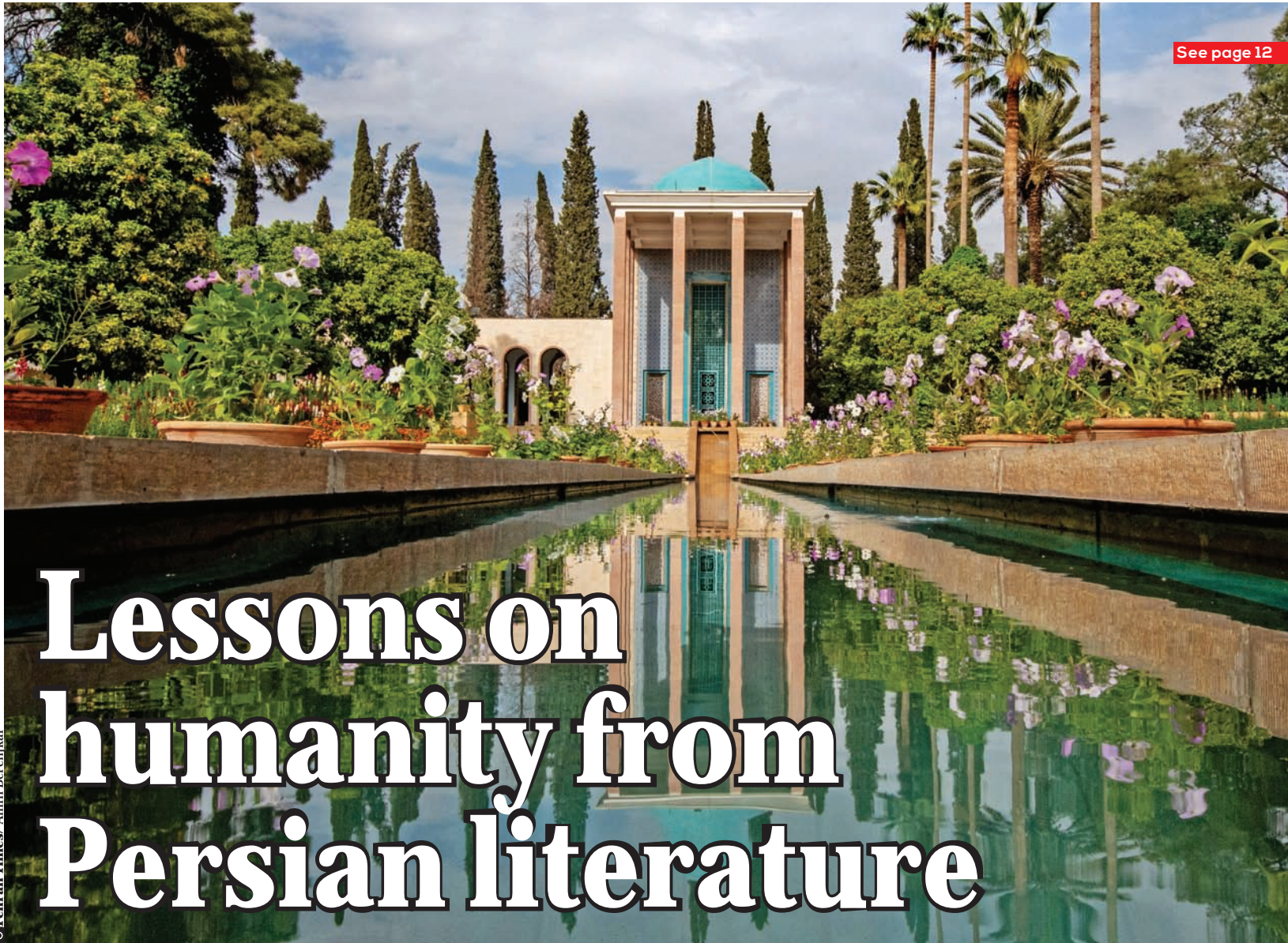


IRGC Navy advises U.S. to avoid adventurism in Persian Gulf **2**

Authorities planning big to make Ardebil winter tourism hub **8**

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Lessons on humanity from Persian literature

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

REPORT
Mohammad Jafari
Teheran Times journalist

Anti-war activist criticizes U.S. political system's blatant discrimination against Blacks

The United States' capitalist system is fundamentally antithetical to the realization of human rights, especially on the subject of Blacks, a senior member of the Executive Committee of the U.S. Peace Council and leadership body of the United National Anti-War Coalition (UNAC) said, noting that such racist policies have turned the African-Americans into the most vulnerable communities amid COVID-19 outbreak.

Ajamu Baraka, who is an editor and contributing columnist for the Black Agenda Report and contributing columnist for Counterpunch, wrote in his analytic article published by BAR that pushing workers back to work and attempting to "normalize" the economy was the growing consensus among the capitalist class, not just Trump. "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control." Baraka cited the article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"We have to make the world see that the problem that we're confronted with is a problem for humanity. It's not a Negro problem; it's not an American problem. You and I have to make it a world problem, make the world aware that there'll be no peace on this earth as long as our human rights are being violated in America," the anti-war activist quoted Malcolm X as saying.

"With the overwhelming evidence that the capitalist system is fundamentally antithetical to the realization of human rights, including what should be an elementary right — access to healthcare — the presidency of Donald J. Trump has been a godsend for the capitalist rulers," Baraka, who was former Green Party nominee for Vice President of the United States in the 2016 election, went on to say. **→7**

How Iran could curb COVID-19 despite sanctions, restrictions?

By Farnak Bakhtiari

TEHRAN — Since the first case of coronavirus was identified in Iran, the country has taken extensive measures to curb the spread of the disease, so that daily death toll has been declining over the past few days, unlike some other countries around the world which are still grappling with high casualties and infection.

Until April 11, the virus mortality in the country was rising daily, however, reports indicated that death toll faced a sharp decline over the past 8 days. The same also happened for the new cases of the virus, which are reducing from over 3,000 newly diagnosed cases daily to 1,300 day by day.

But what is the reason behind handling the

spread of the disease in Iran despite sanctions and trade restrictions?

■ **Volunteers play a significant role**

Although, at the beginning, Iranians like other people around the world, felt a binge fear rushing to pharmacies to lay their hands on face masks, medical gloves, and detergents to protect themselves, which caused the country to run out of anti-corona products, they later came to a conclusion that helping each other is a better way to survive.

So, almost all of the people reached out to volunteer in doing whatever could ever combat the disease, volunteer groups started offering services to the patients and medical staff, as well as producing face masks, scrubs, and disinfectants.

Many of these volunteers were house wives who sewed face masks and gowns to distribute among the public and health workers; in addition, teams made up of Iranian youth started producing disinfectants in universities or religious places.

Many self-protective products have been distributed in deprived areas of the country where financially struggling families are residing and cannot afford these items.

Also, many students and volunteers, have been working in hospitals and helping the medical staff. They collect waste from the coronavirus patients' ward, or help feeding them, and sometimes encourage the patients and medical staff by reciting poems and songs. **→9**

Houthi spokesman: Short-term solutions cannot bring peace to Yemen

The UN Security Council on Friday endorsed the secretary-general's call for warring parties in Yemen to immediately stop fighting and focus on reaching a peace agreement and countering the outbreak of the new coronavirus.

The council statement followed a briefing Thursday by UN special envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths who said the threat of COVID-19, the illness caused by the new coronavirus, has galvanized peace efforts.

Griffith said talks with the warring sides "are making very good progress" and that he expects them to adopt proposals for a nationwide ceasefire and peace talks "in the immediate future."

But Mohammed Abdulsalam, a spokesman for Ansarullah, said Thursday the current UN proposal neglects a key demand — to lift

Saudi Arabia's air and sea blockade, which fuels the country's humanitarian crisis. He also refused short-term solutions, saying the blockade must be removed before any serious talks.

However, political experts believe the party which must end the war is Yemen because their country is destroyed by the enemies.

This comes as Saudi Arabia and its allies are accused of violating the ceasefire despite Riyadh's unilateral declaration of truce of two weeks.

Yemen's armed forces spokesman Yahya Sare'e says Riyadh has carried out scores of air raids since it announced ceasefire. He warned that more painful attacks would be carried out in response to such escalation.

Analysts say the Saudi-led coalition has never

been complied with the agreements despite efforts by Ansarullah to save the peace accord.

According to Press TV, many rounds of talks have failed to bring peace to the war-torn country. The Sweden peace talks had been described as the first breakthrough by the UN, yet such diplomatic efforts have failed to bring an end to Saudi aggression against Yemen that has killed and injured thousands of civilians.

The outbreak of the coronavirus in Yemen, which reported its first case earlier this month, threatens deeper and more widespread suffering in the Arab world's poorest country. Many stress the vital importance of access to humanitarian and economic aid for Yemenis in need, which is especially important in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.



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Army's 'defenders of health' praised

TEHRAN — In a ceremony held on Sunday in Golestan Hospital, the Army praised "defenders of health" in the fight against the outbreak of the coronavirus.

Armed Forces, including the Army, have been helping the Health Ministry to deal with the Covid-19. The establishment of 2,000-bed mobile hospital in Tehran by Army in 24 hours in late March was a great record.

Over the past 24 hours, 1,343 new citizens were confirmed infected with the coronavirus, Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Sunday.

Iran among five leading countries in manufacturing drones

TEHRAN — Brigadier General Aziz Nasirzadeh, the commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF), announced on Sunday that Iran is among the five leading countries in manufacturing drones.

"We are among the top regional countries in manufacturing drones and using unmanned aircrafts," Nasirzadeh told a press conference.

He added, "We are moving on this path, conforming to updated standards in the world."

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 multirole, 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. **→2**

Annual steel products export by major producers rises 27%

TEHRAN — Iran's export of steel products in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19) rose 27 percent compared to its preceding year, IRNA reported.

As reported, the country's major steel producers managed to export about 7.33 million tons of the products in the previous year.

According to the data released by the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry, in the mentioned period over 20.226 million

tons of steel ingots were produced by the country's 10 major companies to register a five-percent rise year on year.

The mentioned companies also produced nearly 13.38 million tons of other steel products last year, six percent more than the preceding year.

The export of steel ingot during the last year's 11-month period ended on February 19, increased by 42 percent to stand at 6.3 million tons. **→4**

Expert predicts long-term effects of coronavirus on Iran's football

By Farrokh Hesabi

TEHRAN — Bijan Zolfagharnasab, head of Iran Football Coaches Association (IFCA), believes that the pandemic coronavirus crisis could bring long term consequences for the Iranian football.

The ex-Iran defender, who has coached different teams in Iran, in an exclusive interview with Tehran Times, discussed the current situation of Iranian football, in particular the

clubs, after the suspension of the events due to the outbreak of novel coronavirus.

"Obviously, the professional football clubs will face a lot of financial problems. There is no support for our clubs in critical situations like this. The revenues of our clubs are limited because of the lack of broadcasting rights and the events like this are expected to worsen the financial burden on the clubs. **→11**

Post-corona era beginning of U.S. hegemony decline, accelerating East rise: Prof. Suzuki

By Payman Yazdani

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

The outbreak of the coronavirus and how governments are able to confront it have, on one hand, raised the question of the effectiveness of political systems and, on the other, the transition from the current order to the post-coronavirus order.

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

To shed light on the issue we reached out to Kazuto Suzuki vice dean and professor of international politics at Public Policy School of Hokkaido University, Japan.

Here is the full text of his interview with: ■ How will the coronavirus outbreak affect the existing world order?

First of all, this pandemic has revealed that the Western states (Europe and the U.S.) were not prepared for such pandemic while Asian countries were fairly capable of coping such pandemic. This would lead to the second point that this pandemic can be summarized as the decline of the West and the rise of the East in the world order. China, which was the origin of the pandemic, was the first to re-open the country with strong production capability. Now, China provides masks and other medical equipment to other countries including the United States. On the other hand, the United States under President Trump was not able to cope with the situation and more than 30,000 lives were lost. His approach puts his election strategy in front of the health and lives of people in America. There are conflicts about the federal governments and state governors. This pandemic does not allow room for a populist approach in which the leaders and people neglect the importance of science, experts, and facts.

■ What are the deficiencies of the liberalism and realism approaches that the existing world order has been made on them? **→7**

Iran among five leading countries in manufacturing drones: Air Force chief

1 → 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.



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.

Zarif to Trump: Iran will be exporting ventilators 'in a few months'

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — In a tweet on Sunday addressed to President Donald Trump whose administration has even refused to relax illegal sanctions against Iran amidst the coronavirus pandemic, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said that Iran will be exporting ventilators in a few months. Zarif advises Trump that what he needs to do is to avoid pressuring other countries who wish to have normal relations, including economic and trade ties, with Iran.



"Iran will be EXPORTING ventilators in a few months, @realDonaldTrump. All you need to do is stop interfering in the affairs of other nations; mine especially. And believe me, we do not take advice from ANY American politician," Zarif wrote.

Refusing to lift illegal sanctions, even while Iran is battling the deadly new virus, Trump has said Iran can request the U.S. for humanitarian aid.

In response, Zarif said Iran is rich in human and natural resources and does not need "charity" from Trump to contain the outbreak of the coronavirus.

"Iran is rich in human & natural resources. We don't need charity from @realDonaldTrump—who's forced to buy ventilators from sources he's sanctioned," Zarif tweeted on April 7.

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

Iran's Deputy President for Scientific Affairs Sorena Sattari unveiled six products in the field of diagnosing, screening and combating the new coronavirus during a ceremony at Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences in Tehran on Friday.

According to Press TV, one of the Iranian-manufactured products was the Traffic and Disinfection Gate, which prevents the spread of pathogens by sanitizing individuals and vehicles, and facilitates the detection of body temperature using a temperature detection sensor as well as measuring blood oxygen saturation percentage.

The Ozone Generator, equipped with an ozone measuring sensor, is a device that has the ability to disinfect the air and produce ozone on-site, without using chemicals.

The other product unveiled at the ceremony was Nano Shield, a protective shield with high flexibility that has been specifically designed and manufactured to suit the demands of the Iranian medical staff.

Sattari also unveiled three molecular detection kits for the coronavirus — COVID-19 Quick Diagnosis Kit, COVID-19 Disease Management System and TAK App (Nutrition, Immunity, Corona).

Closure of religious sites, prison furloughs extended in Iran

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — Religious holy sites and mosques in Iran will remain closed due to the outbreak of the coronavirus until May 4, President Hassan Rouhani said, noting that the Judiciary has also extended furloughs for prisoners for one more month.

Addressing a Sunday session of the Coronavirus Fight National Headquarters, Rouhani said the closure of holy sites and mosques will continue until May 4 at the headquarters' discretion.

He also expressed hope that improvement of the situation in the battle with the coronavirus would allow the people to go to the religious sites afterwards.

The president also noted that the prison furloughs granted in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak were initially going to end on April 19, but the Judiciary has decided to extend them for one more month.

