, on February 29, Washington is compelled to pull out American forces and foreign troops from Afghanistan by July next year, provided that the militants start talks with Kabul and adhere to other security guarantees.

The Taliban has long demanded reductions in the CIA presence in Afghanistan alongside U.S. troops, a request that American negotiators have so far resisted.

U.S. officials say any withdrawal of CIA personnel will be done alongside the broader withdrawal of American military advisers — not in isolation from the broader peace plan.

The number of CIA operatives in Afghanistan is thought to be several hundred, and it is perceived as one of the agency's largest presences outside of the Washington area.

CIA personnel operate in various places around Afghanistan, advising militia groups. CIA's presence in Afghanistan, on the phony pretext of combating terrorism, has made restoration of peace and stability in the country unattainable.

A highly secretive CIA-trained paramilitary unit, known as the Khost Protection Force (KPF), operating in eastern Afghanistan, has been championed by many U.S. officials as one of the most effective military forces in Afghanistan. The Khost Protection Force has been implicated in civilian killings, torture and resorting to excessive force under the guise of counterterrorism activities.

According to Press TV, the KPF, which is said to be more influential than the Afghan army and police in the province, is just one of several large paramilitary forces created by the CIA in the months after the Taliban was ousted following the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

Including the CIA's presence in negotiations with the Taliban is Washington's latest effort to use what bargaining chips it has left with the Taliban militant group, the report said.

"What is important to the United States government is that the Taliban and the Afghan government work to prevent a terrorist group from establishing itself again in Afghanistan, creating a state within a state, and eventually conducting another international terrorist attack," said Lisa Maddox, a former CIA officer.

"It is an endless war," she said. "We are not winning it. Nobody is really winning it. We are going to have to make concessions and it is a difficult balance to strike. I don't envy our negotiators."

How crises are hypocritically used by U.S. politicians to push country towards modern dictatorship!

➔ "The problem is, government rarely contracts once the crisis is over," Larsen underscored.

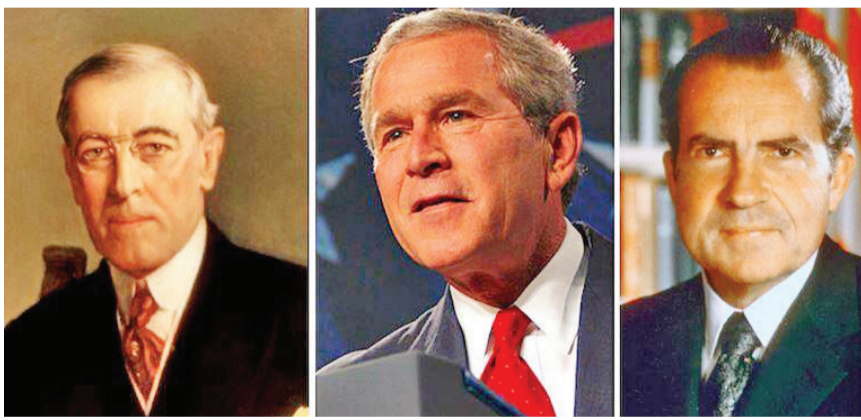
Nowhere is this concern more pronounced — and more demonstrably imbalanced — than in the office of the presidency. And it did not begin with Donald Trump.

If you sense an unsettling partisan quality to the federal government's response to the current crisis; if your mind is boggled at the gamesmanship occurring while lives and economies are at risk; if Congress seems unusually hyperpartisan and unaccountably mired in turmoil while states seem to be competing for resources on political grounds; and if it all seemingly enables the president to act autonomously — even competitively, trust your senses. And look to history to understand.

President Woodrow Wilson superseded Congress by using an Executive Order to arm U.S. merchant ships, a move that which ultimately led the U.S. into World War I. The Great Depression and World War II, combined with a Democratic majority, enabled FDR (Franklin Delano Roosevelt) to enact temporary programs which became the basis of today's welfare state. As his programs expanded from emergency aid to entitlement, today they absorb more than 60 percent of the federal budget and — many experts say — have created disincentives that actually increase dependency.

Harry S. Truman sent troops to Korea without the consent of Congress and assumed control over the armed forces by establishing the Department of Defense and CIA. In 1978, FISA courts were created. In 2001, President George W. Bush, with the justification of a crisis, used them to trample personal privacy after 9/11. Those expanded rules are still in place today.

In his book *The Lost Soul of the American Presidency*, Stephen Knott explores the notion that George Washington's non-partisan presidency has not survived. This may come as a surprising statement in a



world accustomed to executive orders and a gridlocked Congress. However, Knott has a basis for concluding that "the American president was intended, at least in part, to serve as the nation's chief of state, as its symbolic head, not a partisan leader."

Hamilton and Washington embraced a similar constitutional view of government and a presidency that delivered stability — even calm — to the governed. They agreed that a president should focus on the interests of the nation — not majority-party advantage.

It is a civics debate we have pushed to the very back of the intellectual shelf. Could it be true — that the president was never intended to be the head of a political party or ideology?

Arthur Schlesinger Jr. popularized the concept of the "imperial presidency" during the Nixon administration, but it goes back much further. And examples abound of presidential decisions seemingly justified by crisis that still impact the nation today.

The enlargement of presidential powers has changed the status of the American president. "Leader of the free world" and "party leader" are both historically recent designations that have shifted the roles of Congress, the judiciary and even states under

concepts of federalism. It has contributed to a change in politics and a divisive, winner-take-all mentality. Further, the emergence of the president as "campaigner in chief" virtually eliminates the ability of a president to respond in nonpartisan terms and creates a quadrennial political split in our nation that never seems to heal.

At issue is not the need for presidential leadership in times of crisis; it is the pattern of assumed power that is never fully annulled when the crisis ends. It is the partisan positioning that is perceived to be embedded in every statement — every decision — by parties determined to benefit politically.

We should take a moment and recognize our vulnerabilities as citizens in times of crisis — vulnerabilities that political demagogues know how to exploit. Further, in an election year, we should be awake to the notion that our inspired form of government may be fundamentally misaligned with its founding principles.

When partisan politics eclipse the sacred obligation of those entrusted with power; when presidents speak as the head of a party rather than the head of a nation — we no longer benefit from a Congress sworn to balance "ambition against ambition" via

a vigorous House and a measured Senate, under the constitutional scrutiny of a dispassionate judiciary and exercising only powers that are, as per the Constitution, "few and defined."

Passion during a crisis is not political — it is human nature. However, exploitation of a crisis is political, and we should be aware of an existing structural imbalance at the federal level that enables the leveraging of passion and avoidance of responsibility.

What is needed today are leaders committed to the principles of liberty and a version of power described in the Constitution — representatives who possess a quixotic affection for freedom and who will lead with an insistence that the people and nation come first. Then the balance of power can be set right.

Then, and only then, would we see Congress capably resume its intended responsibilities: balance and oversight. Then, states would be newly empowered to make local, independent decisions — free from the threat of political retribution. Then, we would see a return to a more dignified office of the president, elevated to protect the unity and welfare of a nation — prioritized above party.

On April 14, President Donald Trump's claim that he wielded "total" authority in the pandemic crisis prompted rebellion not just from governors. Legal scholars across the ideological spectrum rejected his declaration that ultimately he, not state leaders, will decide when to risk lifting social distancing limits in order to reopen businesses.

As of April 17, the number of people infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) around the world reached 2 million 183 thousand 877, according to the data released by coronavirus research centers.

The death toll was over 146,000.

552,771 patients have recovered. U.S. was leading in the world in terms of the largest number of infected people (678,210 confirmed cases). 34,641 deaths were reported.

Historical Saint Sarkis Cathedral in Tehran to be demarcated

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Saint Sarkis Cathedral in downtown Tehran will be demarcated in the near future, Tehran's deputy tourism chief Morteza Adibzadeh said on Saturday, CHTN reported.

The demarcation project aims at protecting the cathedral, which was added to the National Heritage List in February.

Built in 1970 by Iranian-Armenian architect Eugene Aftandilian, Saint Sarkis Cathedral is the largest church in Iran.



It was established by an Armenian benefactor in Iran, Markar Sarkissian, at his own expenses in memory of his wife, and was named after Saint Sarkis the Warrior.

Located on Karimkhan Zand Street, downtown Tehran, the church is considered as a symbol of Christianity in Tehran.

Seljuk-era relics recovered in Tehran

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian police have recently confiscated four historical objects related to Seljuk era (1037–1194) in Tehran.



Some six fake objects have been recovered as well, provincial tourism chief Parham Janfeshan announced on Saturday, CHTN reported.

The official, however, did not provide more detail about the exact time of the confiscation and probable culprits detained in that regard.

Seljuk, also spelled, Seljuq, was a ruling military family of the Oguz (Ghuzz) Turkic tribes that invaded southwestern Asia in the 11th century and eventually founded an empire that included Mesopotamia,

Syria, Palestine, and most of Iran. Their advance marked the beginning of Turkish power in the Middle East.

Arrival in Tehran and I am already at home!

By Monica Scaccabarozzi

(Part 3 /5)

In the desert, still a reflection, more than anything else obvious, but that today belongs to me.

As long as I was in the car, I felt only the changes in the landscape, from the oasis to the desert, but only the violence of the wind that dragged me away made me realize that things are only grasped if you live them.

We must expose ourselves and try. Without hearing, we're just puppets behind a window. Dasht-e Lut, where the wind sings and creates.

And my journey continues.

The caravanserais are buildings made up of walls that enclose a large courtyard and a porch. They were used to stop the caravans crossing the desert. It could also include rooms for travelers freely used by travelers. They welcome both travelers and merchandise, and it is both a resting place and a stop on commercial roads, it is both a point of arrival and a starting point.

That's right, a point of arrival but also of departure.

Many of these structures were built by master engineers belonging to Sufi orders (mostly) who applied the principles of golden geometry and the perfect ratio of proportions, as was the case for mosques.

The Caravanserai contains an incredible charm. The colors of the bricks mingle with the colors of the sand, the only color of the sky creates a clear separation with the earth and surrounds the magnificent building that is it outlines before our eyes, like an animal that has camouflaged itself in the savannah and then when it is very close, it is finally seen.

The desolation of this place and the wind that continues to whisper words in my ear, makes me understand that if you are looking for something, however lost it may be in the end you find it, without purpose, but you find it ... I imagine Marco Polo with his horses get here, in the middle of nowhere and see this fortress so unhospitable .. apparently devoid of interest, invisible and then, once entered, suddenly finds itself in paradise!

Always looking in depth, never stopping at the exterior, this is the meaning of my reasoning born from the ruins of thoughts and places.

Even in this case you do not stop and continue in the journey and in research.

Letting the free thoughts flow, I continue with my reflections, because I believe it is absolutely useless to describe a country that if only wanted, is willing to make itself known, it is enough to know how to search and have the desire to understand, also because many books, beautiful books, talk about Iran.

Trying to understand a different culture from our own, it is always "difficult" difficult in quotation marks, because as already said, it is enough just to want it, but now reading this information available everywhere, I realize that I really knew nothing about these countries in their history of their culture. Today I understand attitudes and behaviors, I may not share them, but I understand them.

To get to know a country you need to know its history and its stories, go through its cities and meet the faces of its inhabitants.

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

Lost in time: discover once-mighty stronghold in Tehran

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — One of the largest military fortresses of the ancient times can be found some half an hour drive southeast of Tehran, which makes it a very perfect and convenient destination for both domestic and foreign travelers.

Iraj fortress, also known as Gabri fort by the locals, is one of the lesser-known tourist sites of the country. It is located near the gates of the old city of Rey, now in the southeast of Tehran.

Some estimate that the crumbling fortress dates from the Sassanid era (224–651), however, there are experts who believe that it belongs to the Kayanian dynasty era, a semi-mythological dynasty, which is mentioned in the Persian poet Ferdowsi's magnum opus, the Shahnameh.

Looking at the imposing adobe citadel, which is now in the middle of nowhere, you might imagine the hustling and bustling of the place, scorching faces of military men and their horses in its heyday.

Form another point of view, the fortress seems to be on the verge of total elimination due to years of neglect though it was registered on the National Cultural Heritage List 2003.

Measuring about 3,000 square meters in area, the fortress has lost it towers some centuries ago – may be by erosion, and only lengthy and tall clay ramparts have been left.

Based on evidence from excavations in 2008, archaeologists believe that the Iraj fortress was likely abandoned shortly after construction.

It seems that people who constructed the Sassanid fortress may have received bad news or were informed of a forthcoming invasion, therefore they leave the site.



Crumbling ramparts of the ancient Gabri fort dominates landscape on the outskirts of Rey, southeast Tehran.

The findings also indicated that the structure had been built to house 5,000 people, while the pottery dishes discovered at the site were adequate for only 500 people, so the experts cannot determine the purpose of the structure precisely.

From very early history to modern times, defensive walls have often been necessary for

cities to survive in an ever-changing world of invasion and conquest.

Fortifications in antiquity were designed primarily to defeat attempts at escalade, and to defense of territories in warfare, and were also used to solidify rule in a region during peacetime.

Uruk in ancient Sumer (Mesopotamia) is

one of the world's oldest known walled cities. The Ancient Egyptians also built fortresses on the frontiers of the Nile Valley to protect against invaders from neighboring territories.

Many of the fortifications of the ancient world were built with mud brick, often leaving them no more than mounds of dirt for today's archaeologists.

UNESCO-registered sanctuary draws 60,000 visitors in year

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Some 60,000 travelers visited Takht-e Soleyman ("Solomon's Throne"), an ancient isolated sanctuary in northwest Iran, during the past Iranian year 1398 (ended March 20).

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list, the scenic sanctuary bears testimony to various eras of the nation's history. It is situated in the southeastern highlands of West Azarbaijan province overlooking a lake with a backdrop of a snowcapped mountain range.

"The UNESCO-registered site, like previous years, has been one of the most visited historical sites in Takab county (where the sanctuary is situated),"



Amir Matloubi, the director of UNESCO site, said on Thursday, CHTN reported.

Iranian museums to receive free internet in bid to draw more audiences

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — All cultural heritage museums and sites across Iran will be provided with free internet access as part of a government initiative to attract more audiences, Mehr reported on Friday.

In the first phase of the program, all Tehran museums are scheduled to be equipped with the free-of-charge internet for a month, the report said.

The privilege has so far been granted to the National Museum of Iran, the Glassware and Ceramic Museum of Iran (Abgineh Museum), and all other museums located around Tehran's historical Mashq (parade) Square.

The initiative came after Iranian museums and historical sites were ruled shut down, losing potential visitors over the fears of coronavirus pandemic.

In February, Iran started temporarily closing cultural heritage museums and historical sites in a preventive measure to help curb the virus outbreak.

No official celebrations or public gatherings, even the pre-scheduled ones, were held during the two-week Noruz holidays (started March 20). Moreover, all museums (and historical sites that are affiliated with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts) have remained closed until further notice.



A view of the Glassware and Ceramic Museum of Iran (Abgineh Museum) in downtown Tehran

With Persian tahdig — the fluffy-rice, crispy-bottom classic — practice makes perfect

rice thoroughly to get rid of excess starch, and then parboil until the rice is soft on the outside but still firm on the inside. The rice will cook completely while it's steaming as the tahdig is forming.

With more home cooks trying to make tahdig for the first time, the most common question is probably how to get tahdig out in one piece when flipping the pot. The truth is simple: It doesn't have to be in one piece.

In an Iranian household, the steamed rice typically is scooped out of the pot and served in one platter, sometimes topped with additional saffron-infused rice, and then the tahdig — that is, the crispy vegetables or chicken on the bottom — is broken into pieces and either placed on top of the rice or served on another platter.

So don't stress over flipping the rice to get tahdig in one piece. If the crisp pieces must be gently loosened from the pan or if they break up, it's that much easier for everyone to easily pick a piece to munch on. Unless the rice burns, tahdig never fails.