The inmates that do not pose a threat to social security can enjoy the prison leave until May 20, he added.

Rouhani further said that the decision about closure of schools and universities has not changed, and that students should keep receiving education via remote learning programs at home.

More than 56,000 patients have recovered from the coronavirus in Iran, as the daily death toll from COVID-19 in the country dropped for the fifth consecutive day on Saturday.

IRGC Navy advises U.S. to avoid adventurism in Persian Gulf

IRGC likens U.S. description of Iranian boats to "Hollywood" scenarios

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy issued a statement on Sunday saying Iran will respond firmly to any miscalculation of the United States, advising Washington to avoid any adventurism in Persian Gulf.

The statement called the U.S. claims about the Iranian boats getting close to the U.S. vessels "fake" and liken them to some "Hollywood" scenarios.

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 IRGC statement said, "In the past weeks, we witnessed the United States' terrorist navy's unprofessional behaviors which threatened the region. One of these actions was obstructing the path of Martyr Siavoshi ship on April 6, when the ship was returning from a mission in southeast of Farsi Island. Based on the ship's black box data, the United States' terrorist warship was conducting dangerous behaviors and ignored the preliminary warnings. It finally diverted from the path of the Guards' vessel."

"Once again, on six o'clock in the morning



of April 7, in a region in front of Asaluyeh and within 30 miles distance of Iranian platform, the United States' terrorist fleet with the number CG72 on its side obstructed the path of Martyr Siavoshi vessel. This vessel finally succeeded on continuing its path through a professional and intelligent action," the statement added.

The statement also said on April 15, after announcing state of shooting, the IRGC sent 11 gunboats to the region considered for practicing and faced the U.S. vessels and made them leave the path of the boats.

It added, "The illegitimate presence of the terrorist regime of the United States is source of insecurity in the region and removal

of the United States' forces from the West Asia is the only way to strengthen security."

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 also 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 ends of the world and make unfounded claims," he told reporters on the sidelines of a parade held to mark the National Army Day.

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

Iran has speeded up progress in air defense: Army chief

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi, the chief of Iran's Army, said on Sunday that the Islamic Republic has speeded up progress in air defense system by forming Army's air defense force.

"The Army's air defense force is prepared to respond to any mischievous acts," he said during a ceremony held to unveil two radar systems named "Khalij Fars" [Persian Gulf] and "Moragheb" [Watchful].

He praised efforts being made to make new technological achievements in line

with boosting the country's defense power.

According to the Mehr news agency, "Khalij Fars" is a strategic radar system that has a range of over 800 kilometers. The high-tech 3D phased array radar can identify all conventional and stealth targets as well as ballistic missiles.

"Moragheb" is also a state-of-the-art 3D phased array radar with a range of 400 kilometers that can detect flying targets with high accuracy. Also, it is able to identify small flying objects and UAVs in low altitude. The system has been devel-

oped based on domestic knowledge in the Army's Air Defense with the cooperation of knowledge-based companies.

The Army took delivery of a "massive number" of reconnaissance and combat drones on Saturday.

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



Calgary University professor urges world to press U.S. to lift sanctions on Iran

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Lorian Hardcastle, a professor at University of Calgary, has said that the international community must make more efforts in pushing the United States to remove sanctions on Iran when the country is fighting the outbreak of the coronavirus.

"The international organizations have not exerted enough pressure on the United States to lead it to removal of sanctions. Other countries can also push the United States to take more actions," she told ILNA in an interview published on Sunday.

Hardcastle noted that sanctions have limited Iran's access to medical equipment.

Thomas Alan, a professor at Vanderbilt University, has also 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.

A number of Tunisian political activists and jurists have condemned the United States sanctions on Iran as the country is hit hard by the deadly coronavirus.

The activists and jurists have urged the U.S. to immediately lift sanctions on Iran given the dangers of the coronavirus pandemic. ISNA reported on April 14.

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

"The danger of the coronavirus pandemic must make the humanity united and lead superpowers to stop adopting inhuman policies and pressure, because such policies impede the fight against the coronavirus," he said.

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

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

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

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

UNHCR hails Iran's hosting of Afghan refugees, vows more assistance amid coronavirus

(Press TV) — The representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Iran, Ivo Freijssen, has hailed as an "important achievement" the country's hosting of Afghan refugees for more than four decades, vowing to help the Islamic Republic protect Afghans amid the ongoing novel coronavirus pandemic.

"As UNHCR, we want to first and foremost underscore and highlight that it has been commendable that Iran has been hosting refugees primarily from Afghanistan for more than 40 years now, which is an important feature and an important achievement, a commendable achievement," Freijssen said in an exclusive interview with Iran Press on Saturday.

He added that the UN refugee agency in cooperation with its international partners would provide Iranian authorities with further support to protect the Afghan refugees until they can voluntarily and safely go back to their "fully stable" homeland.

"Iran has done very well over the years

in making basic social services accessible for refugees," the UN official pointed out.

The UN representative also lauded a 2015 decree by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei allowing schooling for all Afghan children in Iran. The Leader ordered that all Afghan children in Iran be permitted schooling regardless of their residency status.

Iran spends \$8 billion on Afghan migrants every year in various sectors, and has repeatedly complained that the countries which caused the displacement of Afghans must accept responsibility and help cover the costs.

In February, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi praised Iran and Pakistan for hosting millions of Afghan refugees despite receiving minimal support from the international community.

"Afghans now constitute the largest group of arrivals in Europe, exceeding for the first time the arrivals from Syria,"

Guterres said, expressing regret that returns to Afghanistan have hit a historical low.

Elsewhere in his interview, Freijssen said the role and mandate of the UNHCR in the Islamic Republic is to essentially assist the government and other actors in their efforts to provide basic social services and to protect Afghan refugees in areas such as health, education, livelihood and skill development.

He added that the UNHCR would support and closely work with its partners in Afghanistan on "voluntary repatriation so that Afghan refugees who wish to go back to their home areas can do so in an organized and planned manner."

"This is what we would like to see in international norms that systems are accessible for refugees" and Afghan children take advantage of education and healthcare like all the other children in Iran, he said.

Freijssen noted that the UNHCR tries to maximize its support for Iran in the protection of refugees and related services,

particularly amid the current coronavirus outbreak.

He said the UNHCR would definitely like to do more in this regard but its ability depends fully on the amount of money given by donors.

In a statement late last month, Iran's Foreign Ministry threw its weight behind a proposal by the United Nations secretary general for a global ceasefire in conflict-hit zones and a nationwide truce in war-ravaged Afghanistan.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran shares the good idea of His Excellency Mr. Antonio Guterres in announcing a global ceasefire in all conflicts and focusing on the campaign against the coronavirus, which is ruthlessly targeting all people regardless of their religion, faith, race, gender and age," the ministry said.

The statement said Iran, as a neighbor of Afghanistan and host to millions of Afghan refugees for the past four decades, fully supports the UN chief's initiative for nationwide ceasefire.

MEK running anti-Islamic Republic propaganda from Albania, France: Murtaza Hussain

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — The Intercept's Murtaza Hussain has said members of the Mojahedin-e Khalq, an exiled Iranian militant group better known as the MEK, are tasked to run the cultish group's online propaganda campaign against the Islamic Republic from the MEK's bases in France and Albania.

"The MEK is a very secretive organization but defectors have told us that on their bases in Albania and France members are tasked all day with posting articles online and running the MEK's information operations," Hussain said in an interview with the Balkans Post published on Sunday.

Last month, The Intercept published an article by Murtaza Hussain and Matthew Cole, providing a comprehensive account of what life was like inside the MEK. The article was based on interviews with the group's high-ranking defectors.

According to the article, interviews with six defectors in Europe revealed how the MEK isolated, disappeared, and tortured many of its cadres into submission, including forcing dozens of female members to have sex with Masoud Rajavi and undergo medical sterilization so they could devote themselves more fully to the leader and his cause.

It also said the MEK has shelled out hundreds of thousands of lobbying dollars in Washington, first as part of a successful campaign to get itself removed from the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations and later, to build its reputation as a credible alternative to the Iranian government.

"The MEK was designated a terrorist group by the State Department but for years still did lobbying work on Capitol Hill," Hussain was quoted by the Balkans Post as saying. "It seems that the law has always been unevenly applied on the question of terrorism designations."

A few years ago, the MEK members were relocated from their Camp Ashraf in



Olsi Jazexhi, a Canadian-Albanian historian, has argued that Saudi Arabia is funding the MEK.

Iraq's Diyala Province to Camp Hurriyet (Camp Liberty), a former U.S. military base in Baghdad, and were later relocated to Albania.

Last year, Germany's Der Spiegel revealed that members of the MEK undergo horrific training in a camp in Albania, a country that has turned into a hub for anti-Iran activities by hosting the MEK.

Asked why the Albanian government hosts the terrorist organization, Hussain said, "I'm not sure what the Albanian government's decision-making was but it seems highly likely that they made this decision based on the desire to be on good terms with the U.S. administration and right-wing elements in that country."

"There has been some speculation

also about financial compensation in exchange for taking in this group on their soil," he added.

The MEK was established in the 1960s to express a mixture of Marxism and Islamism. It launched bombing campaigns against the Shah, continuing after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, against the Islamic Republic. Iran accuses the group of being responsible for 17,000 deaths.

Based in Iraq at the time, MEK members were armed by former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein to fight against Iran during a war that lasted for 8 years in the 1980s.

In 2012, the U.S. State Department removed the MEK from its list of designated terrorist organizations under intense lobbying by groups associated

with Saudi Arabia and other regimes opposed to Iran.

Olsi Jazexhi, a Canadian-Albanian historian, has argued that Saudi Arabia is funding the MEK.

"While the U.S. government and Israel will most probably not spend their money with an ex-terrorist organization, I believe that the only state who can support it should be Saudi Arabia," the Balkans Post on Wednesday quoted Jazexhi as saying.

"Saudis have done such a thing with Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan or Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria and we should not be surprised if they pay the MEK bill as well," he added.

In 2018, Professor Paul Pillar, who was a CIA intelligence analyst for 28 years, told the Tehran Times that the financial sources of the MEK have always been unclear, but the most likely sources are states that are regional rivals of Iran.

Hussain also said it is unclear how the group's activities are funded but "it would be expensive".

"The MEK has killed thousands of Iranians over the years and was involved in the 2009-2011 assassination of Iranian scientists alongside the Israeli Mossad," he said.

The investigative journalist added that the MEK is a deeply unpopular group including among opponents of the Iranian government.

Back in June 2019, Hussain wrote an article in The Intercept arguing that Heshmat Alavi, who wrote dozens of articles for right-wing outlets, appears not to exist. Alavi's persona is a propaganda operation run by the MEK, he quoted two sources as saying.

In the Sunday interview, Hussain said Heshmat Alavi is a persona used by the MEK to "continue its public relations work in the Western countries, aiming to sway elite and public opinion by placing news articles and running social media campaigns promoting its vision for itself as the future government of Iran."

Details of motion aiming to reduce parliament speaker's power unveiled

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — A member of the parliament's presiding board has unveiled details of a motion that aims at reducing the parliament speaker's power among other things in the next parliamentary term.



Amirhossein Ghazizadeh said the motion also aims to reform the structure of the parliament in order to improve the parliament's performance, Mehr reported on Sunday.

"In addition, the aforementioned motion would create important paths toward supervision of the Majlis through more serious and precise regulations in posing questions to the ministers and the president as well as impeaching ministers and supervising the representatives' behavior," he added.

South Korea blocks test kits for Iran on Saudi-funded TV's request

TEHRAN (Press TV) — Iran says South Korea has rejected a SWIFT payment request by Tehran for purchase of coronavirus testing kits over the U.S. sanctions.

Iran's Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour late Saturday released a document that shows a Saudi-funded TV had asked a Korean bank to reject the request.



"As a result, the Korean bank rejected Iran's request and the kits were not delivered to Iran," he said.

According to the document, London-based Iran International television channel falsely claimed that the SWIFT request had been made by a software company which sought to export non-medical goods to Iran.

Jahanpour released a second document which shows South Korea's Mico BioMed, which develops and sells medical kits, had in fact presented the SWIFT request to the bank.

"The SWIFT request related [to Iran's purchase of test kits] has been rejected by the Korean bank under the pretext of sanctions," he said.

"This shows claims of medicine and medical equipment not being subject to sanctions are lies. The bank has officially stated that the purchase is not possible due to the sanctions," Jahanpour added. Belgium-based SWIFT, the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, is used to transmit payments and letters of credit.

The U.S. government has intensified its sanctions on Iran despite international calls on Washington to suspend them to allow the Islamic Republic to secure necessary medicine and equipment in the midst of the coronavirus fight.

Washington claims the sanctions do not target medicine for Iran, but they make it all but impossible for importers to obtain letters of credit or conduct international transfers of funds through banks.

Last week, Iran's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York dismissed the Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement (SHTA) which the Europeans belatedly announced with much fanfare to have made operational in coordination with the U.S. to barter medicine and food with Iran.

The mission said the United States has forced SHTA to pursue a very tight and tough procedure, making it practically very difficult for companies to trade with Iran.

"Additionally, almost impossible or cumbersome nature of transferring Iran's reserves blocked outside the country to the designated Swiss bank, not only does not allow the SHTA to function properly now but may actually render it redundant in a matter of few months," it said.

According to the mission, several companies that supply the medical equipment required to fight the coronavirus have recently stopped shipping to Iran because the current U.S. sanctions regime makes the shipping of such items to Iran almost impossible.

Washington has imposed new sanctions in the midst of the coronavirus, targeting trade with Iran, even as President Donald Trump has claimed that the U.S. was ready to help with the outbreak if Tehran asked for it.

The Islamic Republic has rejected the offer as hypocritical while the U.S. is refusing to lift the sanctions and even intensifying them. Officials have said Washington's demand that Tehran make a direct plea for the removal of sanctions shows the United States seeks "nothing short of surrender".

Iran's UN mission said last week the only message the U.S. is sending with intensifying its sanctions amid the coronavirus is that companies must avoid doing any business with Iran, even if their work is humanitarian in nature.

Meanwhile, certain sections of mainstream media act as a virtual arm of the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) which is responsible for administering the U.S. sanctions regime.

They have been on a witch hunt to identify Iran's financial institutions and report them to the U.S. government for possible sanctions.

Iran International, launched in May 2017, is a regular megaphone for separatists and terrorist groups operating against Iran. It is best known for airing disparaging reports about Iran and trying to stoke unrest in the country.

Zarif set to meet Assad in Damascus



POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif is scheduled to meet Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus on Monday.

According to Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi, Zarif is slated to make a one-day trip to Syria to meet President Assad and Foreign Minister Walid Muallem.

Zarif and the Syrian authorities are set to talk about bilateral ties, regional developments, the latest political situation in Syria, and the country's fight against terrorism, Mousavi added.

Iran is a key ally of Syria. The Islamic Republic has been providing military advisory to Damascus in its anti-terror campaign.

Iranian officials have made it clear that Tehran would stand by Syria in the reconstruction projects of the war-stricken country.

Back in April 2019, Zarif met Assad in a trip to Damascus, where the two exchanged views on bilateral and regional ties.

Zarif's April trip took place almost two months after Assad's unannounced visit to Tehran, during which he met Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani, with Zarif absent at the meetings.

Shortly after Assad's meetings in Tehran, Zarif announced his resignation in an Instagram post. His not knowing about the visit was speculated as being the reason.

Two days later, however, Rouhani rejected Zarif's resignation, saying it was contrary to the country's interests. On the same day, Assad officially invited the Iranian foreign minister to visit Syria. Zarif later announced that he will visit Syria soon.

Iraq's Nujaba vows support for Iranians in coronavirus battle



TEHRAN (Tasnim) — The representative of the secretary-general of Iraq's al-Nujaba Movement said the Shiite resistance group will spare no effort to assist Iranians in the fight against the novel coronavirus.

In an interview with Tasnim, Seyed Abbas al-Moussavi said members of the Nujaba Movement are ready to dedicate their lives to helping the Islamic Republic in the battle with COVID-19.

Iraqis owe a lot to Iran, he said, stressing that the two neighbors are like brothers.

"We will stand by the noble people of Iran ... and help them in the battle with the virus," al-Moussavi underscored, saying it is impossible to return the favor that Iran has done Iraqis in the past.

He also pointed to the voluntary plans that the Nujaba members have carried

out in the Iranian city of Qom, such as disinfection of the public places and distribution of foodstuff among the needy families, asking the Iranian authorities to give Nujaba the addresses of Iranian coronavirus patients who are unable to get out of the house, so that the Iraqi volunteers will provide them with aid packages.

Back in February, the spokesperson for Nujaba Movement lauded Iran for providing humanitarian assistance for the Iraqi students who had been stuck in China after the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

Hailing Iran for transferring the Iraqi students from China and providing them with medical care, Nasr al-Shammari said such move revealed that the Islamic Republic has great respect for the humanitarian values and avoids sectarianism.

U.S. distracting world attention from its economic terrorism: Iranian envoy

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — The United States is trying to distract world attention from its economic terrorism waged against the people of Iran, says Tehran's ambassador to the United Nations.

"Yet another attempt by US to distract from its continued #EconomicTerrorism on the Iranian people: this time, US is calling on #UNSC to violate its very resolution 2231, and continue arms restrictions on Iran," Majid Takh-Ravanchi tweeted on Sunday.

"But US will not succeed in wooing others to violate int'l law," Takh-Ravanchi added.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Saturday urged the United Nations Security Council to extend the international arms embargo on Iran.

Repeating Washington's unfounded claims, Pompeo said lifting the sanctions imposed on Tehran may give rise to violence in the Middle East.

"The arms embargo on Iran — the world's leading state sponsor of terror — expires six months from today. The UN Security Council (UNSC) must extend the embargo



before Iran's violence escalates and they start a new arms race in the Middle East. The clock is ticking," Pompeo claimed in a tweet.

"In the last year, Iran fired ballistic missiles at its neighbors, mined and captured oil tankers, smuggled weapons

into conflict zones, and shot down a civilian passenger jet. We can't risk Iran buying more advanced weapons and transferring their arsenal to irresponsible actors," he added.

Russia also reacted to Pompeo's remark and ruled out the possibility of renewing the arms embargo against Iran.

"Usually an arms race is not unilateral. It is a collective endeavor even at level of great powers or in regional & subregional context. A risk of arms race can hardly be removed through arms embargo against one country. This task requires collective efforts through negotiations," Russia's Permanent Representative to the IAEA Mikhail Ulyanov tweeted on Saturday.

Under the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, which the U.S. abandoned in May 2018, a UN ban on weapons sales to Tehran will end in October 2020.

In December 2019, President Hassan Rouhani said Iran intends to stay in the nuclear deal despite the U.S. actions, arguing that the internationally-endorsed pact will be put to good use in 2020 when the arms embargo comes to an end.

Is Italy’s economic crisis an opportunity for China?

Italy represents one of the most important countries for China’s geo-economic interests in Europe. It is a source of strategic assets both in advanced and traditional industries and internationally recognized brands and technology as well as occupying a crucial geographic position in the framework of China’s 21st century Maritime Silk Road, an integral part of Belt and Road Initiative. Getting access to Italy’s port infrastructure is a priority for China as it seeks to expand its trading routes from the Mediterranean to northern Europe.

In March 2019, Italy became an official member of the Belt and Road Initiative, becoming the first G-7 country to join the Beijing led platform and the largest economy among the 15 European Union countries that are BRI members. Being the third largest economy in Europe with 15 percent of the Eurozone GDP, including Italy in the BRI was important and largely symbolic for Chinese ambitions in Europe, suggesting the growing role of China in the world. The ambitious BRI MOU signed between Rome and Beijing included 50 agreements, covering economic, cultural, and infrastructural areas. However, the anticipated economic boost for the country has yet to materialize, while fallout from getting significantly closer to Beijing amid criticism from the EU and the United States sparked a real political debate in Italy.

■ **Italy as BRI member: Where are the benefits?**
Italy’s hope was that membership in the BRI would open new opportunities in trade and investment. Since the early 2000s, trade between the two countries has increased five-fold (from \$9.6 billion in 2001 to \$49.9 billion in 2019). However, overall trade levels between Italy and China have barely changed since 2010 (\$49.5 billion). At the same time, the trade deficit for Italy has been continuously increasing, reaching \$20.9 billion in 2019, while Italian exports to China have declined, dropping a 6.1 percent last year alone. In 2019, China was the third largest import partner for Italy, providing more than 7 percent of its imports, and the ninth biggest export partner, receiving just 2.9 percent of Italian exports, mainly in electronic equipment and machinery.

When it comes to Chinese foreign direct investment, Italy has been among the top three recipients in Europe, after the United Kingdom and Germany. In 2019, the cumulative Chinese FDI in Italy reached \$17.4 billion (15.9 billion euros) since 2000, with the peak of investment in 2014 and 2015. If investments and construction contracts are considered, including loans, the amount of investment reaches \$25.5 billion, focusing mainly on energy (\$6.5 billion), transport (\$8.75 billion), technology (\$4 billion), and finance (\$2.8 billion). Among the main investments has been the acquisition of 17 percent of Pirelli, the world largest tire-maker, for \$7.9 billion by the Chinese state owned enterprise ChemChina. Chinese investors, through the People’s Bank of China, are also interested in the Italian stock exchange market, purchasing shares worth more than \$4 billion in Intesa Sanpaolo, Unicredit, Eni, Enel, Telecom Italia, Generali, Terna, and others.

However, in recent years, investment has been disappointing. Italy has failed to attract many projects last year, although 29 deals were signed amounting to \$2.8 billion, including deals between China Communication Construction Construction (CCCC) and the ports of Trieste and Genoa. While Huawei had announced in July 2019 a \$3.1 billion investment plan over the next three years, the Italian government has since hardened its stance on China’s human rights records and on restricting Huawei Technology access to fifth generation (5G) data networks. Last December the intelligence and security committee of the Italian parliament recommended that the government “very seriously” consider banning Huawei and other Chinese equipment suppliers from Italy’s 5G mobile networks. But the response from Conte’s government was that the existing screening procedures, including the so-called “golden power rules” to protect strategic assets (covering the defense, national security, transportation, and high-tech sectors, including 5G technology), were more than enough.

■ **COVID-19 crisis and its economic consequences**
Since February 2020 the Italian economic picture has completely changed. As Italy is hampered by its most severe crisis since World War II, with more than 20,000 deaths from COVID-19, its economy will likely suffer the deepest recession in the country’s history.

The spread of the COVID-19 virus has caused an unpredictable market shock, both on demand and supply, amid the progressive shutdown of national economic activities necessary to stem the epidemic. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, Italy had been facing stagnant incomes, with the same average per capita income as 20 years ago, and its economy was struggling with a 12 percent unemployment rate and a sovereign debt worth 133 percent of GDP. The economic blow resulting from the current health disaster will bring even more dire consequences.

The Italian Institute of Statistics (Istat) notes that the consumer confidence in March alone fell by 9.9 percent compared to the previous month, and that the Economic Sentiment indicator decreased by 17.6 percent. Confindustria estimates in the most optimistic scenario a 10 percent drop in GDP in the second quarter compared to the end of 2019 and a restart in the second half of 2020, which, will however be hampered by the weak demand for goods and services. It’s estimated that Italy will end 2020 with a 6 percent drop in GDP, a 6.8 percent drop in consumption, and a 10.6 percent drop in investments.

Stock prices have plummeted. In just a few weeks, the MIB index has reached its lowest levels since 2012 with a 40 percent contraction, particularly affecting banks and insurance companies. In such a situation, many Italian companies that were in pretty good shape before the crisis now run the risk of passing into foreign hands. It seems like a repeat of what happened after the Eurozone crisis, but much worse.

And during the previous crisis, Chinese investment, mainly through acquisitions of Italian companies, went from 100 million euros in 2010 to 7.6 billion euros in 2015.

■ **“Golden power rules” extended**
Worried that Italy’s distressed companies would be purchased by foreign players at cheap prices, the Italian government has quickly launched an intervention to protect national companies. As of April 8, 2020, the “golden power rules” have been extended to a wide range of sectors, including health, finance, insurance, land and infrastructure, raw materials, robotics, and media, among others. The challenge is that protecting Italian companies from foreign acquisitions could be limited and difficult to implement in such a dire economic situation, when most companies risk bankruptcy. An intermediate solution for the Italian government could be instead their recapitalization through a public investment fund. At this stage the Italian government is taking steps to stem the most immediate effects of the crisis by providing subsidies to families, but there is no real plan for to protect businesses from bankruptcy, with only 400 billion euros in state-guaranteed loans available to companies. Other EU resources are expected to be added to these interventions in the coming days.

(Source: The Diplomat)

First VP calls for supporting private sector to spur non-oil exports

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — First Vice-President Es’haq Jahangiri said, on Saturday evening, that the government should support the country’s private sector as they are the economic frontiers in the battle against the coronavirus.

Speaking in a meeting with the Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani and his deputies, the official stressed the significant role of the private sector in the country’s economy, noting that: “this year we need non-oil exports more than ever, and the government’s priority is also promoting non-oil exports.”

“Our main focus is on non-oil exports,” he said, adding “[promoting] non-oil exports should be on the agenda as a serious and strategic issue, and although we have budgetary constraints, government support will be provided.”

He further noted that increasing non-oil exports to the neighboring countries is the



First Vice-President Es’haq Jahangiri (L) attends a meeting with the Industry Minister Reza Rahmani (R) and his deputies on Saturday evening.

Annual steel products export by major producers rises 27%

➔ Iranian major steel companies produced over 18.5 million tons of steel ingots during the 11 months, registering a four-percent growth from the figure for the same period in the previous year. As Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) has announced, Iran’s annual steel ingot production is planned to increase 3.2 million tons in the current Iranian calendar year, which began on March 20.

The country has defined 16 development projects in the steel sector to boost the output of steel products by 17.3 million tons in five years.

These projects are for constructing production units each with the capacity of 600,000 tons, while some other projects have been also defined to set up some units with under 500,000-ton capacity that together with the 600,000-ton capac-



ity units will add 19.1 million tons to the country’s annual steel products output.

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

Based on the WSA report, Iran produced 31.9 million tons of the mentioned commodity during 2019 compared to the last year’s nearly 24 million tons.

Rice production stands at 2.9m tons in a year

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian farmers produced 2.9 million tons of rice during the past Iranian calendar year of 1398 (ended on March 19), according to Director-General of the Agriculture Ministry’s Grains and Essential Goods Department Faramak Aziz-Karimi.

As the official told IRNA, the rise in the production came after the significant increases in the rainfalls across the country in the past spring.

“The average area under rice cultivation in the country in the past three years was about 605,000 hectares, of which 70 percent is concentrated in Gilan and Mazandaran provinces (about 427,000 hectares),” the official said.

Back in September 2019, the Secretary of Iran Rice Association Jamil Alizadeh Shayeque had put the country’s rice output at 2.6 million tons.

According to Shayeque, the country’s rice production stood between 2.2 and 2.3 million tons in the Iranian calendar year of 1397 (March 2018-March 2019).

In October 2019, Deputy Agriculture Min-



ister Abdolmehdi Bakhshandeh announced that Iran has become completely self-sufficient in rice production as it plans to cut up to two million tons of imports a year.

The Statistical Center of Iran estimates that Iranians consume approximately 35 kilograms of rice per person each year. That would mean a domestic demand of nearly three million tons for a country of 83 million people.

Bakhshandeh said rice self-sufficiency would save Iran more than \$1.1 billion in imports, adding that it would also be a major success amid efforts to minimize the impacts of the American sanctions on food security in the country.

Aluminum ingot production exceeds 275,000 tons

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran’s major aluminum producers produced 275,716 tons of aluminum ingots in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), IRNA reported citing the industry data.

As reported, the country’s aluminum ingot production in the past year fell eight percent in comparison to the figure for its preceding year.

The data show that among the country’s top producers, Iranian Aluminum Company (IRALCO) has the best performance registering a four percent rise during the mentioned period.

Based on the latest data released by the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), Iran produced 276,575 tons of aluminum ingots in the Iranian calendar year of 1397 (ended on March 20, 2019).

IRALCO accounted for producing 53 percent of the total production in the mentioned year. According to IMIDRO, Iran’s aluminum



production capacity is expected to reach 775,000 tons with the implementation of two major plants in South Khorasan and Fars provinces in the coming years.

As the world’s 18th producer of aluminum, Iran plans to reach the annual production of 1.5 million tons of aluminum ingot by the Iranian calendar year 1404 (March 2025-March 2026).

The country is targeting the production of 823,000 tons of aluminum ingots for the current Iranian calendar year, which requires an investment of \$1.8 billion.

Weekly growth in IME’s worth, weight of traded commodities

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The value and weight of goods traded at Iran’s Mercantile Exchange (IME) witnessed growth of 40 and 44 percent, respectively, during the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday), IME Public Relations Department reported.

As reported, 763,000 tons of commodities worth \$785 million were traded at this market over the past week.

Last week, on the domestic and export metal and mineral trading floor of the IME, 257,320 tons of various products worth close to \$390 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 251,870 tons of steel, 4,120 tons of copper, 1,000 tons of aluminum, 180 tons of zinc and 150 tons of molybdenum concentrates were traded by customers.

The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of the IME, 505,434 tons of different commodities with the total value of \$395 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 149,500 tons of



VB feed stock, 157,777 tons of bitumen, 79,327 tons of polymer products, 27,752 tons of chemical products, 43,500 tons of lube cut oil, 1,327 tons of base oil, 500 tons of slaps waxes, 300 tons of insulation as well as 45,420 tons of sulfur were traded.