■ The key: A nonstick pot

The most important thing you should know when it comes to making tahdig is having the right pot. All you need is a clean nonstick pot. Nonstick pots help the tahdig get crispy without sticking.

A 4- to 5-quart pot should serve well for a family, while something smaller works better for a one- to two-person household. If you don't own a nonstick pot, just make tahdig using a pot you have. Keep in mind that you may have to use a thin spatula to scrape tahdig off the bottom.

■ Managing the heat

There is no magic to making the best tahdig, it's all about practice, knowing your pot

and, most importantly, knowing your heat. To make the best tahdig, the heat should be high enough to crisp whatever is at the bottom of the pot, but then lowered enough to keep it from burning.

■ Practice makes perfect

We offer guidance here, but after making just a couple of batches, you'll figure out the best settings for your pot and stove. It might take a few tries to make that seemingly elusive crispy tahdig, but if you keep these notes in mind, you might nail it on the first try.

Patience is the key, as there are no tahdig shortcuts. Take your time.

■ Potato Tahdig

Probably the most requested tahdig among Iranians, the crisp golden spud slices make this dish a work of art.

2 ice cubes
1/4 teaspoon ground saffron
2 cups (about 12 ounces) basmati rice
Kosher salt
1/3 cup plus 1/4 cup vegetable oil
1 pound, 4 ounces russet potatoes, peeled and sliced 1/2-inch thick
1/2 cup water, or more as needed

■ Step 1

Place the ice cubes in a small bowl and sprinkle saffron on top. Let sit on the counter until the ice is melted. This will be your bloomed saffron.

■ Step 2

Place the rice in a colander and wash thoroughly to get rid of the excess starch. Repeat until the water runs clear. (Alternately, place the rice in a large bowl and cover with water. Swish the rice with your hand until the water is cloudy. Drain and repeat until the water remains clear.)

■ Step 3

Bring a medium pot (preferably nonstick)

of water to a rolling boil and add enough salt to the water so that it's mildly salty, and then add the rice. Cook until the rice is soft on the outside and still hard on the inside, 3 to 4 minutes. Take one grain of rice, and if you can break it into two using your fingertips, it's ready. Drain the rice and rinse with cold running water to stop the cooking.

■ Step 4

Return the pot to the stove and turn the heat to medium. Make sure the pot is completely dry, then add 1/3 cup vegetable oil and the bloomed saffron water. Tilt the pot to coat the bottom.

Arrange the potato slices in a single layer in the pot and top with the parboiled rice. Form it into a mound, but don't press it down. Use the handle of a wooden spoon to make five holes in the rice for steam to escape. Pour the 1/2 cup of water around the edges, wrap the lid in a clean kitchen towel and cover the pot.

■ Step 5

Cook about 7 minutes. Drizzle the remaining 1/4 cup oil over the rice and cover the pot again. Reduce the heat to medium-low and cook until the rice and potatoes are fully cooked, about 30 minutes.

Taste the rice to make sure it's cooked through. If the grains are still hard (which is unlikely), drizzle an additional 1/4 cup water over the rice and let steam for 10 minutes more.

■ Step 6

To serve, transfer the rice to a platter and then carefully lift or scrape the potatoes off the bottom of the pot and place them, crispy side up, on top of the rice.

■ Nutrition

Calories: 469; Total Fat: 22 g; Saturated Fat: 2 g; Cholesterol: 0 mg; Sodium: 36 mg; Carbohydrates: 63 g; Dietary Fiber: 3 g; Sugars: 1 g; Protein: 6 g.

Iran unveils high-tech products to fight COVID-19

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Six Iranian-made products in the field of diagnosis, screening and fighting coronavirus were unveiled on Saturday in the presence of Sourena Sattari, Vice President for Science and Technology.

Control and disinfection gate, which can detect body temperature and also measure the level of oxygen saturation, is one of these products, IRNA reported on Saturday.

The ozone generator equipped with an ozone measurement sensor is another unveiled product; the device has the ability to disinfect the air and produce ozone as onsite. Lack of need for chemicals, replacement of hospital autoclaves, and non-staining of equipment, surfaces, and clothing are other features of the device.

A nano face shield is also designed with flexibility and according to the desired features of the medical staff.

Also unveiled were three molecular COVID-19 diagnostic kits, kits for rapid detection of coronavirus, disease management system and Tak application (Nutrition, Immunity, Coronavirus).



World Bank, Islamic Development Bank to help Iran in fighting COVID-19



SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The World Bank (WB) and the Islamic Development Bank will provide Iran with loans to support the country in fighting coronavirus.

“For the first time since 2005, we will receive a loan worth 50 million dollars from the World Bank. Preliminary measures have been taken by related bodies such as the Central Bank,” deputy health minister Kamel Taqavinejad said, ISNA reported on Saturday.

Moreover, the Islamic Development Bank is going to provide us with another loan worth 130 million euros for buying medical equipment,” he added.

Iran’s central bank wrote last month to the International Monetary Fund to request a \$5-billion from its Rapid Financing Initiative, an emergency program that gives loans to countries facing sudden shocks such as natural disasters.

It was Tehran’s first request for IMF loan since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Iranian central banker Abdolnasser Hemmati said Iran’s request was being presented to the IMF executive board, and that Tehran was intent to pursue the demand.

“We expect the IMF to immediately respond to the request of Iran which itself is a founding member of the fund,” Hemmati wrote on his Instagram page on April 9.

COVID-19 in Iran: daily death toll drops sharply to 73



SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Health Ministry reported that 73 coronavirus patients lost their lives in the country over the past 24 hours, a sharp decline compared with 89 deaths the day before.

Over the past 24 hours, 1,374 new patients were infected with the coronavirus compared with 1,499 a day earlier, Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Saturday, ISNA reported.

The total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in the country has reached 80,868, of whom 55,987 have recovered.

The Iranian government has allocated

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

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

Iranian-made medical items will be soon mass-produced and hit the market within the next month, Babak Shokri, vice-chancellor of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences has stated. The items consist of diagnostic kits, face masks and ventilators made by Iranian researchers, he said.

Over 63 Iranian health workers martyred in fight against coronavirus

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Over 63 health workers have lost their lives in the fight against the coronavirus so far, Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Saturday.

Medical staff who died of coronavirus outbreak are called ‘martyrs of health’ in Iran.

Jahanpour added that the number of martyrs of health is even more than the announced figure as some of these staff did not have direct exposure to COVID-19 patients,



and their names may not be on the final list, IRNA news agency reported.

The total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran reached 80,868 on Saturday, of whom 5,031 have died and 55,987 recovered.

Meanwhile, 1,374 new patients have been identified over the past 24 hours, Jahanpour said.

He added that 73 more people have died during the same period of time, IRNA reported.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

20% of areas in Iran at high risk of flood

Twenty percent of areas across Iran are highly prone to flooding, Khosro Shahbazi, head of the Forests, Range, and Watershed Management Organization (FRWMO), has said.

“Precipitation in Iran is one-third of the world’s average, as the country is located in a dry and fragile region where we experience 11 millimeters decrease in precipitation each 10 years and an increase in evaporation of more than 50 millimeters every year,” he explained, ISNA reported.

Rainfall fluctuations usually lead to flood and devastation, so a comprehensive planning for watershed management and flood control is required, he noted.

Since most of the water supply is extracted from groundwater resources, the country is in a critical condition in terms of groundwater resources, he stated, highlighting, because perception is less than water withdrawal from the aquifers, so the best way to store rainwater is watershed and aquifer projects.

بیست درصد ایران جزو مناطق با خطر سیل خیزی بالا است

سرپرست سازمان جنگلها، مراتع و آبخیزداری می گوید ۲۰ درصد ایران جزو مناطق با خطر سیل خیزی بالا است.

به گزارش روز جمعه ایسنا، خسرو شهبازی افزود: میزان بارش در کشور ما یک سوم متوسط آن در دنیا است و از نظر جغرافیایی در منطقه ای خشک و شکننده واقع شده‌ایم که هر ۱۰ سال با ۱۱ میلیمتر کاهش بارش و بیش از ۵۰ میلیمتر افزایش تبخیر و تعرق مواجه هستیم که همه منجر به این شده که بارش‌ها در منطقه ما سیلابی و ویرانگر باشد، به همین خاطر نیازمند برنامه ریزی جامع برای مدیریت حوضه‌های آبخیز و کنترل سیلاب‌ها هستیم.

به گفته شهبازی از آنجایی که بیشتر آب مورد استفاده در کشور از آبهای زیرزمینی تامین می‌شود جزو کشورهای بحرانی و فوق بحرانی از نظر منابع آب زیرزمینی بوده و چون برداشت ما از سفره‌ها بیش از ورودی آب به آنهاست و بهترین راهکار برای ذخیره این آب‌ها انجام پروژه‌های آبخیزداری و آبخیزداری است.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“sens- or sent-”

■ **Meaning:** feel, be aware

■ **For example:** Moving house seemed like the **sensible** thing to do.

PHRASAL VERB

Pop up

■ **Meaning:** to appear, sometimes unexpectedly

■ **For example:** Her name keeps popping up in the newspapers.

IDIOM

Dead as a doornail

■ **Explanation:** This expression is used to stress that something or someone is very definitely dead

■ **For example:** They’ve started fighting again, so the peace agreement is now as dead as a doornail.

Coronavirus crisis: a time for lasting togetherness

1 → “We have so far found some volunteer psychologists reaching out to see if the patients need help, as they burden high levels of stress, isolation and fear,” he also said.

Ehsan Rouzbahani, another coronavirus-focused volunteer, said that initially, the disinfection fleet began to operate, with the help of volunteer forces and through the next stages, other services were provided to the local people and other neighboring hospitals and deprived areas.

“Our team offers 24-hour services with a capacity of 400 people, consisting of men and women, working in four shifts.”

Disinfection all passages and public spaces is done daily with a capacity of 7000 liters per day, he noted, adding, “We have established a system for services requested by local people and provision of free services, which include disinfection of houses, daily purchases, and delivery services to reduce traffic, medical screening tests, provision of nutritious foods such as fruit juice, honey, and lemons for coronavirus patients.”

Production of masks for public and supply of four hospitals in the city that are involved in the coronavirus issue with a capacity of 2000 masks per day, production of medical gowns and face shields, as well as hand disinfectant with a capacity of 1500 liters per day, are among the activities which have been done so far.

Besides, production and packaging of 500 bottles of juice per day for medical staff of hospitals and patients, holding family cultural and social competitions in social media and providing medical and legal counseling services, providing health care items for children with the participation of 500 people, and providing food packages for the financially struggling individuals are also some other ways we are dealing with the epidemic.

Seyed Ali Shoja’at, a 42-year-old volunteer, also reached out to help those in need by providing hundreds of food packages, and deliver the packages to the identified people.

He said that “We will step forward to help combat the pandemic and that we are preparing for the next phase of the help, which is distribution of food packages among people in underprivileged areas.”

WHO defunding ‘not surprising’ for those familiar with U.S.’ unilateralism: expert

1 → international law (eg. Geneva Conventions, rulings of ICC and ICJ), and established international treaties. U.S. unilateralism is a direct extension of U.S. imperialism and the nation’s quest to develop and maintain a global empire. Until members of the international community realize their own long-term self-interests in multilateralism and the rules based international order, and stand up to oppose American unilateralism, empire, and eternal warmongering through the very international institutions created to give such opposition meaning, American unilateralism will sadly continue to persist.

The other topic on the news is U.S.’ reported efforts to block IMF’s emergency loan to Iran, although the body said on Wednesday that it is still assessing Iran’s request. Can these obstacles be defined as the continuation of the collective punishment of the Iranian people through the so-called ‘maximum pressure policy’?

Should the United States succeed in blocking the IMF emergency loan to Iran then these obstacles can be considered more direct, collective punishment of the Iranian people through the Trump regime’s so-called “maximum pressure policy.” As we recently saw by way of this week’s legal ruling in Luxembourg (re. the bogus attempt to award Sept. 11 victims \$1.6b in Iranian funds) it is possible for institutions to counter the dictates of imperial America by simply doing their job properly and transparently, so it is hoped IMF policy will win the day over American manipulation.

WORDS IN THE NEWS

World Development Report

(July 09, 2003)

The United Nations Development Programme has published its annual World Development Report. It calls for much faster progress if the world is to reach its Millennium Development Goals. This report from Elizabeth Blunt:

Do you remember the Millennium Goals? When world leaders celebrated the year 2000 with a solemn pledge to reduce poverty and hunger, **check** the spread of AIDS, get boys and girls into school, and improve health and sanitation, all by 2015? Well, three years **down the road**, and the UNDP’s yearly collection of facts and figures already shows that if we **carry on** as we are, the only target likely to be met is that for halving poverty, and that is entirely due to the success of one country - China. It is so vast that growing prosperity in China lifts literally millions of people **above the poverty line**, even though in Africa, Latin America and the former Soviet Union people have actually been getting poorer. Otherwise progress is **patchy**. East Asia should **meet its target** of halving hunger by 2015, and Latin America and the Caribbean are not far behind, but at present rates of progress Africa and South Asia won’t get there for another hundred years. For Africa – right at the bottom of **virtually** every table - reducing infant mortality by two thirds and getting all its children into school look like an impossible dream until well into the twenty-second century. The good news is that it can be done - that there are success stories. Ghana - **an economic basket case** in the eighties and early nineties - has **pulled itself together** and it’s now comfortably in the middle range of countries, way ahead of the much more naturally wealthy Nigeria. For every Congo, Cambodia or Iraq, ruined by war or dictatorship, or every southern African country devastated by AIDS, there is a Mauritius or a South Korea, steadily working its way up **the league table** towards a better life for its people.

■ Words

check: limit, stop from spreading

down the road: later, further on in time

carry on: continue on as before

the poverty line: if you are on the poverty line you have just enough income to buy what you need in order to live

patchy: not completely satisfactory; good only in parts

meet its target: achieve the results it wants

virtually: almost, very nearly

an economic basket case: whose economy is in a very bad state. (This is an informal use)

pulled itself together: managed to find a way out of its difficulties
the league table: when countries or organisations are listed in a league table they are listed according to the results they have obtained, with the most successful at the top and the least successful at the bottom

(Source: BBC)

Nigerian president's top aide dies of coronavirus

Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari's chief of staff has died after contracting the novel coronavirus, the presidency said on Saturday. Buhari's office announced in a statement that it "regrets to announce the passage" of Abba Kyari, who acted as gatekeeper to the president of Africa's most populous nation, al Jazeera reported. "The deceased had tested positive to the ravaging COVID-19, and had been receiving treatment. But he died on Friday, April 17, 2020," the statement said. "May God accept his soul." Kyari, in his 70s, was the highest-profile COVID-19 death in the West African country, which has 493 confirmed cases and 17 deaths, according to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control.

Cold War talk: Pentagon says Moscow tested 'anti-satellite' weaponry & accuses it of hypocrisy

Russia has tested an "anti-satellite" weapon — at least Pentagon said so, branding Moscow's calls against militarization of space "hypocritical." The US itself has had such weaponry for years already, however. News of the Russian test of a missile, allegedly capable of destroying satellites in low Earth orbit (LEO), was broken by the chief of US Space Command General John Raymond. The test is yet "another example that the threats to US and allied space systems are real, serious, and growing," the Space Force chief of operations said, RT reported.

■ What is it that Russia tested? The test itself remains a mystery. No satellites, target or otherwise, were destroyed to back Raymond's assertion. The missile system in question, known as Nudol (pronounced like 'gnoodle'), has been in development for decades and was tested at least five times over the past few years. While little to no official information on it exists, the weapon is believed to be a potential successor to the A-135 system, the core of the ballistic missile defense deployed in the Moscow region. Such a role makes the new system a purely defensive one. It is not known whether Nudol is even able of hitting satellites in space. That has not stopped the US military to repeatedly attribute such a capability to it. Even if Raymond's claim is true, that does not make Nudol any less of a defensive system, given the US Space Force's publicly stated plans to put weaponized satellites into space, believes Alexey Leonkov, editor of the Russian weapons and military magazine Arsenal Otechstva.