Moreover, 250 tons of various commodities were traded on the side market of IME.

IME is one of the four major stock markets of Iran, the other three markets are Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Iran’s over-the-counter (OTC) market known also as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), and Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX).

Iran’s port capacity hits 250m tons

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami says the capacity of the country’s ports has reached 250 million tons, the portal of the ministry reported on Sunday.

According to Eslami in the past Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended on March 19), 147 million tons of commodities were transported through Iranian ports.

The figure stood at 134 million tons in the preceding year, he said in a televised interview.

Transit of goods through the country’s ports also experienced a 16 percent increase in the past year despite the U.S. sanctions, the official stressed.

He mentioned the significant improvement in the



development of the Chabahar port, in the southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan province, saying that currently in Chabahar, seven cargo vessels are sending about 300,000 tons of basic goods to foreign destinations.

Loading and unloading of goods in Chabahar port reached nearly 3 million tons in the past calendar year, 600,000 tons more than its preceding year, the official said adding that Chabahar port has had a significant impact on the Sistan-Baluchestan province’s economy.

Back in October 2019, the head of Iran’s Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) announced that after inaugurating the first phase of Chabahar Port’s development plan, the port’s capacity increased four times in less than two years.

Europe needs at least 500 billion euros from EU institutions for recovery: ESM



European Stability Mechanism Managing Director Klaus Regling

Europe will need at least another 500 billion euros from European Union institutions to finance its economic recovery after the coronavirus pandemic, on top of the agreed half-a-trillion package, the head of the euro zone bailout fund said.

In an interview with Italy’s Corriere della Sera paper, published on Sunday, European Stability Mechanism Managing Director Klaus Regling said the easiest way to organize such funds would be via the European Commission and the EU budget.

“I would say that for the second phase we need at least another 500 billion euros

from the European institutions, but it could be more,” Regling told the paper.

“For that, we need to discuss new instruments with an open mind, but also use the existing institutions, because it is easier, including in particular the Commission and the EU budget. Rethinking European funds can go a long way in keeping the European Union together,” Regling said.

European Union finance ministers agreed on April 9th on safety nets for sovereigns, companies and individuals worth in total 540 billion euros.

They also agreed that the euro zone,

which the IMF predicts will plunge into a 7.5% recession this year because of the pandemic, will need money to recover, but they had different ideas on how much is needed and how to raise it.

EU leaders are to discuss that at a videoconference on April 23. The idea around which a compromise may emerge is likely to involve the European Commission borrowing on the market against the security of the long-term EU budget and leveraging the money to achieve a bigger effect.

(Source: Reuters)

Iran's monthly natural gas consumption rises yr/yr

ENERGY

TEHRAN — National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) Dispatching Director says the country's gas consumption during the first Iranian calendar month of Farvardin (March 20-April 19) has increased in comparison to the last year's same period, Shana reported.

According to Mehdi Jamshidi-Dana, the daily natural gas consumption by domestic, commercial and non-industrial sectors was 349 million cubic meters (mcm), while major industries consumed 122 mcm and power plants used 142 mcm per day of natural gas.

Jamshidi-Dana put the daily consumption by the domestic, major industries and power plants in the previous year's same month at 316 mcm, 121 mcm, and 120 mcm, respectively.

The official noted that NIGC supplied 719 mcm of natural gas, on average, to the national gas network during the mentioned period.

Iran's daily natural gas consumption had hit a record high of nearly 600 mcm a day in early February due to the unprecedented snowfall and cold weather that blanketed the country.

Iran is currently producing over 810 mcm



of natural gas daily which is mostly used inside the country for the domestic sector and also as fuel for the power plants and a small portion is also exported to the neighboring countries like Iraq.

Currently, about 30,000 villages with 4.6 million households as well as 1,148 cities with

over 18 million households are connected to the national gas network in Iran.

Gas is supplied to 97 percent of people in the urban areas and 82 percent of people in the rural regions, according to the NIGC's Managing Director Hassan Montazer Torbati.

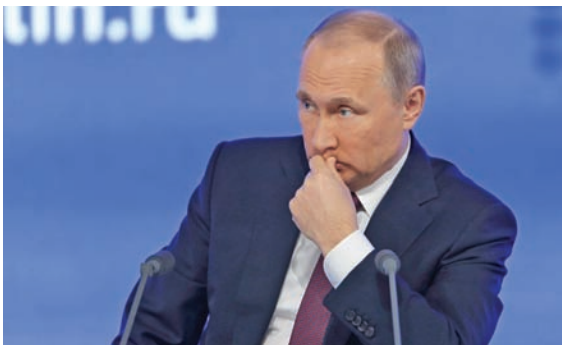
Oil crisis challenges Putin's power

Russian President Vladimir Putin refuses to yield under pressure. That is a matter of pride for Putin himself and a key aspect of his appeal to Russian elites and the public alike. The trick is preserving that reputation in the real world, where leaders routinely miscalculate and pivot while remaining loathe to admitting mistakes. The plunge in oil prices because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the collapse of the OPEC+ agreement on production cuts provide the most recent test.

In early March, the Saudis called for a meeting of the OPEC+ group to agree on further drastic production cuts of 1.5 million barrels a day to support oil prices as COVID-19 spread, crushing economic activity and demand. The Russians balked. According to the spokesperson of Rosneft, Russia's oil-sector national champion run by Igor Sechin, a close associate of Putin's: "This deal made no sense from the standpoint of Russian interests. By removing cheap Arab and Russian oil from our own markets, we open up the way for expensive American shale oil." Moscow wanted to maintain current levels of production for a few months to get a better sense of the economic consequences of the spreading pandemic before deciding on further cuts. And, when those cuts came, it wanted to make sure that the United States bore its fair share.

Moscow also had other reasons for wanting to strike a blow against the American energy sector. Late last year, Washington levied sanctions against Nord Stream 2, a strategic gas pipeline between Russia and Germany, pushing back its completion date by at least several months and raising costs, at a time when American shale gas was entering European markets. More recently, the United States sanctioned a Rosneft subsidiary, Rosneft Trading, for assisting the Maduro regime in circumventing US restrictions on Venezuelan oil exports.

But Moscow did not anticipate the Saudi reaction to its refusal to agree to further cuts. The Saudis' threat to open the spigot and offer steep discounts on their oil exports pushed oil prices down to lows not seen in decades. The price war had begun, even if only the Saudis were prosecuting it robustly: The Saudis had the capacity to add 2.5 million barrels a day, the Russians, 300,000. True to form, Moscow was defiant. Despite Russia's dependence on oil for two-thirds of its export earnings and 40 percent of its budget revenue, the Ministry of Finance announced that Russia could withstand prices as low as \$25 a barrel for up to ten years. It would draw on its \$150 billion National Wealth Fund to cover gaps in the



budget, currently based on an oil price of \$42 a barrel. That was certainly an exaggeration, and the Russian oil industry itself would suffer significant damage in the short term if wells had to be capped. Still, the ministry sent the unequivocal message that Moscow would not back down.

Despite such rhetoric, the collapse in oil prices raised grave domestic challenges for Putin. Earlier this year, in Russia's analog to the State of the Union address, Putin stressed his determination to stimulate the economy and raise living standards, which have largely stagnated for the past six years. The bleak socioeconomic conditions were fueling discontent across the country, as Russians protested over educational, health and ecological matters, as well as official corruption, callousness and incompetence. The unrest has not risen to levels that threaten Putin, but the Kremlin has historically been wary of mass discontent — workers' protests after all played a role in the overthrow of Russian autocracy in 1917 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Now, the global economic consequences of COVID-19 would inevitably slow Russian economic growth. A prolonged collapse in oil prices would almost certainly push the economy into recession. Putin's promises evaporated. In these circumstances, Putin needs to raise and stabilize oil prices. The question was how to do that without appearing to yield to Saudi or American pressure.

US President Donald Trump gave Putin the opening he sought. Trump initially greeted the price collapse as a "big tax cut," but by the end of March, he changed his tune under pressure from the domestic oil sector. He set about trying to persuade the two strongmen he had cultivated since assuming office, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin

Salman and Putin, to agree to major production cuts.

On March 31, Trump called Putin to discuss the novel coronavirus crisis and oil markets. Kremlin statements routinely note who initiates the call when Putin talks to foreign leaders, and the Kremlin readout makes it clear that Trump made the call — the inference was that Trump, not Putin, urgently needed relief from the price war and the pandemic. The next day Russia sent a planeload of humanitarian assistance to New York, underscoring again that the United States, not Russia, was in need. Three days later, Putin announced that Russia was prepared to work with its partners, the United States and Saudi Arabia, to stabilize oil markets. Production, he said could be reduced by up to 10 million barrels day. He supported another meeting of OPEC+ to work out the details. As far as Moscow was concerned, cuts in US production, a key Russian goal from the outset of the crisis, would have to be part of the deal.

As Putin was pivoting, two narratives for the oil price war gained greater prominence in Russian media. One presented the Saudis as determined to drive American shale oil off the market by cratering oil prices. The other suggested the price war was, from the beginning, a US-Saudi conspiracy to undermine the Russian oil sector through a combination of production cuts and sanctions. The first narrative absolved Russia of any ill will against the United States, and the second portrayed Russia as an innocent victim. Both reinforced standard Kremlin tropes of Russian goodwill and victimhood.

Where oil prices will settle in the next few months is far from certain. Daniel Yergin, a leading expert on the global energy sector, has noted in Foreign Affairs that prices will likely plummet in late April and May as demand plunges and storage capacity is depleted. The cuts OPEC+ agreed to this weekend — 9.7 million barrels a day — are insufficient to stave off the decline in price. In this environment, US production will inevitably drop, as Moscow wants, but so will Saudi and Russian production, beyond what was already negotiated, if not through further negotiations then through market dynamics. No matter what Trump, MBS and Putin do, tougher times lie ahead. But, for Russians, despite the initial miscalculations, Putin will appear as a decisive and constructive leader in battling the crisis, playing a stronger hand than Trump. More important, Putin, and Russia, did not yield.

(Source: oilprice.com)

The oil industry's recovery lacks one important ingredient

By Cyril Widdershoven

The growing global oil and gas glut, partly caused by the coronavirus global lockdown but also due to mismanagement of the US shale sector and the OPEC+ price war fall-out, is causing mayhem in all energy sectors.

Most of the media's attention goes to upstream oil and gas operators and financial institutions. As US shale companies drown in debt, bankruptcies are expected to pile up within the next months. US shale, offshore oil and gas operators and most non-OPEC producers are going to be struggling to keep some air in the balloon that was filled the last years.

In the next couple of months, due to OPEC++ production cuts and bankruptcies, a vast part of the overproduction will be removed, shrinking the glut to a much more acceptable level. Some analysts are even expecting growth before the end of 2020, based on misconceptions that oil prices could be even hovering around \$40 per barrel at that time. Optimism based on simple Excel equations or mathematics are most probably going to be proven wrong.

As long as the impact of the extended Covid-19 crisis on energy and on the global economy is not fully visible, and storage volumes are still building up, oil prices will probably stay low. At the same time, even if all goes back to a 'pre-corona normal', the normal will be different if nothing will have been learned from history.

A demand collapse such as we are witnessing at present has never been seen before. Demand destruction to the tune of 20-25 million bpd is a giant shock to the total energy system. Market watchers, however, are focusing too much on E&Ps. The current financial situation of most NOCs, IOCs and large independent producers is not yet dire, while smaller drillers are already on life-support. The industry will, in the end, find the right balance again as much production from smaller producers will be shut in or disappear for good.



The main objective for many producers is to be able to produce significant volumes at the end of the crisis. This is partly misunderstood in the media, as most operators are not the ones directly responsible for the production of hydrocarbons. The main players here are the oilfield services, the companies with the technical know-how and tools to produce a barrel of oil.

Oilfield service companies offer technologies and equipment to oil and natural gas drillers and are crucial in the exploration and completion process, but are also responsible for the manufacturing and mending of equipment. Overall, the fate of all oil service firms is positively correlated to crude prices and also to the capital investment decisions of E&P operators.

The current correlation however is very negative, as low oil prices hit oilfield services exponentially harder. It's strange to see that non-oil and gas analysts are understanding the threat better for other sectors, than oil and gas does. The threat to the survival and revamp of the automotive sector worldwide is not the cash-flow and debt levels of VW, Mercedes, Toyota or GM, but the survivability of the automotive part suppliers. Without automotive suppliers, no car or vehicle will leave the factory in Stuttgart or Detroit.

The situation is no different for the oil, gas and energy sector. Without oilfield services, production will stall and decline within months. The situation is dire for mainstream independent oilfield services companies, not only in US shale, where giants like Schlumberger, Halliburton or National Oilwell Varco are cutting their investments and workforce, but also in other non-OPEC and OPEC regions.

One Oil & Gas UK (OGUK) report already stated that the financial contagion triggered by historically low oil prices will threaten North Sea jobs, shrink its economic contribution and undermine energy security.

According to Energy and Restructuring law firm Hayes and Boone's, last year already a grand total of 50 energy companies filed for bankruptcy, including 33 oil and gas producers, 15 oilfield services companies and two midstream companies. The law firm warns that as the crisis in 2020 continues, they fear that the ax could now fall on debt-ridden oilfield services companies. Just in North America, oilfield services companies debt is said to reach \$32 billion which is coming due between 2020 and 2024.

The poor financial state of the industry is well represented by the sector's favorite benchmark, the VanEck Vectors Oil Services ETF (NYSEARCA:OIH), which is down more than 70 percent YTD, considerably lower than the 30 percent plunge by the S&P 500. Rystad's report last month that 20 percent of global oilfield services workers could be laid off this year has been undervalued as a real threat for the future. The firing of 1 million or more experts, drillers, engineers and workers means a possible productivity loss at the end of the year that will constrain a possible upsurge in demand and supply.

Former oil and gas crises in the 1980s or 2010s have shown that knowledge destruction because of layoffs can significantly slow down a recovery in the sector. Taking into account that the average oil and gas worker is above 45 years of age, a large part of those becoming unemployed will never come back again. Additionally, the possible bankruptcy of small specialized oilfield services also will destroy specific knowledge not easy to be regained if demand is growing again. Former oil price collapses have led to a strategy change at IOCs, removing part of their inside capabilities in engineering and operations, cutting costs meant handling over project implementation to independent oilfield services. IOCs and NOCs are now doing the same again, putting most of the current crisis fall-out on oilfield services companies that will have no other option than to cut their workforce. Oilfield servicing margins, even in good times, have been under pressure.

Oil & gas' future faces several threats and lack of human capital is a much underestimated one that threatens profitability of the sector going forward. Without human capital, which in most cases is being provided by oilfield services, less oil and gas will be able to be produced, refined, stored or processed.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Waning onshore storage awaits render floating storage best option

Crude oil storage facilities on land and on water are filling fast amid ongoing overproduction of 10 million bpd, leaving the global tanker market to make up for excess supply.

"Cuts are nowhere near enough to counter the 20 million bpd demand destruction," Erik Broekhuizen, head of Tanker Research & Consulting at Poten & Partners said in a webinar Friday. Crude tanker rates are expected to remain strong until oil demand surpasses output and a destocking cycle begins, he explained.

OPEC expects global oil pandemic demand destruction of 6.8 million bpd year on year in 2020 to 92.82 million bpd, with April seeing the largest downturn at about 20 million bpd, according to its latest monthly oil market report.

Large tankers such as the VLCCs and the Suezmaxes in the dirty sector and the Long Range 1 and Long Range 2 tankers on the clean side have benefited the most due to floating storage demand and they are expected to remain strong as long as stocks are building.

"As storage capacity fills up onshore, tankers are the last resort," Broekhuizen said. "Tanker rates will be high and volatile as long as the oil market is oversupplied, which we expect throughout the second quarter of this year."

■ **Bullish tanker freight to stay as stocks build**

An ever-deepening crude contango structure has led to a soaring VLCC market, as charterer interest in floating storage and spot voyage charters for the carriage of cheap crude barrels has created a run on global tonnage.

Freight for the 270,000 mt US Gulf Coast-China voyage is currently 93percent higher than March 9, the day that global crude prices saw an initial drop following news of



the failure of OPEC+ to reach a production cut agreement, S&P Global Platts data shows.

The cost of the USGC-China voyage was last assessed Friday at lump sum \$13.5 million, unchanged on the day.

Rates have hovered above the \$11.5 million level since mid-March, reaching as high as \$19.75 million on April 1, only assessed higher on October 14 at \$21 million after US sanctions on Cosco Shipping on September 25 shorted global VLCC tonnage by close to 5 percent.

The Suezmax market has seen a knock-on effect from VLCC volatility, with freight for the 130,000 mt USGC-Singapore route rising 32percent from the March 9 milestone, last assessed at \$5.8 million.

Currently 54 VLCCs holding 2 million barrels each and 25 Suezmaxes with 1 million barrels each or close to 7percent and 5percent of the global fleet in each segment

are used for floating storage counting ships that have been stationary for more than 20 days, according to Brockhuizen referring to Lloyds data.

Between 10percent and 15percent of the globally available tanker tonnage could accommodate 300 million barrels of crude and 100 million barrels of clean products, according to estimates by S&P Global Platts Analytics.

According to Broekhuizen 500 million barrels of floating storage could be filled within a month with overall overproduction of 10 million bpd.

■ **Floating vs onshore storage payoff** Floating storage rates were last talked Friday morning around \$55,000/d-\$57,500/d for Suezmaxes for a six-month period charter and \$86,000/d for VLCCs for the same period.

The NYMEX WTI crude contango structure more than pays off for floating and onshore

storage costs; however, waning availability at onshore storage facilities could prompt further floating storage interest.

"Everyone is freaking out because storage at Cushing is filling up, but the floating storage is still there and available," a shipbroker said.

The NYMEX WTI May carry between the first- and sixth-month contracts settled at \$14.96/b Friday, a payoff of around \$110.70/mt, while floating storage costs would be approximately \$57.33/mt for six-months storage on a VLCC and about \$66/mt for a Suezmax.

Current crude storage costs at Cushing are about 60 cents/b per month for 12-18 month terms and nearing \$1/b per month for short-term six-month contracts, according to Ernie Barsamian, CEO of Tank Tiger, a tank storage clearinghouse.

Hence for a sixth-month term floating storage fees range close to \$12/mt and \$22/mt over onshore fees at Cushing, before the \$3/b it costs for walk-up shippers to move light sweet barrels of crude from the Enterprise Katy facility in Fort Bend County, Texas, to Cushing, when Enterprise Products Partners plans to move crude oil on an existing pipeline from May 1, in order to meet growing demand to store oil at inland facilities.

"While promptish availability of storage in Cushing is limited at this time, we are showing 3Q 2020 storage," Barsamian said. "Traders are reluctant to pounce on future storage, since the contango flattens out considerably down the curve. However, with this inventory overhang, it will take several months to see an inventory drawdown. As a result, the giant front-loaded contango will likely roll from month to month which will make the 3Q storage very attractive."

(Source: Platts)

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

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

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

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

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Anti-war activist criticizes U.S. political system's blatant discrimination against Blacks

1 → The obsessive focus on Trump the person, his style, his theatrics, the idea that he represents an aberration, an existential threat, allows for the ongoing structural violence embedded in the DNA of racialized capitalism to hide in plain sight.

But for the Black working class and poor it is suicidal to embrace this illusion. Maintaining a clear understanding of our situation, unimpeded by illusions and ideological mystifications, has always been a tool we used to ensure our survival before the ideological swing to the right over the last decade and a half.

White "America" pretends once again to be surprised by the emerging facts that African Americans are disproportionately bearing the brunt of the coronavirus assault. But why should anyone be surprised? African Americans make up a disproportionate number of the 87 million people in the U.S. who are under-insured or lack health insurance, who occupy the lowest paid jobs, jobs today deemed "essential." It is in our communities where the toxic waste dumps are located, the petroleum processing companies, the hog farms, garbage dumps, the buildings with lead paint and asbestos, and the highways pumping out millions of tons of pollution every day.

"The obsessive focus on Trump the person, allows for the ongoing structural violence embedded in the DNA of racialized capitalism to hide in plain sight."

And it is in our communities that, before gentrification, over the last 40 years, governments under the pressure of neoliberal austerity cut budgets and services. It was in our communities, both urban and rural, where the hospitals and clinics were closed, the sewer and sanitation deteriorated and something as basic to life as water was commodified, contaminated and often cut off.

Trump didn't create these conditions. The higher rates of hypertension, asthma, and diabetes that ravage the health of our people, and almost ensure a death sentence if Black people contract coronavirus, were not created by Trump over the last three years. These conditions are the result of the cold, hard logic of environmental racism fueled by the profit motive that creates disposable people and communities.

The denial of the human right to health to African Americans, particularly to African workers and the poor, has been a permanent feature of the gross human rights violations that our people have experienced over the decades and centuries in this white supremacist settler-colonial state.

The human right to health is not the right to be healthy or the right to health care, but a



more complex and nuanced understanding of the right to health. The enjoyment of this human right is determinate on the availability of all of the other human rights and collective services necessary to create and protect the conditions in which people can lead a healthy life — the right to housing, education, food, a clean environment, paid sick leave, parental leave, leisure and water, to name a few.

It is, therefore, a reactionary, indeed counterrevolutionary position to engage in the politics of diversion by focusing on Donald Trump. When Trump floated the trial balloon of pushing workers back to work by Easter, leftists who should have known better reduced this decision to the heartless agenda of Trump when the fact was that pushing workers back to work and attempting to "normalize" the economic situation was the growing consensus among the capitalist class represented by opinions published in the Wall Street Journal and New York Times, and by positions taken by members of the banking industry.

Trump and capitalist rulers want to return to "normal," but for the African working class and poor who have not even "recovered" from the collapse of economy in 2007-2008, normal is a one-sided race and class war that degrades, dehumanizes and destroys Black life.

The systemic conditions of poverty, unemployment and underemployment, mass incarceration, police killings, gentrification, infant and maternal mortality have always been comparable to those of nations in the global South, but now, the pre-mature death from coronavirus should reveal to all, except to the most dishonest, that the real enemy is this racist, capitalist/imperialist system.

-- what we refer to as the Pan-European colonial/capitalist white supremacist patriarchy.

If Black lives really matter, it is obvious that we are the ones that must make them matter. It must have been made clear by now that this system of racialized capitalist domination and imperialist aggression against non-European people, from the African continent to Venezuela, will not be defeated by online petitions, webinars and polite appeals to the neoliberal criminals who run the Democratic Party.

We did ask for this war. We want peace. We want our human rights. But we are not pathological. We know that the very way in which this system is organized, that is, its essence, is organized to ensure our spiritual, psychological and physical death. Therefore, we have no other choice but to fight for our human rights.

That realization and understanding must inform our strategies and the tactics we employ, from participating in the electoral system and strike actions in response to the coronavirus to building dual power structures that allow us to exercise community self-determination and power that is grounded in our class interests and independence.

The enemy will come to understand that we will not quietly die. We will not beg their system to recognize its unfairness, nor will we call for the enemy system to somehow "repair" us - its' victims.

No, we must come to the painful, and for some scary, conclusion that the system that destroys us and the majority of humanity but be fought and defeated. This is what distinguishes the People(s)-Centered Human Rights (PCHRs) tradition that emerges from the Black radi-

cal human rights tradition, from the system's state-centered, legalistic, liberal counterpart.

The PCHRs reject the liberal colonial/capitalist conception of human rights. It asserts that oppressed peoples cannot afford the fiction of a non-political, objective concept of human rights, which, beneath the surface of universality, reaffirms individualism, and rationalizes market capitalism and white supremacist patriarchy. For the African working class and poor, the fight for human rights is a life-or-death struggle, with the future of our communities and peoples at stake.

We again turn to Malcolm and the radical Black human rights tradition. Malcolm counsels us that one must be ready to pay the price required to experience full dignity as a person and as members of a self-determining people.

"The price to make others respect your human rights is death. You have to be ready to die.... It's time for you and me now to let the world know how peaceful we are, how well-meaning we are, how law-abiding we wish to be. But at the same time, we have to let the same world know we'll blow their world sky-high if we're not respected and recognized and treated the same as other human beings are treated."

There was never a social contract that involved Africans in the U.S. -- only a racial contract among the white rulers to maintain white minority ruling class power. That commitment translated into the systematic, brutal violations of the human rights of Africans.

We are clear. Trump is a useful idiot for the neoliberal forces who are in power. Our job is to de-mystify the structure of the capitalist dictatorship so that are our targets are clear and we can aim true.

According to VOX.com, It has been clear for some time that the coronavirus pandemic is killing black and Latino Americans at disproportionately high rates, but new data from the last few days reveals just how devastating the Covid-19 crisis has been for people of color.

Starting in New York City, the American epicenter of the outbreak: Black New Yorkers are dying at twice the rate of their white peers; Latinos in the city are also succumbing to the virus at a much higher rate than white or Asian New Yorkers. The same trends can be seen in infection and hospitalization rates, too.

In Wisconsin, black people represent 6 percent of the population and nearly 40 percent of Covid-19 fatalities.

In Louisiana, black people make up 32 percent of the state's population but almost 60 percent of fatalities.

In Kansas, 6 percent of the population is black and yet black people account for more than 30 percent of the Covid-19 deaths.

Post-corona era beginning of U.S. hegemony decline, accelerating East rise: Prof. Suzuki

1 → The global pandemic requires international coordination because the virus does not respect borders. But at the same time, the only way to deal with this virus is to implement social distancing since there is no therapeutic drug or vaccine. In order to change people's behavior, national governments have to step in and impose severe rules. So realism, or state-centric approach, would be inevitable. This realism, however, puts every state in competition for masks, goggles or ventilators. The market liberalism puts states in competition and the stronger and wealthier wins. I think those are the deficiencies.

■ The Outbreak of the virus also showed that militaristic economies also are not able to maintain the security of nations and governments in post-corona era. What do you think of this?

Although national governments have to put a lot of resources onto the fight against the pandemic, still military posture remains in a minimum change. I think there will be a lot of stress on welfare programs or national infrastructure investments, but military spending will remain at the current level. Even it is possible that governments may increase military spending and elevate tension in order to stir up nationalism (which may be different but similar trajectory of the 1930s).

■ If we accept that the post-corona world order will be different from the existing one, do you think that the changes to it will be fundamental ones?

Post-corona world order will be the one of transitioning order. I think it will be the beginning of the decline of U.S. hegemony, for sure, and the rise of China will be accelerated. But I think it will not be a new hegemonic order by China. China may be a superpower beyond the United States, but its soft power, or power to attract other countries to follow the Chinese lifestyle or Chinese model of governance.

Kazuto Suzuki also served as an expert in the Panel of Experts for the Iranian Sanction Committee under the United Nations Security Council from 2013 to July 2015. He has contributed to drafting the Basic Space Law of Japan and serves as a member of Sub-committees of industrial policy and space security policy of the National Space Policy Commission.



Trump has accelerated forces that will end American Empire: writer

By Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

"As soon as Trump became an agent of the Israel Lobby and revoked the JCPOA, he accelerated the forces that will bring an end to the American Empire," E. Michael Jones, the current editor of Culture Wars magazine, told Tehran Times on Saturday.

Here is the full text of the interview:

■ How far do you think the United States can continue its unilateralism in the international arena? Do you see any sign of stopping on its way?

As soon as Trump became an agent of the Israel Lobby and revoked the JCPOA, he accelerated the forces that will bring an end to the American Empire. Jews don't understand limits. They always push things too far and create a reaction, and that is precisely what the Israel Lobby is doing now. Trump is uniting the Eurasian landmass. This violates a fundamental premise of Anglo-American foreign policy which has been in force for over a century, even since Halford Mackinder wrote The Pivot of Civilization.

■ The Trump administration has refused to ease sanctions against Iran amid the pandemic. Many believe that the anti-Iranian sanctions are a tool of collective punishment. How do you assess the White House animosity towards the Iranian nation which seems to be continuing even amidst a global pandemic?

The Jews run the sanction office at the U.S. Treasury Department, and they see Iran as the main enemy of Israel. The fact that Israel and America had to back down militarily after the murder of Soleimani means that the sanctions will get worse.

-How do you see the effects of COVID-19 outbreak on US politics? Will the US hegemony continue as before?

The COVID-19 pandemic is a desperate attempt on the part of the oligarchs to regain control over the narrative which they lost in the great internet hate speech battle of 2019. That attempt failed largely because of the internet and their inability to control it.

■ The world saw another unilateral measure by Trump administration recently when he announced that he would halt funding for the World Health Organization. What do you think is the main purpose of such a measure?

Defunding the WHO is a good idea because WHO is an agent of Big Pharma which has been imposing toxic vaccines on Africa and other places for years. Big Pharma is now the main oligarchic instrument involved in the attack on representative government throughout the world.



Afghanistan's political structure in dire need of basic reforms

Making fundamental changes in Afghanistan's political system can be regarded a the best way towards attaining a stable powerful government, decentralization of power, putting an end to decade-long conflicts and meeting the Afghans' interests.

"Afghanistan is constantly in tension between having either a centralized government or a decentralized one, between a parliamentary system or a presidential system and between having a strong president or a strong prime minister, and which one of them should have more power," Zabihullah Saleem, a lawyer and researcher educated in the Ahmad Ibrahim Faculty of Law in the International Islamic University of Malaysia, wrote in his article published by Khaama Press.