"It might have an 'additional option' of targeting military satellites. The Americans are seeking to put more military satellites into space," Leonkov told RT. The US military satellite program includes anti-satellite interceptors, laser anti-missile systems, and even space-based kinetic weapons capable of hitting ground targets, he added.

■ Crying wolf According to Gen. Raymond, however, it's Moscow's repeated calls for keeping space weapons-free that are "hypocritical." "This test is further proof of Russia's hypocritical advocacy of outer space arms control proposals designed to restrict the capabilities of the United States while clearly having no intention of halting their counterspace weapons programs," Raymond said. The US military should hardly talk about hypocrisy, given its own active anti-satellite weaponry program, former Pentagon official Michael Maloof told RT.

It's the height of hypocrisy that the general calls out Russia on something that the United States has been doing. Back in 2008, the US actually shot down its own defunct satellite with a ground-based missile. "Recently, satellites in low orbits have been hit by the missile defense systems of the United States, China and India. And no one made a fuss about it," Mikhail Khodarenok, a retired colonel in the Russian Air Defense Forces and former General Staff officer, told RT.

Both the US and the Soviet Union developed anti-satellite weaponry during the Cold War. With the collapse of the USSR, such weapons were shelved — but for not too long — and the hysterical reaction of the Pentagon over the 'new' weapon test looks quite strange at best.

"With continued militarization of space we may be forced to reconsider such capabilities," Leonkov said. "Of course the Americans frame it along the lines of 'look, we have to militarize space because the Russians have anti-satellite weapons'."

U.S. quietly recalls all B-52 bombers from Guam just days after staging 'show of force'

All five nuclear-capable B-52 strategic bombers departed their forward base on the Pacific island of Guam just days after taking part in an 'elephant walk' show of force. The U.S. Air Force says it wants to be more unpredictable.

The B-52H Stratofortresses departed Guam on Thursday, ending the Continuous Bomber Presence Mission that began in 2004, according to the War Zone blog. They were spotted flying over to Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota, with callsigns spelling "SEEYA".

The redeployment was in line with the new National Defense Strategy, calling for the bombers to return to their permanent base and keep the forward deployments less predictable, U.S. Strategic Command spokesperson Major Kate Atanasoff told the War Zone.

For the past 16 years, that place was the Andersen AFB on Guam, where the B-52 bombers as well as their newer B-1B and B-2 cousins, would do six-month stints. Under the Trump administration, however, the USAF began experimenting with "Dynamic Force Deployment," sending B-2s to Wake Island amid their deployment at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.

The bombers' departure was accidentally revealed by the Pentagon on April 14, when a photo of them was captioned "Last Continuous Bomber Presence Mission on Guam" on the official Defense Visual Information Distribution Service (DVIDS) website. The caption was later changed to "Andersen remains ready."

That was the same caption that was used for the 'elephant walk' publicity stunt the day before, when the five B-52s lined up on the runway with six KC-135 Stratotankers, an RQ-4 Global Hawk long-range surveillance drone and the Navy's MH-60S Knighthawk helicopter.

Trump accused of 'fomenting rebellion' after 'LIBERATE' tweets

Washington Governor Jay Inslee on Friday accused Donald Trump of "fomenting domestic rebellion and spreading lies" after the United States president urged supporters to "LIBERATE" three states led by Democratic governors.

"The president's statements this morning encourage illegal and dangerous acts. He is putting millions of people in danger of contracting COVID-19," Inslee said in a series of tweets on Friday afternoon.

"His unhinged rantings and calls for people to 'liberate' states could also lead to violence. We've seen it before," Inslee added. "The president is fomenting domestic rebellion and spreading lies - even while his own administration says the virus is real, it is deadly and we have a long way to go before restrictions can be lifted."

Inslee's tweets came after Trump apparently encouraged the growing protests against the stay-at-home restrictions aimed at stopping the coronavirus, al Jazeera reported. "LIBERATE MINNESOTA!" "LIBERATE MICHIGAN!" "LIBERATE VIRGINIA," Trump said in a tweet-storm in which he also lashed out at New York Governor Andrew Cuomo for criticizing the federal response.

Cuomo "should spend more time 'doing' and less time 'complaining,'" the president said. The president's tweets marked a different tone from the day before, when Trump said it was up to state governors to decide when and how to reopen their economies. The Trump administration on Thursday un-



Protesters carry rifles near the steps of the Michigan State Capitol building in Lansing, Michigan [Paul Sancya/AP Photo]

less time 'complaining,'" the president said.

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veiled a phased approach to the reopening of the economy, saying governors would be calling their "own shots" while the federal government stood "alongside" them.

On Friday, responding to pleas from governors for help from the federal government

in ramping up testing for the virus, Trump put the burden back on them: "The States have to step up their TESTING!"

Trump defended his tweets later on Friday, saying he was "very comfortable" with the posts. He accused the three states of doing "too much" and said he was not worried about those protesting against stay-at-home orders, despite the fact demonstrators have defied the administration's social distancing guidelines.

■ Governors remain cautious

Trump has repeatedly expressed his desire to see businesses reopen quickly and claimed earlier this week that he possesses "total authority" over the matter, even though the lockdowns and other social-distancing measures have been imposed by state and local leaders, not Washington, DC.

Some states did take some of the nation's first, small steps towards loosening restrictions.

In Florida, Republican Governor Ron DeSantis gave the green light for municipalities to reopen beaches and parks if they could do so safely. In Texas, Republican Governor Greg Abbott said stores could begin selling items curbside, non-essential surgery could resume, and state parks could reopen.

At least 20 Afghan presidential palace staff test positive for coronavirus

At least 20 officials working at Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's palace have tested positive for coronavirus, prompting the 70-year-old leader to limit most of his contact with staff to digital communication, government sources said Saturday.

An official document delivered to the Presidential Palace in Kabul is thought to have infected staff, many of whom began feeling unwell and were tested earlier this month, according to a senior health official.

"A contaminated document was sent to an office inside the palace from another government department and that's how the employees were infected," the official told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"Some of the employees were still working in their offices when the results came out, and we had to quarantine them and their families, but the numbers could be higher," the official added.

Sediq Sediqqi, Ghani's spokesman, said the Civil Service Commission has already asked government employees to



stay at home before the tests were conducted and that order has been extended for another three weeks.

A government source told Reuters that Ghani, who in the past has said he suffers from health issues related to his

stomach, has limited contact with staff, conducting most meetings through video conference calls and meeting only a handful in his inner circle in person.

COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus has been known to disproportionately affect older people and result in much higher mortality rates within that demographic.

Afghanistan - already battling shortages of food and medicine while violent clashes with the Taliban continue - had recorded 933 positive cases of coronavirus as of Saturday.

Thirty people have died of the virus but health officials say the number of cases are likely to be much higher than reported due to limited testing.

The Afghan health ministry has warned that unless containment measures are improved throughout the war-torn country, Afghanistan is heading for a catastrophe and millions would be infected.

(Source: Reuters)

'Neither 'lab' nor 'wet market'? Covid-19 outbreak started months earlier and not in Wuhan'



The novel coronavirus may have first passed to humans somewhere in southern China months before the outbreak in the city of Wuhan, a new study found, cutting against widely held theories about the origins of the pandemic.

Mapping a "network" of coronavirus genomes and tracing mutations over time, a team of researchers led by a Cambridge University geneticist determined the first Covid-19 infection may have come as early as September in a region south of Wuhan, noting the pathogen could have been carried by humans well before it mutated into a more lethal form, RT reported.

"The virus may have mutated into its final 'human-efficient' form months ago, but stayed inside a bat or other animal or even human for several months without infecting other individuals," geneticist Peter Forster told the South China Morning Post. He leads the ongoing yet to be peer-reviewed research, recently published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences journal.

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Coronavirus infections among Saudi royals 'exceedingly surpassed' previous figures



A Saudi whistleblower has said that the number of Saudi royals infected with the coronavirus (COVID-19) has "exceedingly surpassed" figures previously revealed by a New York Times report.