The country needs stability which a strong president can bring, but at the same time it does not need a dictator, which may lead to abuse of power. Constitutional and political reforms should not be sidelined and steps that are necessary to make it a reality needs to be taken. These changes will not be possible without political maturity and the presence of reasonable political parties.

With the conclusion of the announcement of the delayed election results, Afghanistan's independent Election Commission (IEC) in mid-February stated that President Ashraf Ghani had won a second five-year term. This has propelled the country into a political crisis, which threatens the impending peace agreement between the United States and the Taliban.

The response of Ghani's main opponent, Abdullah Abdullah, who has been the Chief Executive Officer of the Unity Government of Afghanistan, was that the election results were marred with fraud and it was ultimately the intention that the IEC results would lead to a coup.

Furthermore, Abdullah threatened to form an alternative government, one that would be managed independently as the current recognized government.

Ghani's own vice president, General Abdul Rashid Dostum, called for citizens to march into the streets to protest.

Two decades of increasingly and consistent fraudulent elections have impaired Afghans trust in democracy. This was demonstrated by an appallingly low voter turnout level. It was less than 20 percent of the qualified population that voted in the September 2019 election. There were many reasons as to why the turnout was particularly low. In addition to Afghans low trust in democracy, corruption allegations and insecurity were also among the many reasons that fewer Afghans voted.

Without an urgent remodel of Afghanistan's political system, Afghanistan will continue to be tangled in factionalism and civil conflict.

Without a political refashion, peace will almost be impossible in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's current political system is the single major obstruction for peace. It has seen the rise of government predation that emanated from a deteriorated government, which also gave confidence for insurgence to flourish. The system is in deep conflict with Afghanistan's decentralized political reality. This deprived Afghans from living under a

productive and effective government.

Political reform was largely absent in political institutions post-Taliban. An ineffective government rekindled from the constitution bore with it an excessive soviet influence. Initially, Afghans welcomed democracy in the country, but this soon turned sour when they realized that the government hasn't changed much and maintained the same standard centralized authority they had seen. It then saw democratic elections being laid down on a centralized system that was essentially disintegrating.

It is not unheard off that Afghanistan has one of the most centralized systems in the world. It is within the discretionary power of the President to appoint all ministers, including all officials at the sub-national level which includes provincial and district governors and mayors. Decisions on budget are made in Kabul, whereby MPs in the Afghan parliament approve fiscal budgets every year. This centralization has grown extensively in conflict with a society that has over time developed into a self-sufficient volatile society that has learned the art of self-governance.

Afghanistan is home to a rich society that comprises of ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. In Afghanistan, it is not incorrect to say that due to this diversity, it opposes the maturation of an inclusive and legitimate government that is a true representation of local interests.

Afghanistan has held four presidential elections to date. Every election was tarnished with corruption and fraud. The 2014 presidential election is evidence to this. The outcome of the election failed to discern a winner, with both candidates claiming that they had won. After a standoff between Ghani and his rival Abdullah, the then US Secretary of State John Kerry flew to Kabul and brokered an agreement which led to the creation of a National Unity Government (NUG) between the two rivals. This agreement saw the appointment of Abdullah to the newly created, extra constitutional position of chief executive officer.

The election in 2014 exposed the flaws deeply rooted in the constitutionally dictated political system. NUG merely created short-term political stability. One of the issues mentioned in the deal was materialization of political reforms including establishments of a constitutional Loya Jirga.

A Loya Jirga, or "grand council" in Pashto language, is a mass national gathering that brings together representatives from the various ethnic, religious, and tribal communities in Afghanistan. In addition to a constitutional Loya Jirga, a constitutional convention that would reform the presidential system was also promised, as well a parliamentary system or at the very least a semi presidential system.

These promises, whose sole intention was to prevent fraud and to solidify unity, were not executed. This led to political turmoil in the country with the NUG's failure to uphold those promises. Later on, a presidential election was initiated in late 2019.

It was insisted by political factions that political reforms must come before negotiations with the Taliban. Abdullah

and his allies hoped for greater decentralization of authority to secure a better representation of minority groups. Their main contention is that the current system is not responsive to Afghanistan's political problems.

On the other hand, Ghani argued that Afghanistan needs to have a strong central government when in negotiations with the Taliban. A strong central government allows for better representation and division of power between the centre and states, Ghani opined.

However, due to the vast diversity in locality in Afghanistan, their inclusion in politics was not entirely realized. This shows that peace can only be realized with either a new constitution or a series of constitutional amendments that will redistribute and decentralize power. This will make it easier for more inclusion and the recognition of plurality in the country. Without these reforms, it would be difficult to meet the interests of minority groups in the country.

With low turnouts in the recent election, the exclusion of major actors from power, and the growing domination of the Taliban, the government will undoubtedly face serious challenges.

It is important for the Afghan government and the international community, especially the United States, to consider two important steps that can enable peace to be realized in Afghanistan.

Firstly, more consideration needs to be given to Afghanistan's local conditions. Local political institutions have a strong foothold in Afghanistan; however, due to existing conflicts the mentioned institutions have been disconnected from the central government. Locals have learned to create institutions in their villages that have political determination. It is necessary that the government includes these parties to ensure that different groups are represented in the political system. Such power sharing is possible through decentralization and recognition of Afghanistan's extensive self-governance capabilities.

Secondly, modification of the constitution must be done as a necessity. In light of Afghanistan's local diversity, the government needs to prioritize constitutional reforms. This will allow a smooth transition from a centralized government to one that is decentralized to gain greater political inclusion.

After bitterly disputing the results of the 2014 election, Abdullah and Ghani were brought to the negotiating table by the US and agreed to run the government together - but fissures within the national unity government often came to the fore.

Their five years of partnership were often fraught with disagreements, bickering and rifts, bringing the government to a standstill on several occasions.

But the recent dispute between the country's two most senior leaders could not have come at a more sensitive time for Afghanistan.

Hours after Afghanistan's incumbent President Ghani was declared in early March as the winner of the September 28 presidential election, runner-up Abdullah contested the much-delayed results, highlighting the power struggle between the two leaders.

Under-the-radar province registers 580,000 overnight stays in year

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Ilam province, which is currently an under-the-radar travel destination in western Iran, registered some 580,000 overnight stays during the past Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended March 20). “Over 580,000 travelers, including 10,000 foreign nationals, made overnight stays in hotels, guesthouses, and eco-lodge units across Ilam province during the past year,” provincial tourism chief Abdolmalek Shanbehzadeh announced on Saturday, CHTN reported.



In January, the official announced that 1.63 million travelers visited historical sites and heritage museums across the lesser-known province during the first nine months of the year 1398.

Iran's tourism ministry has suggested that less-known travel destinations should be properly introduced to people to have a balanced domestic tourism.

Home to almost half of Iran's UNESCO sites, western Iran is a land of hospitable people, wild extremes and wilder history, and it may be independent traveler's adventure playground. The region also witnessed the rise and fall of many great empires once bordering Mesopotamia, Ottoman Turkey and Czarist Russia.

From the fecund Caspian coast to the stark, mountainous northern borders and the crumbling desert ruins of the southern plains, the region hosts everything from paddy fields to blizzards to Persian gardens.

Varamin to be national hub for handmade glassware

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Ministry plans to name Varamin, a city in Tehran province, the national city of handmade glassware.

The city has over 20 active glassware workshops as well as prominent artists in this field, provincial tourism chief Parvaneh Heydari said on Sunday, CHTN reported.



Being recognized as a hub for handicrafts gives craftspeople the opportunity of promoting their works more properly to reach the global market, she added.

Glasswork objects constitute a majority of Tehran province's exports of handicrafts.

Various Iranian cities and villages have been named as national hubs of handicrafts.

Zanjan for filigree, Kashan for traditional textile, Iran-shahr for needlework, Abadeh for wood carving as well as the village of Fash for crafting indigenous musical instruments are among them.

Arrival in Tehran and I am already at home!

By Monica Scaccabarozzi

(Part 4 /5)

In the city of Isfahan, I happened to talk with two young girls, in a moment of prayer in a mosque.

One evening, I, my dad and Ehsan, our friend Ehsan, went out to eat and, walking in the dark alley of a lifeless bazaar, we came out at the end of a branching of the market.

Ehsan, sure of himself, makes us cross a tiny little door, yet another mosque, but the bewilderment of seeing “yet another mosque” ... leaves me appalled.

The gaze is refocused on the people who are approaching and I realize that they are two little girls, two sweet little girls.

One with the fixture and one with pimples on the face, accompanied by the mother, who proudly asks her daughters to speak to me in English.

They ask me a lot of questions, they are very talkative, unlike me that I shut up the question, what did you think of us, before coming here?

Their need to test themselves in English was overcome by the curiosity to know and go further.

My answer remains vague, but enough for them and I ask myself to go with them to buy a chador in the bazaar, Ehsan intervenes saying that they want to give it to me.

I am embarrassed and I apologize, I don't know for what, I thank them and we take a picture together that will be printed in some way and if they will stick it in the room, like real teenagers, only I am the star here for them.

So many memories of a country that will never leave me, too many to write.

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

Setting up national museum of anthropology is a necessity: expert

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN**

Establishing a national museum of anthropology in Iran is a necessity to turn the spotlight on all people, local communities and folk cultures, director of Iran's Anthropological Research Centre, has said.

“This museum can reflect the existence of multicultural diversity along with the national unity [of the country],” Alireza Hassanzadeh said, IRNA reported on Sunday.

“Countries with ancient cultures and civilizations, such as China, Japan, or Germany, have [already launched] such museums, but Iran has never had a national museum of anthropology,” he added.

The Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts has been well aware of the need for establishing such a museum, however, monetary problems have so far been the main obstacle, he explained.

“The National Museum of Iran, [for instance], represents Iran in terms of culture, ancient and artistic relics and monuments but we do not have a museum that represents the lifestyle of the people over the past centuries.”

Holding a PhD in Anthropology from Goethe University, Hassanzadeh is the author of several book including “Tehran, People and Crows”; “Children of Fables”; “Rituality and Normativity: an Anthological Study of Public Space, Collective Rituals and Normative Orders in Iran from 1848 to 2011”; and “The Myths of the Living: An Anthropological Study of Iranian Folk Tales”.

Anthropology, “the science of humanity,” which studies human beings in aspects ranging from the biology and evolutionary history of Homo sapiens to the features of society and culture that



Wax effigies are on show at the centuries-old Hammam-e Vakil (once a public bathhouse) in Shiraz, southern Iran. (Photo credit: Flickr)

decisively distinguish humans from other animal species. Because of the diverse subject matter it encompasses, anthropology has become, especially since the middle of the 20th century, a collection of more specialized fields.

Authorities planning big to make Ardebil winter tourism hub

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Tourism authorities of Ardebil province, northwestern Iran, have developed extensive plans to draw more tourists during the winter season by launching three new ski resorts in the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21).

“The prosperity of winter tourism and the removal of the province from being a seasonal tourism destination is one of the most important programs for the balanced development of the tourism industry in Ardebil,” provincial tourism chief Nader Fallahi said on Saturday, CHTN reported.

The resorts will be launched in Owjur of the Sareyn county, Shabil in Meshgin Shahr, and Alvaresi in Sareyn county, the official added.

Sprawling on a high, windswept plateau, whose altitude averages 3,000 meters above



sea level, Ardebil is well-known for having lush natural beauties, hospitable people and its silk and carpet trade tradition, it is also home to the UNESCO-registered Sheikh Safi al-Din Khanegah and Shrine Ensemble.

The province is very cold in winter and mild in summer, attracting thousands every year. The capital city of Ardabil is usually recorded as one of the coldest cities in the country in winter.

Iran has long been an international destination for avid powder chasers during winter, while - in total contrast - its arid and semi-arid climate reaches sweltering levels in summer. Maybe not the first that comes to mind, snow-capped mountains above Tehran are home to some of the world's best ski resorts where powder hounds can enjoy famous Iranian hospitality.

Excavations to restart at Soltanieh after decade-long halt

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Ministry is slated to resume archaeological excavations at the UNESCO-tagged Soltanieh Dome and its surroundings after a decade-long halt.

While tourist sites are on lockdown due to coronavirus outbreak in the country and there are no visitors, archeologists can work in the site considering health protocols and social distancing, manager of the site Mir-Musa Aniran said on Sunday, ILNA reported.

Meanwhile, several videos, photos and video clips have been produced to be streamed on social media for online visitors, he added.

The 14th-century Soltanieh Dome, locally known as Gonbad-e (“The Dome of”) Soltaniyeh, is highly recognized as an architectural masterpiece particularly

due to its innovative double-shelled dome and elaborate interior decoration. The monument is, in fact, the mausoleum of Oljaytu, also known as Muhammad Khodabandeh, who was the eighth Ilkhanid dynasty ruler from 1304 to 1316.

According to UNESCO, the mausoleum's interior decoration is so outstanding that scholars like A.U. Pope has described the richly-ornamented building as “anticipating the Taj Mahal”.

The UN cultural body has it that the Mausoleum of Oljaytu is an essential link and key monument in the development of Islamic architecture in central and western Asia. The fairly large dome is the earliest extant example of its type in the country and became an important reference for the later development of the Islamic dome.



Saint Léonard Lake akin to Iran's Alisadr Cave: Swiss embassy tweets



The combination photo shows Switzerland's Lac Souterrain de St. Léonard (L) and Iran's Alisadr Cave

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – The Embassy of Switzerland in Iran in its official Twitter account has compared Saint Léonard underground lake in the European country with Iran's Alisadr water cave.

“Lac Souterrain de St. Léonard” in #Switzerland's Valais region is the largest underground lake in Europe

attracting 1000s of tourists every year. In #Iran, the Alisadr cave system near Hamedan offers a similar feature, incl. pedalos to explore the water cave #Dream-NowTravelLater,” the tweet reads.

A top destination for domestic and foreign sightseers, researches, history buffs, and day-trippers, Ali Sadr

Cave is a gigantic water-filled cavern widely believed to date from Jurassic era. It embraces a huge matrix of sunless channels, ponds, grottoes and water passages which are stretched along with imposing rock formations and stalactite-covered tops in a span of several kilometers.

The entrance to the lengthy cave is situated some 70km north of Hamadan in west-central Iran. Sight-seeing there is connected with traversing in well-lit labyrinths of waterways via paddle boats, walking on subterranean islets, as well as observing rock carvings of hunting scenes, artifacts, paintings and vessels which are associated with prehistorical troglodytes.

With a length of 300 and a width of 20 m, which is situated at Saint Léonard in the canton of Valais, Lac Souterrain de St. Léonard is the largest underground lake in Europe. Sources say that it was formed where a bed of Triassic gypsum, emplaced within impervious Carboniferous strata, has been dissolved by groundwater.

The underground lake was discovered in 1943 by Jean-Jacques Pittard. Before 1946 the water-level was much higher, but an earthquake with a force of 5.6 on the Richter-scale opened additional fissures in the cave on January 25, 1946 made it more readily navigable. The lake is accessible by the public since 1949.

ISA stands against U.S. economic sanctions against Iran

SOCIETY TEHRAN — The International Sociological Association (ISA) has issued a statement announcing that it stands against the economic sanctions that the United States has imposed on Iran amid the coronavirus outbreak that is sweeping the globe.

"We are concerned about the crippling effects of these sanctions on more than 100 million citizens of Iran, Venezuela and Cuba. We deem these sanctions immoral and unconscionable. The measures have already negatively impacted the social and economic infrastructures in these countries," the statement reads.

"Yet, at this critical juncture, and with the pandemic sweeping the globe, we are particularly concerned that the sanctions will further curb these countries' ability to respond to and contain its adverse effects. We, thus, stand in solidarity with the citizens of these countries, condemn the restrictions set in place by sanctions, and urge the United States government to lift the sanctions."

"Furthermore, we are concerned for and stand in solidarity with our colleagues, students and faculty in Iran, and elsewhere, in their call for a sustainable critical public sphere, free from internal and external pressures, where critical thinking and sociological imagination can flourish in safety. According to our statutes, the main function of the ISA is "to represent sociologists everywhere," "advance sociological knowledge throughout the world," and "support and strengthen the free development of sociology



in cooperation with similar associations of social scientists."

"Thus, we fully support and endorse the statement published by our colleagues at the Iranian Sociological Association, in which they have pointed out the combined effects of sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic on Iranian sociology."

The statement came in response to a letter by Seyed Hossein Serajzadeh, president of the Iranian Sociological Association, parts of which are as follows:

"I am writing to you on behalf of the board and members of the Iranian Sociological Association to share our concern

at the continued sanctions imposed by the US against Iran and their escalation, and to call upon you to join our voice and take a stand for easing the sanctions at this very critical moment in view of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

With the pandemic sweeping through Iranian society and the escalation of sanctions, the economy has entered a deep recession, jeopardizing the livelihoods of 80 million Iranians. Sanctions have affected everybody, but have hit low income people harder as the threat of losing their livelihoods has forced them to work under unsafe conditions in the midst of a fully-fledged public health crisis.

Today, more than ever, we need human solidarity and concerted action. The more the world becomes interconnected, the more our problems turn to be interrelated, and the more we need to move toward global collaboration to address them.

The Iranian Sociological Association as a beneficiary of the common heritage of social sciences and their underlying concern for peace, justice and human welfare, looks forward to the support of international colleagues in its call to mitigate the current situation and to help sustain the role of the Iranian sociological community at the face of adversity.

Iran ready to offer COVID-19 diagnostic system free of charge

SOCIETY TEHRAN — The Iranian research institute for information and communication technology has announced it is ready to provide the homegrown system for diagnosing the novel coronavirus with more than 97 percent accuracy for free to medical and research centers around the world.

The diagnostic system has been designed by a team of researchers at Sharif University of Technology using artificial intelligence algorithms via CT scans of chest, ISNA reported on Sunday.

There are currently many ways in the world to diagnose coronavirus, but what has been proven, and confirmed by the American College of Radiology, chest scan is the best way to diagnose the virus, Hamid Reza Rabiee, director of the institute at Sharif University, said.

China has so far used artificial intelligence to diagnose the disease, and a company from Stafford University in the



United States has been involved in such process, he said, adding, by focusing on the use of artificial intelligence in

CT scans, we have also innovatively designed a system for rapid and accurate detection of Covid-19.

He noted that the accuracy of the systems used in China and the United States is over 90 percent, noting, the system is the result of the young scientists' efforts, with innovative pre-processing on quality scanned images, we have created a system with higher accuracy and sensitivity.

This system has been able to achieve good results with stability and sensitivity of over 97 percent in a stable manner and in less than a minute, while it is also able to calculating the volume of infectious areas, he explained.

Our research team is ready to provide this system for free to medical and research centers around the world, he highlighted.

The system has so far started operation in 4 provinces of the country, he concluded.

Exterminating bats blamed for spreading Covid-19 would increase risk of further diseases, warn experts

Exterminating colonies of bats because they were the source of Covid-19 would be pointless and could even expose people to even greater risk of new viruses, experts are warning.

Killing wildlife in unhygienic conditions anywhere could allow new pathogens to breed and intensify viruses in surviving animals, it's claimed.

Scientists believe that Covid-19 originated in horseshoe bats at a live animal slaughter market in China, passing to humans via pangolin.

As a result, while the pandemic spread, people in China started asking for hibernating bats in or near their houses to be destroyed.

And in northern Peru last month, locals had planned to attack and kill a colony of 200 bats with torches, a local website

reported. Wildlife authorities intervened to rescue the animals and moved them to safety in a cave far from the town.

In San Francisco, residents have been asking experts how to trap or kill bats, thinking it would prevent the spread of Covid-19 and save lives.

But wildlife campaigners say such action not only runs the risk of concentrating pathogens in remaining animal populations, but is also replicating the disastrous behaviour that created coronaviruses in the first place.

The call comes as The Independent is campaigning to end the wildlife trade at the heart of the pandemic, and to help prevent the spread of zoonotic diseases.

Mark Jones, a vet and head of policy at the Born Free Foundation, said that while wild animals may be the source, they are

not to blame for the transmission of the virus to people.

We all carry viruses all the time, and normally animals are not made sick by viruses they carry, he said.

"But viruses can replicate very rapidly in the right circumstances. When animals are stressed, their immune systems are suppressed, allowing viruses to replicate and mutate so they can infect new hosts such as people.

"When wild animals of different species are captured or farmed and put together in large numbers in awful conditions, where they're highly stressed and sold in wildlife markets, in close proximity to each other and to people that's where the biggest risk of these viruses mutating into a form that can infect people exists," he said.

"Exterminating bat roosts won't do anything to reduce the risk of another human pandemic. We can't go round trying to eliminate the risk by exterminating animals in the wild."

Christian Walzer, executive director of health programmes for the US-based Wildlife Conservation Society, said: "Beyond the simple fact that persecuting wildlife further perturbs nature and enhances spillover events while also increasing the prevalence of pathogens in the remnant individuals, it is really important to clearly understand that local wildlife provides essential services to humans that far outweigh any perceived risk.

"For example, the often vilified bats provide invaluable pest-control and pollination services in the order of tens of millions of dollars in North America alone."

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ↔ ع

Iranian-made HPV vaccine to be commercialized in months

Production of human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine (the virus that usually causes cervical cancer in women) is in the final stages of clinical trial and will be launched by the next few months, director of health technology development office of the Ministry of Health, has announced.

According to the plan, the product was expected to enter the domestic market by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20), but sanctions caused problems in its manufacturing rocess, Hossein Vatanpour said, IRNA reported.

واکسن ایرانی HPV به زودی وارد بازار می شود

تولید واکسن HPV (ویروسی که معمولاً موجب سرطان دهانه رحم در زنان می شود) در مراحل انتهایی کارآزمایی بالینی (کلینیکال تریال) قرار دارد و اوایل سال آینده این محصول ایرانی وارد بازار می شود. حسین وطن پور مدیرکل دفتر توسعه فناوری سلامت وزارت بهداشت در گفت و گو با ایرنا اظهار داشت: براساس برنامه ریزی انجام شده قرار بود این محصول تا پایان سال جاری، وارد بازار داخلی شود که تحریم مشکلاتی در روند کار تولید آن به وجود آورد.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"ante-"

■ **Meaning:** before

■ **For example:** some *antecedents* to the African novel might exist in Africa's oral traditions.

PHRASAL VERB

Pull off

■ **Meaning:** to succeed in doing something difficult

■ **For example:** The goalkeeper pulled off six terrific saves.

IDIOM

Dead man walking

■ **Explanation:** inevitably be in great trouble very soon, especially to lose job or position

■ **For example:** Because of the way he handled the recent riots, the minister is a dead man walking.

How Iran could curb COVID-19 despite sanctions, restrictions?

1 → Medical staff have become so popular in Iran these days, as photos of them are going viral in social media and are praised by many of the Iranians who call them "heroes of health."

■ **Knowledge-based companies, researchers come on the scene**



Besides, manufacturers multiplied their production capacity, and also Iranian researchers soon achieved the technology to produce three kinds of COVID-19 diagnostic kits which hit the market since past two weeks.

Two types of diagnostic kits are now mass-produced by knowledge-based companies, first one is the RT-PCR tests, 8 million of which are being produced per month; while the other is serology-based tests that a total of 400,000 are being manufactured monthly and is expected to reach up to 2 million.

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

Iranian-made innovative products in the field of diagnosis, screening and fighting coronavirus were also unveiled to combat the disease, namely, ozone generator, nano face shields, disinfection gate and molecular COVID-19 diagnostic kits.

■ **People choose to break transmission chain**

To curb the disease transmission, Iran implemented the social distancing measures from March 27 in a bid to minimize the spread of coronavirus. According to the plan, intercity travels were restricted and only residents were allowed to enter their cities.

Moreover, holding any kind of meeting or congregation was banned and all parks and gyms, as well as universities and schools, remained closed. Meanwhile, rail, road, and air transport were limited.

The outbreak reached its peak concurrent with the Iranian New Year celebration, while travels decreased by 70 percent to help reduce the spread of the virus, and fever tests were performed at the entrances of cities so that suspicious cases of COVID-19 would not enter the more populous cities.

However, in Sizzdah Bedar, an Iranian festival held annually on the thirteenth day of the first month of the Iranian calendar (falling on April 1 this year), people were also asked to stay at home and resist picnicking outdoor to break the chain of coronavirus transmission.

Moreover, the Iranian government introduced a telephone service and a website, urging people to report their physical condition so that screeners and doctors could contact and guide them if they have symptoms of the coronavirus.

According to statistics, about 70 million people out of Iran's 85 million population have participated in this national project and provided their information to the Ministry of Health.

From the very first days of coronavirus in Iran, mosques and religious places were announced closed in Iran to ensure the public health, emphasizing that maintaining the health of the Iranian people is more important than anything else.

Although, it is clear that not even a nation has completely left the epidemic behind, few of them could somehow reduce the burden of the disease; so that Iranian way of tackling the pandemic, could probably help other nations to manage coronavirus, a way that requires people's togetherness, power and insight; Iranian people once again proved that despite any restrictions, sanctions or any barrier, could stand up with a sparkle of hope in their eyes.

WORDS IN THE NEWS

AIDS conference

(July 14, 2003)

A major conference on AIDS has opened in Paris with criticism of the developed world for not providing universal access to cheap anti-retroviral drugs. In his opening address, the former Brazilian president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, criticised the current United States HIV policy. This report from Richard Black.

Dr Cardoso **urged** the global community to learn from **Brazil's example**. Through education, basic health care and providing **anti-retroviral drugs** to all infected people, he said, Brazil has **halved** the death rate from AIDS. He was **scathing about** the US approach of **emphasizing** sexual abstinence and fidelity rather than condom use. Such policies, he said, **promote a sense of security** among people in long-term relationships who don't then use condoms. Through their partners' infidelities, many go on to **contract HIV**.

Also speaking at the opening was Marie-Jose Mbukenakamwe, an activist from Burundi, who **lambasted** the world's richer nations for not putting money into the global fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria. She told the conference that at least ninety-thousand people in Burundi need anti-retrovirals - about one-thousand are receiving them. The G8 countries, she said, have no trouble making speeches about the seriousness of the epidemic though not one has **respected its commitments**.

■ **Words**

urged: tried very hard to persuade

Brazil's example: what Brazil has done

anti-retroviral drugs: drugs which are used to treat HIV - they slow the spread of the virus in a person's body

halved: reduced by 50%

scathing about: very critical of

emphasizing: focusing on

promote a sense of security: create a feeling that you are safe and protected against something

contract: become infected with

lambasted: reprimanded, told off

respected its commitments: done what it promised to do

(Source: BBC)

Turkey's Covid-19 cases overtake Iran to become highest in West Asia

Turkey's confirmed coronavirus cases have risen to 82,329, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said, overtaking neighbouring Iran for the first time to register the highest total in the West Asia (Middle East).

According to Reuters, an increase of 3,783 cases in the last 24 hours also pushed Turkey's confirmed tally within a few hundred of China, where the novel coronavirus first emerged.

Koca said 121 more people have died, taking the death toll to 1,890. A total of 10,453 people have recovered from coronavirus so far, and the number of tests carried out over the past 24 hours came to 40,520, the minister said.

The Interior Ministry also said it was extending restrictions on travel between 31 cities for a further 15 days starting at midnight.

Venezuela lambasts Trump after Central Bank assets quietly transferred to Guaidó's Fed account

The Trump administration quietly ordered the transfer of some \$342 million in funds from a Venezuelan central bank account at Citibank to an account controlled by opposition leader and self-proclaimed Venezuelan 'president' Juan Guaidó at the New York branch of the U.S. Federal Reserve.

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza has hit out against the Trump administration over its move to effectively siphon off seized Venezuelan state assets and redirect them to Guaidó, Sputnik reported.

"The Central Bank of Venezuela denounces the vulgar dispossession that Donald Trump, in complicity with some lawmakers from the National Assembly, ordered regarding the nation's financial resources, which had been blocked at Citibank," Arreaza wrote on Twitter.

In a communique accompanying the tweet, the Central Bank blasted the U.S. government's unilateral decision to act "in collusion with a group of National Assembly lawmakers" in the seizure of Caracas' funds, describing it as just another action in a series of attacks by the U.S. state against the Bank and the people of Venezuela.

According to the Bank, the seizure will have a direct impact on the development of the Venezuelan economy, "already affected by the illicit economic and financial blockade of the supremacist elites that govern the United States of America, and currently aggravated by the pernicious impact of the global coronavirus pandemic."

Earlier this week, lawmakers from Guaidó-aligned National Assembly authorized the transfer of an estimated \$342 million in funds from a Venezuelan Central Bank account with Citibank to its own Fed account. Opposition lawmaker Angel Alvarado told AFP that the transfer would "further protect these assets."

■ A Citibank branch logo



Washington and its allies began seizing Venezuelan state assets in early 2019, shortly after recognizing Guaidó as the country's 'interim president'. The seizures included the confiscation of Venezuelan gold bullion in U.S., British and European banks, the freezing of the assets of Venezuelan-owned but U.S.-based oil refiner, transporter and seller Citgo, and the seizure of billions of dollars of liquid Venezuelan assets in U.S. banks.

Venezuelan authorities have described these measures as "economic warfare" and urged the international community to stand up to and resist U.S. bullying.

Guaidó and other members of the opposition have also been accused of siphoning off some of these resources for their own personal use, and of spending U.S. funds provided as 'humanitarian aid' on lavish hotels, food and drink, and even prostitutes. Last June, Venezuelan Attorney General Tarek William Saab accused Guaidó and his comrades of acting less like an opposition and more like a "mafia."