The Saudi al-Ahd al-Jadid Twitter account made the revelations on Friday, more than a week after the NYT report said as many as 150 Saudi royals had contracted the virus.

The report at the time said that over 500 beds were being prepared at the elite King Faisal Specialist Hospital that treats members of the Saudi family.

On Friday, however, al-Ahd al-Jadid, which is known for whistleblowing on high-profile cases within the Saudi court, revealed that the Saudi hospital reserved for the royals in the Red Sea port city of Jeddah had been overwhelmed with coronavirus cases.

"The Jeddah specialist hospital, which is reserved for Saudi royals, is no longer capable of accepting new cases," the Twitter account said.

"Therefore, two hotels have been re-

served to be fully used for accommodating and curing infected royals," it added, naming one of the hotels as being the "Movenpick Hotel".

As of 1400 GMT on Friday, more than 7,142 confirmed coronavirus cases were reported in the kingdom, with 87 deaths, according to a Reuters tally.

Another Saudi whistleblower, Mujtahid, however, has cast doubt on official figures, arguing that the situation throughout the kingdom is much more critical.

The reports of the COVID-19 disease spreading among royals come as the Saudi family is embroiled in a bitter power struggle between Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and his potential rivals, according to reports.

According to Press TV, since 2017, several wave of arrests have led to the imprisonment of many high-ranking Saudi royals over alleged corruption and attempted coup d'état charges seeking to unseat King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and the crown prince.

U.S.-backed militants escape al-Tanf base, defect to Syrian army

Members of the last remaining U.S.-backed militant group in Syria have fled an occupied American military base to government-held territory, defecting to the Damascus army that is on the verge of winning the war against Takfiri terrorists.

Sources said Maghawir al-Thawra elements began defecting from the al-Tanf base in Syria's Homs province this week, taking U.S. arms and vehicles while heading to the city of Palmyra in the same province.

In a video purporting to show the defection, the convoy of defectors could be seen heading to the area controlled by the Syrian army. It also shows U.S. military machine guns, as well as other weapons on board the defectors' vehicles.

A Western military source with knowledge of operations in Syria confirmed that the vehicles appeared to carry U.S. equipment.

Earlier this month, a handful of Maghawir militants also defected to the Syrian government with their weapons, a source familiar with the matter told The

Defense Post media outlet.

The U.S. trains anti-Damascus militants at the al-Tanf base, which is situated near Syria's borders with Iraq and Jordan.

Washington has unilaterally declared a 55-kilometer "de-confliction zone" around the facility, and frequently threatened to target Syrian forces within the area.

■ Russia confirms defection

The Russian Reconciliation Center for Syria confirmed that over two dozen militants, who had received U.S. training at al-Tanf base, had surrendered themselves to the Syrian army.

"Twenty-seven men finally managed to battle their way out. Now they are under guard of Syrian government troops in Palmyra," said Oleg Zhuravlev, chief of the Russian center.

The militants revealed that they had been "trained by U.S. instructors to commit acts of sabotage at the oil-and-gas and transport infrastructure facilities, as well as to organize terror attacks on territories controlled by Syrian government forces," he added.

Zhuravlev further noted that the militants are being held in Palmyra by the Syrian government forces and that they handed over dozens of U.S.-supplied firearms, including grenade launchers and heavy machine guns.

■ U.S. seeks to rebrand militants as drug smugglers

The U.S. military has been trying to rebrand the defectors as drug smugglers, claiming that they are fleeing al-Tanf base because Washington did not let them get away with smuggling on Jordan's border.

Maghawir al-Thawra claimed that the militant group allowed Samir Ghannam al-Khidr, one of the defectors, to leave with his family as it did not want to get in a conflict with him.

"He left because he could not smuggle drugs in this area due to the efforts of Maghawir al-Thawra in interdicted drugs," it tweeted.

The U.S. interests are at stake in Syria, where the war winds down with the army capturing most of the territory that was once lost to foreign-backed Takfiri elements.

Stay at home and read a book: Morteza Mehrzad

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran sitting volleyball player Morteza Mehrzad has urged people to «stay at home and save lives».

Sporting activities across the world have come to a grinding halt due to COVID-19 pandemic which has claimed more than 150,000 lives so far.

The health ministry said that the Islamic Republic's death toll had reached 5,301 among a total of 80,868 infected people.

“Stay home as much as possible and don't go where people are. I am at home and train to stay fit. The Third World War is now against the coronavirus,” Mehrzad said in an interview with Tehran Times.

“I'm reading books and watching movies in these days and it can help me to spend my free time,” he added.

Morteza Mehrzad, the tallest Paralympian in Rio, has not yet been able to find gloves since he has huge hands.

“The people wear mask and plastic gloves to protect themselves from the coronavirus but I cannot find gloves,” he laughed.

Mehrzad helped Iran sitting volleyball team win their sixth gold at the Paralympic Games. He was ready for another gold in 2020 Paralympic Games but the event was postponed due to coronavirus pandemic.

“From my viewpoint, the postponement of the Games is the right decision for the athletes. Sport is not the most important thing right now and the organizers want-



ed to preserve human life,” the 8-foot, 1-inch player said.

“Iran sitting volleyball are the most

decorated team in Paralympics and we'll do our utmost to win gold in Tokyo,” Mehrzad concluded.

Mehrzad also was a member of the team who won the 2018 Sitting Volleyball World Championships at The Hague, Netherlands.

Iran football league still in limbo

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Sports Medicine Federation of Islamic Republic Iran (SMFIRI) announced that it will make a decision on whether Iran Professional League (IPL) will resume its 2019-20 season on May 4.

Reza Saeidi, SMFIRI spokesman, said the federation will wait more to decide on the competition's resumption.

“The matches will reopen when officials deem conditions safe from the novel coronavirus,” Saeidi said.

“The health of sportspersons is important for us. All

sporting events have been suspended until May 20 and we will make a decision on May 4 about the resumption of the Iran football league,” he added.

Sporting activities across the world have come to a grinding halt due to COVID-19 pandemic which has claimed more than 150,000 lives so far.

The health ministry said that the Islamic Republic's death toll had reached 5,301 among a total of 80,868 infected people.

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

Sardar Azmoun likned with Premier League move



Wolves will kick themselves if West Ham pull off reported £30m deal

Premier League pair West Ham United and Leicester City reportedly want Zenit's Sardar Azmoun - if only Wolverhampton Wanderers could turn back the clock.

Wolverhampton Wanderers don't make many mistakes in the transfer market these days.

But not even a club with a recruitment strategy as intelligent and thought-out as Wolves' can get it right 100 per cent of the time, as the case of Sardar Azmoun shows.

Back in January 2019, when all was right with the world, the Black Country giants came very close to finalizing a deal to sign the so-called 'Iranian Messi' on loan from Rubin Kazan for the remainder of the campaign. But that was as close as Azmoun came to donning that iconic golden shirt.

According to Sky Sports, the deal collapsed because of a disagreement between the two parties. Rubin wanted to include an £11.5 million obligation-to-buy clause in Azmoun's contract - something Wolves apparently weren't too keen on.

Less than two years on, however, a 6ft 2ins forward who is now banging in the goals for Zenit St Petersburg is back on the radar over in England. According to AreaNapoli, West Ham United and Leicester City have both been in negotiations over a deal that would see Azmoun move to the London Stadium or the King Power for £30 million.

You don't need us to point out that the 25-year-old's price-tag has risen quite considerably (by almost £20 million to be precise) since Wolves got cold feet. Though, with 26 goals in 45 games for Zenit, there is a reason why the Russian giants want a considerably larger fee for one of European football's most underrated number nines.

In hindsight, you can understand why Wolves would be a little overly cautious. Azmoun was hardly prolific for Rubin after all and was yet to prove himself at one of the continent's biggest clubs. But maybe that £11.5 million risk was one worth taking after all.

(Source: HITC)

Italian football federation hopes play resumes in late May



Plans for football's return in Italy have come to light as football chiefs look to stage the Coppa Italia semi final by the end of May as the country looks to resume the 2019-20 season.

According to Football Italia, officials have lined up May 27 and 28 as dates for the competition's semi finals to take place, with Serie A action set to get underway just days later.

Football in Italy came to an abrupt halt in early March, with all sport suspended indefinitely in the country due to the spread of the deadly disease.

21,645 people have died in Italy as a result of the virus, with the country hit hardest by the global pandemic. However, this week the lockdown restrictions imposed by the government had been eased, offering hope that the football season can resume.

Italian football authorities have earmarked the semi finals as the first games to return to for two key reasons. The first leg of the ties have already been played, while the competition is broadcast on free-

to-air TV in the country, meaning that the games would not be exclusive to just Sky and DAZN subscribers.

The report suggests that clubs may return to training on May 4 with the Italian Football Federation drawing up protocol that will see players take swab and blood tests once a week.

Following the conclusion of the semi finals, the plan is to play a round of Serie A games every three days, meaning that the season would be concluded at some point between mid-July and early August.

The Federation is in favor of putting the clubs in training camp 'retreats' that will see them cordoned off from the outside world so as to lower the risk of infection.

Should the Italian season finish in that time frame, it would allow the clubs competing in Europe to continue those competitions in August.

According to the Italian press, Brescia and Torino are the last two clubs to openly oppose the resumption of the league.

(Source: Daily Mail)

Athletes banned until 2020 can compete at Olympics: Athletics Integrity head

The postponement of the Tokyo Olympics will allow athletes banned until 2020 to qualify for the Games next year as doping bans are based on time periods and not events, Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) head Brett Clothier told Reuters.

Last month, the International Olympic Committee and the Japanese government agreed to postpone the Tokyo Games, due to start in July, to 2021 because of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic that has killed over 150,000 people worldwide.

World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) bans are designed to prevent athletes from competing during an Olympic cycle and Clothier said stopping athletes whose bans expire this year from competing in 2021 would lead to legal complications.

“The standard penalty under the WADA code for doping is a four-year ban,” Clothier said. “And that's been designed that way to tie in with the Olympic cycle.”

“But in this case, of course, it's an anomaly that the Olympics have moved so some athletes will benefit from that.”

“It's an unfortunate situation but one that is very clear under the legal framework so the ban is based on time and

not tied to particular events.”

The anomaly could prove to be a double-edged sword, however, with Clothier saying athletes caught after August this year would be banned for two Olympic Games — in Tokyo and Paris — since they fall within the four-year sanction range.

But with social distancing protocols and lockdowns in place in several countries, Clothier said the biggest impact the pandemic has had on anti-doping agencies is the lack of regular testing.

“The restrictions on movement that are happening in many countries are having a severe disruption to testing processes around the world,” he said.

“We do testing for over a 100 countries round the world and there are different restrictions in each country... and those restrictions are changing day-to-day, week-to-week.”

“So our normal testing operations are disrupted. We are still conducting testing where we can but there is a severe disruption, no question.”

The United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) said a new self-administered doping test, where athletes are

monitored live by a doping control officer, could help protect clean athletes, as the agency tries to ensure no one gets a “free pass” from reduced testing during the pandemic.

Clothier said that though current testing limitations give dopers an opportunity to cheat, agencies should be proactive in identifying athletes prone to cheating while also cracking down on the root causes of doping.

“One thing that needs to be understood though is testing for us isn't just a numbers game,” he added. “We use intelligence and investigation methodologies to make sure we are testing the right athletes we need to at the right time.”

“While our testing activities are reduced at the moment, we are focusing on our priority and high-risk athletes and making sure we can test them as much as possible within the limitations we have.”

“We're hoping that we'll see change around the anti-doping world... where more organizations invest in intelligence capabilities so that they can address the root causes of doping and the people behind doping rather than just using the tests as a facade or a numbers game.”

(Source: Reuters)

Lorenzetti nominated for Iran volleyball job: report

Italian coach Angelo Lorenzetti is an eligible candidate to take charge of Iran national volleyball team.

La Gazzetta dello Sport has reported that the negotiations between two sides are progressing.



Iran parted company with Igor Kolakovic in late March following cancelation of the 2020 Olympic Games due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Iran volleyball team are drawn with Japan, Poland, Italy, Canada and Venezuela in Pool A at the Olympic Games.

Pool B consists of Brazil, USA, Russia, Argentina, France, and Tunisia.

(Source: La Gazzetta dello Sport)

Iran to start screening Olympians for COVID-19

MNA — Iran's Sports Medicine Federation is planning to kick off a screening program to primarily detect COVID-19 in those athletes who are going to participate in the upcoming Olympics.

Although the Tokyo Olympics has been postponed for a year, the COVID-19 outbreak among sports society has urged officials to devise a special plan to respond to the outbreak before it is late.

According to Reza Saeidi, the federation's spokesman, the project will start from this week and accordingly, 52 Olympians who have already won Olympics quota will be screened.

In an interview with Mehr News Agency on Saturday, he said that the screening has two stages. In the first stage, experts will contact every Olympian and ask a couple of questions regarding their probable symptoms, the status of training, and diet and so on. If anyone of the athletes is suspected to be affected by the virus, the next stage which is physical examination will be performed, he noted.

Discus thrower Ehsan Haddadi, the London 2012 silver medalist, was the most prominent Iranian athlete infected by the novel virus and then defeating it.

Saeidi also noted that among 3.6 million athletes across the country, only eight have contracted the disease so far and none have been hospitalized.

According to the latest announcement of the Iranian Health Ministry on Friday, so far more than 79,000 people have tested positive for COVID-19 while the number of those recovered has crossed 54,000. The disease has also claimed 4,958 lives in Iran.

Bashar Resan to leave Persepolis at end of season

TASNIM — Iraqi midfielder Bashar Resan has said that he will leave Iranian team Persepolis at the end of the current season.

The iconic player is in Iraq at the moment after the Iran Professional League was postponed due to COVID-19.

“This is my last season in Persepolis and I want to experience another league,” Resan said in an interview with Qatari newspaper Al Watan.

“I've received many offers from Persian Gulf countries and Espanyol as well. But I will wait until the end of the season to make the best decision,” he added.

Resan had already been linked with a move to Al Sadd of Qatar.

Mercedes F1 boss Wolff takes a stake in Aston Martin

LONDON (Reuters) — Mercedes Formula One boss Toto Wolff has taken a stake in British sportscar maker Aston Martin, whose executive chairman Lawrence Stroll runs the Racing Point F1 team, according to company filings.

A Mercedes F1 spokesman said Wolff's move was purely an investment on the Austrian's part and would be diluted by a rights issue on Monday from 4.77% to less than 1%.

“Fully diluted following the pending rights issue, this investment will represent a 0.95% stake in the company,” he added.

“It is a financial investment and Toto's partnership and executive role with Mercedes are unaffected by the transaction.” Swiss billionaire Ernesto Bertarelli has also bought a 3.38% stake which will be similarly diluted.

Wolff previously had a 16% shareholding in former champions Williams but sold that after he joined the Mercedes team, where he serves as principal and owns 30%.

Canadian billionaire Stroll, whose son Lance drives for Racing Point alongside Mexican Sergio Perez, is close to Wolff. The Silverstone-based team — to be renamed Aston Martin next year — use Mercedes engines and gearboxes.

Mercedes-Benz's parent Daimler also has a small stake in Aston Martin.

“It's clear that Aston are now Mercedes' B team,” the Daily Mail quoted one Formula One insider as saying.

Wolff's future at Mercedes has been the subject of some media speculation, with the 48-year-old linked variously to senior management roles with Liberty Media-owned Formula One and at Aston Martin.

His Aston Martin shares were bought from Yew Tree Overseas Limited, a vehicle controlled by Stroll who acquired a roughly 25% percent holding in Aston Martin with a consortium of investors.

Mercedes have won the past six Formula One drivers' and constructors' titles but have six times world champion Lewis Hamilton out of contract at the end of the 2020 season, which has yet to start due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Adopt generosity, and avoid vain severity and oppression; for, severity compels people to emigrate, and oppression incites revolt, and puts an end to your rule.

Imam Ali (AS)

Iranian painter's "Mass Production" produced 8 years ago resembles image of COVID-19

A R T **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — "Mass Production", a painting done by Iranian artist Tara Behbahani for display at the Fifth Beijing International Art Biennale in 2012, surprisingly enough looks closely similar to the novel coronavirus image.

The artist had no idea her artwork painted 8 years ago would one day look like a die-hard virus.

"In my artwork, I have painted people who continue their lives accompanied by an idiotic, startled monster, and today, 8 years later, that unidentified monster has been introduced as 'COVID-19'," Tara told the Persian service of ISNA on Saturday.



An image of "Mass Production" by the Iranian artist Tara Behbahani.

Tara noted that she did not have the slightest idea about viruses while she was painting "Mass Production". "It is a big surprise for me to see how an artist can unconsciously predict and visualize her idea as a painting, which turns into a reality eight years later, leaving the world in fear and horror," she added.

"I created the painting in 2012 based on the main topic of the biennial, 'Future and Reality'. Despite my other works that are full of colors, this painting intends to focus on the dark side of the world by depicting other aspects of the globe," she said.

"No matter how much we try to show the bright side of the world, there still remains the dark side, and the dark and negative sides might even grow more, and more, that is, they can even grow so big that they will swallow people," she said.

The biennial took place at the National Art Museum of China in Beijing from September 28 to October 22, 2012, displaying works by 261 international artists.

Stage director assigned to assess fallout of COVID-19 turmoil in Iranian theater

A R T **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iran's Dramatic Arts Center has assigned stage director Atabak Naderi the task of assessing the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic on Iranian troupes and private theaters.



Stage director Atabak Naderi in an undated photo.

"We need to study the exact situation of the troupes and theaters and take action," the director of the center, Qader Ashena, said in a press release on Saturday.

"This study needs to be done consistently under the supervision of one director, and Naderi is scheduled to study about the troupes and halls in detail," he said.

"Coronavirus pandemic is serious in the country and has involved people from all walks of life. The current situation of theaters should be studied and a post-coronavirus program should be organized," he added.

"We are planning to determine the exact damage to the troupes and halls over the past two months and set out plans for the theater performances in the post-coronavirus days," he remarked.

Naderi was the former director of Sangelaj Hall in Tehran.

Iranian bookstores resume activities on Saturday

C U L T U R E **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Bookstores across Iran were allowed to resume activities from Saturday after a nearly two-month shutdown due to the new coronavirus pandemic.

However, the bookstores must obtain the Health Ministry's permission beforehand, the ministry announced in a press release.

Any bookstore lacking permission will be prosecuted. They have been asked to respect health protocols during the COVID-19 epidemic.

Earlier last week, Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi said that the coronavirus outbreak in Iran will cause an estimated loss of over \$230 million in the art and culture sectors by April 19, the end of the first month of the Iranian calendar year.

President Hassan Rouhani also has already said that low-risk economic activities would resume from April 11 in the country.

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

FIDIBO, a major online Iranian store for audio and electronic books, said in early April that the number of e-book readers has increased four times higher than the number registered before the COVID-19 epidemic in the country in February.



A customer (L) and booksellers are seen at a shop in Tehran on April 18, 2020 after the reopening of the bookstores across Iran after a nearly two-month shutdown due to the new coronavirus pandemic. (IBNA/Hamid Hafezi)

Iranian theater teacher recommends books for home quarantine



Iranian theater scholar Hassan Dowlatabadi in an undated photo. (Theater.ir)

C U L T U R E **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian theater teacher Hassan Dowlatabadi has recommended two of his books he believes are appropriate to read during the home quarantine.

"Training through Theater at Home and Educational Centers" and "Training through Stories at Home and Educational Centers" are the books written by Dowlatabadi.

"The subjects of the books are involved with the COVID-19 crisis and compulsory home quarantine and help parents and teachers how to use theater and stories to teach children," he told the Persian service of MNA on Saturday.

Dowlatabadi, who is also the director of the Children's Theater Office at the Art Bureau, added, "The books familiarize you with methods to entertain children

at home and are really applicable in the home quarantine."

He also announced his plan to write a new play about a person infected with coronavirus and has to battle the illness alone while away from home.

A theater professor at Soore University in Tehran, Dowlatabadi said that people have to change their behavior due to the coronavirus pandemic.

He added that people around the world have increasingly turned into frequent users of social networks, applications and the Internet, which he believes will be regarded more in the future.

"Due to the lack any planning, our society have to use a trial and error method to achieve a better result from social networks and this usually takes a longer time," he stated.

Iranian center to commemorate Persian poet Sadi



Mausoleum of Sadi in Shiraz.

C U L T U R E **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The Center for the Study of Sadi will pay tribute to the Persian poet Sheikh Muslih od-Din Sadi Shirazi in a weeklong program commencing today, just one day prior to Sadi Day.

The center will live stream music performances on the Instagram page of the center, which are scheduled to be held at the mausoleum of Sadi in Shiraz, the center announced on Saturday.

Seven stories, seven lyrics, seven lectures, seven compositions and seven calligraphy works will be uploaded during the program.

"Theme Trio", a folktronic band comprised of various elements of folk music and electronica, will be presenting a music video on Sadi on their Instagram

page, while a number of poets, writers and researchers will publish their works on Sadi on different national websites.

The program has been organized in collaboration with the Fars Department of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization and Shiraz Municipality.

The Book City Institute in Tehran and Center for the Study of Sadi also plan to commemorate the Persian poet Sheikh Muslih od-Din Sadi Shirazi and Sohrab Sepehri during a weeklong program entitled "A Week with Sadi and Sepehri".

The program, which will be organized online, is scheduled to commence on Monday, which is Sadi Day as well as the 40th anniversary of the passing of Sepehri, one of Iran's icons of Persian blank verse.

San Diego Comic-Con canceled for first time amid coronavirus outbreak



An attendee poses for a picture as they arrive in costumes to enjoy Comic Con International in San Diego, California, U.S., July 19, 2019. (Reuters/Mike Blake)

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — San Diego Comic-Con, an annual celebrity-studded showcase of superhero films and pop culture, has been canceled for the first time in its 50-year history due to the global coronavirus outbreak, organizers said on Friday.

Comic-Con had been scheduled to take place in July. The event typically draws tens of thousands of costumed revelers to a San Diego convention hall and surrounding streets, restaurants and hotels.

"Continuous monitoring of health advisories and recent statements by the Governor of California have made

it clear that it would not be safe to move forward with plans for this year," organizers said in a statement posted on the convention's website.

The next San Diego Comic-Con is scheduled for July 22-25, 2021, the statement said.

Comic-Con had become a major event for TV networks and movie producers to promote upcoming programming. Last year's lineup featured Angelina Jolie and Natalie Portman talking about their roles in upcoming films from Walt Disney Co's (DIS.N) Marvel Studios, and Tom Cruise previewing a new "Top Gun" movie.

Allen Daviau, cinematographer for "ET" dies at 77



Cinematographer Allen Daviau (FilmMagic/Jon Kopaloff)

New York (CNN) — Allen Daviau, an Oscar-nominated cinematographer whose work produced some of the most iconic film images of our time, has died from complications related to Covid-19, his talent agent Karin Martin tells CNN. He was 77.

Daviau, a frequent collaborator of director Steven Spielberg, was a resident at the Motion Picture and Television Fund in Woodland Hills, California and died there Wednesday, a statement from MPTF president & CEO Bob Beitcher said.

Daviau, according to Beitcher, will be remembered as "a master of light and a

connoisseur of the science and magic of film, a memorable physical presence, a lover of great food, and a long-time Los Angeleno who didn't drive."

Daviau work included films "E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial," "Empire of the Sun" and "The Color Purple," all of which earned him Oscar nominations.

"In 1968, Allen and I started our careers side by side with the short film AMBLIN," said Spielberg in a statement posted to Twitter. "Allen was a wonderful artist, but his warmth and humanity were as powerful as his lens. He was a singular talent and a beautiful human being."