Egypt puts 13 people including Zyad Elelaimy on 'terrorism' list

Egypt has added 13 people, including former legislator Zyad Elelaimy, on the country's "terrorism list" for collaborating with the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood.

Saturday's decision, published in the official gazette, stated that their "placement on the terrorism list will be for a period of five years".

Elelaimy, a key figure of Egypt's 2011 popular uprising that toppled longtime President Hosni Mubarak, was arrested in June 2019.

Also put on the list was Ramy Shaath, a prominent activist who holds Egyptian citizenship and was arrested two months after Elelaimy.

Since their arrest, the pair have been charged with joining a "terrorist group", namely the Muslim Brotherhood, which has been outlawed following the 2013 overthrow of Islamist President Mohamed Morsi.

In its ruling Saturday, the court said Brotherhood members had tasked "other members of the group ... including Ramy Shaath and Zyad al-Elaimy" with carrying out activities against the state.

Defence lawyer Khaled Ali told AFP news agency the decision was taken in the absence of the lawyers and would be appealed.

Hundreds of people have been added to Egypt's terrorism list in recent years, including fugitives and people arrested by authorities.

The measure authorises the authorities to freeze their assets while those who are not behind bars are banned from travel.

Authorities have arrested thousands of Morsi supporters since his removal, as well as secular activists, journalists, lawyers and academics.

UAE-backed separatists warn of 'imminent war' with Saudi mercenaries in Yemen

UAE-backed separatists in southern Yemen have warned of an "imminent war" with Saudi-sponsored militants as divisions between the two sides continue to deepen.

In a statement, the so-called Southern Transitional Council (STC) said it had informed ambassadors of major countries to Yemen and the UN envoy Martin Griffiths that "the outbreak of war is imminent".

The group accused Riyadh-backed government of former Yemeni president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi of violating a power-sharing settlement signed between the two sides last year, Press TV reported.

The STC accused the former government of trying to regain control of southern provinces in violation of a "sustainable political agreement" reached last November.

The statement also said that Hadi's loyalists had attempted to overrun Aden, which was seized by the separatists last August.

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

Equipped and funded by the United Arab Emirates, the separatists have long sought southern Yemen to secede.

They had initially agreed to fight under the Saudi-led military coalition, but recently and after a decision by the UAE to effectively withdraw its forces from Yemen, the group has turned its weapons on rival militants loyal to Hadi.

The infighting has highlighted deepening divisions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the two countries that are leading the war on Yemen.

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

The threat of an imminent war comes in the wake of a unilateral ceasefire declared by Saudi Arabia earlier this month, citing the coronavirus outbreak.



Leading international weekly newspaper The Economist, however, raised doubts about the true objectives of the ceasefire on Saturday, saying Saudi Arabia was using the pandemic as a "fig leaf" for an exit from the Yemen "quagmire".

"Cynics doubt that compassion is truly motivating Saudi Arabia. For years its bombs have hit hospitals, houses and schools in Yemen—often, it seemed, on purpose," the London-based publication said.

"The Saudis want a way out and are using the coro-

navirus as a fig leaf," it said, citing Yemeni Analyst Abdulghani al-Iryani.

According to the paper, "despite its vicious air campaign, Saudi Arabia has been unable to dislodge the Houthis from most of Yemen's population centers, including the capital, Sana'a".

Its main ally, the United Arab Emirates, began scaling back its involvement in the war last year, The Economist said, adding in recent months they have held secret talks with the Houthis.

Pentagon chief pours cold water on theory that coronavirus was released from a Wuhan lab



U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper took a cautious line on the theory that the coronavirus was released from a Wuhan virology lab, after the Trump administration confirmed that it was investigating that possibility.

Esper said that "a majority of the views right now is that it is natural, it is organic," in an interview on NBC's Today show on Thursday night. His comments echoed Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Mark Milley, who said in a Tuesday press briefing that evidence otherwise is "inconclusive," according to Politico.

The comments came after it emerged on Tuesday that scientific diplomats who visited the Wuhan Institute of Virology numerous times in 2018 had sent two warnings back to the U.S. government alleging poor safety practices.

The lab had been studying novel coronaviruses and their possible transfer between bats and humans, BusinessInsider reported.

After this, Secretary of State Mike

Pompeo confirmed that the government was investigating the possibility the lab accidentally released the virus. China denies this.

It, and most scientists, favour the theory that the virus emerged in bats and was transmitted to humans in one of the city's wet markets, as Business Insider's Aylin Woodward reported.

Speaking to NBC on Thursday, Esper said it was hard to trust the Chinese state on this matter. "We do know one thing: If the Chinese government, the party, had been more transparent earlier, it would have helped us in terms of staying ahead of this virus ... To this day, they need to be far more forthright than what they've been."

On Wednesday, it emerged that the Chinese state had learned in mid-January that the virus could spread between humans, but sat on the information for six days. At the same time it said that it did not believe human-to-human transmission was possible.

Rise in Bahrain's coronavirus infection cases causes serious alarm



Reports that Bahrain is witnessing straight days of increased infections with the highly contagious novel coronavirus have concerned international organizations over the inaction of the ruling Al Khalifah regime to take proper measures.

The Ministry of Health reported on Friday 40 new coronavirus cases. Out of those cases, two were migrant workers and 10 were people who encountered previously infected individuals, Press TV reported.

The total number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Bahrain has reached 1,744, while the death toll stands at seven, according to the latest running count by worldometers.info.

This came as Bahrain has been bitterly criticized by a number of human rights organizations over prison conditions, including overcrowding, poor sanitation and lack of medical care.

Even though the Manama regime has freed some 1,000 prisoners in an alleged response to the epidemic but actually under pressure from the global public opinion,

what has caused international despair is that only around 6 percent of those freed included political dissidents.

Others were mostly prisoners being kept behind bars for crimes related to burglary, homicide and drug smuggling.

Earlier this month, rights groups, including Amnesty International, jointly urged Bahraini officials to set free those who "peacefully exercised their rights to freedom of expression," especially elderly prisoners or those with existing health conditions.

"The authorities don't like to be seen to bend to political pressure," Marc Owen Jones of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter said then.

Last week, Reuters news agency shed light on the situation of jailed Bahraini activist Abdullah Habeeb Swar, who developed a days-long bad cough, causing great anguish among his 14 cell mates that he might have contracted coronavirus and would spread it through their overcrowded wing.

Iraqi Govt. reportedly urges purchase of Russian S-400s despite U.S. warnings of fallout from the deal

In January 2020 members of the Iraqi parliament said the country was mulling the purchase of advanced Russian S-400 missile systems amid concerns that Washington might stop supporting Iraq and providing it with modern air defense armaments.

The Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee of Iraq submitted a detailed study requesting the purchase of Russian long-range, surface-to-air S-400 missile defense systems for the consideration of the country's caretaker prime minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi on 18 April, Sputnik reported.

"The issue has already been discussed with relevant figures at the General Command of Armed Forces, and now awaits the prime minister's agreement," committee member Badr al-Ziyadi was quoted as saying by the Arabic-language newspaper al-Sabaah.

As he underscored the country's need to enhance its defence capabilities, the parliamentarian explained that the acquisition of the S-400 missile system could be finalised after ratification of the deal by the new government that succeeds the current caretaker one, adding his parliamentary committee "will support the next Iraqi government's decisions in this regard, and will present relevant proposals and pieces of advice to it"

"The approval to acquire such a sophisticated system requires large financial allocations and a political decision in order to diversify the sources to get the weapons as we cannot just rely on the Western camp, but rather need to incline towards the Eastern camp as well," said Ziyadi.

In a number of previous instances, the Iraqi lawmaker had gone on record as voicing concerns over attempts to pressure



Baghdad to forgo signing arms contracts with other states.

Thus, last month the Iraqi lawmaker had revealed that U.S. and Israeli arms companies were urging his government to refrain from negotiating the purchase of sophisticated military equipment with other countries.

"There are companies and traders pushing to prevent Iraq from concluding contracts to purchase weapons from developed countries," he was cited by the Arabic-language al-Maalomah news agency as saying on 18 March.

Earlier, on 20 January, Badr al-Ziyadi said Baghdad, in a bid to boost its security from any possible aggression, was mulling dispatching delegations to a number of countries to negotiate the procurement of advanced air defense missile systems.

"The delegations intend to visit countries like Russia, China and Ukraine to negotiate the purchase of modern systems to protect Iraq's airspace... The Iraqi parliament

is right now forming a joint executive and legislative delegation to visit developed countries and sign contracts on procuring advanced weapons," al-Sabaah daily quoted the official as saying.

■ Heightened U.S.-Iraq Tension

Baghdad has been considering buying Russian S-400 missile systems as concerns mount that Washington might withdraw support for Iraq, the Wall Street Journal quoted Karim Elaiwi, a member of the Iraqi parliament's Security and Defense Committee as saying in January 2020.

"We are talking to Russia about the S-400 missiles but no contracts have been signed yet. We need to get these missiles, especially after Americans have disappointed us many times by not helping us in getting proper weapons," said Elaiwi.

The move was confirmed by Abdul Khaleq al-Azzawi, another Iraqi parliament defense committee member, who said:

"We authorized the [Iraqi] Prime Minister to get air defence weapons from any country he wants and we authorized him to spend the money for it, from any country. From Russia or anyone."

The Iraqi moves came amid heightened tensions between Iraq and Washington that were exacerbated after the American military on 3 January launched a drone attack that killed Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' elite Quds Force, near Baghdad International Airport.

Indignation over the attack triggered Iraq's parliament into passing a resolution that called on the government to expel foreign troops from the country and cancel its request for support from the U.S.-led coalition to fight Daesh.

Expert predicts long-term effects of coronavirus on Iran's football

1 → Although most of our clubs are state-owned, they are still not adequately funded, and it is not clear how their rights should be paid in unexpected events" Zolfagharnasab said.

He started his professional career with Pas Tehran, before changing to Persepolis F.C. in 1974, where he won the Iranian championship in 1976 and became runners-up in 1975, in 1977 and in 1978. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Brussels in the field of Physical Education in the early 80's.

"In most of the European countries and other developed nations like Australia, sports medicine has played an important role from the early days of the coronavirus crisis, contrary to Iran that we do not use science properly in our sports." He continued.

In regards to finding the best solution to resume football matches, Zolfagharnasab suggested that there should be formed a "special committee" including representatives of "the Ministry of Sports and Youth, the football federation, the clubs, the coaches, the players, as well as some economic experts to make the best decision.

He also believes that playing games behind closed doors, is not welcomed



by the fans, and it is better to avoid it as much as possible.

Talking about his personal view regarding the way that the matches can be held with the presence of spectators in the upcoming months, the ex-Persepolis player said: "In my opinion, the games can be played with less than half of the capacity of the stadiums, and the fans inside the stadium must sit at a suitable distance from each other. And, among other things, there should be guidelines which outline detailed safety and hygienic protocols for the fans."

The assistant coach of the Iranian national team at the 1998 World Cup qualification also commented on the new head coach of Team Melli.

Croatian coach Dragan Skocic took the reins at Iran national football team in 2020 February.

"Skocic is not a bad coach, but the way he reached the bench of the team was not right. He left Sanat Naft Abadan team, under the pretext of illness, but immediately took over as the manager of the Iranian national team.

"In my opinion, choosing a good Iranian coach along with foreign assistants could be the best choice for the national team."

Iranian wrestler Alireza Karimi undergoes knee surgery



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iranian wrestler Alireza Karimi underwent successful knee surgery on Sunday.

Karimi underwent surgery in Tehran's Arman Hospital.

"He tore his anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) on his left knee and it meant he had to undergo surgery. Fortunately, the operation was successful. An ACL surgery can take six months to recover," orthopedist Dr. Sohrab Keyhani said.

Karimi, who won a gold medal in the 2018 Asian Games and a silver at the

2019 World Wrestling Championships in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, suffered a knee injury in the 2019 World Wrestling Clubs Cup held in Bojnurd, Iran in December.

Karimi, 97kg, was supposed to miss the Olympic Games but he can secure his berth after the Games were postponed due to coronavirus outbreak.

2016 Olympics gold medal winner Hassan Yazdani had previously undergone successful surgery on his torn meniscus.

Yazdani had also suffered the injury at the 2019 World Wrestling Clubs Cup.

Hossein Rezazadeh appointed Iran's para powerlifting director



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Two-time Olympic gold medalist Hossein Rezazadeh has been appointed as director of Iran's para powerlifting association.

Iranian powerlifters have won so many gold medals at the Paralympics, most notably Siamand Rahman who was going to win his third successive gold at the Tokyo but passed away due to a heart failure.

Rezazadeh claimed two gold medals at the 2000 Sydney and 2004 Athens and was forced to retire ahead of the 2008 Olympic Games due to his severe hand injuries and

his high blood pressure.

Immediately following his retirement, he was appointed as the Prime Counselor for Iranian national weightlifting federation and was named president of Iran's weightlifting federation in 2011.

On Sunday, he has returned to the sports scene once again after five years.

"Based on your experience at the weightlifting, you have been chosen as new director of Iran's para powerlifting association. I wish you all success in your new position," head of Iran Sports Federation for the Disabled Mohammad Shervin Asbaghian said.

Football supports humanity's heroes

Zurich: To show appreciation for the efforts made and risks braved by healthcare workers and other professionals who are giving their all to ensure society continues to function in the face of the coronavirus, football stars both past and present have come together to pay tribute to humanity's heroes.

Across the globe, staff and volunteers at medical facilities have been risking their lives on a daily basis to support humankind. Some have, sadly, paid the ultimate price. People working or volunteering in law enforcement, pharmacies, shops, warehouses, delivery services, public transport, and safety and security have also been playing a key role in protecting our way of life.

To all of these heroic people: football thanks you, football remembers you and football supports you.

Fifty of football's biggest stars have all provided their support to humanity's heroes by applauding their efforts in taking the fight to the coronavirus: Holger Badstuber, David Beckham, Bhaichung Bhutia, Lucy Bronze, Gianluigi Buffon, Cafu, Fabio Cannavaro, Iker Casillas, Deyna Castellanos, Giorgio Chiellini, Charlyn Corral, El Hadji



Diouf, Youri Djorkaeff, Han Duan, Magdalena Eriksson, Samuel Eto'o, Pernille Harder, Javier Hernández, Luis Hernández, Kaká, Harry Kane, Carli Lloyd, Harry Maguire, Diego Maradona, Marta, Vivianne Miedema, Ajara Nchout, Michael Owen, Mesut Özil, Norma Palafox, Pavel Pardo, Park Ji-Sung, Pelé, Gerard Piqué, Alexia Putellas, Sergio Ramos, Nicole Reigner, Wendie Renard, Roberto Carlos, James Rodríguez, Ronaldo, Bastian Schweinsteiger, Virginia Torrecilla, Yaya Touré, Marco van Basten, Daniëlle van de Donk, Ivan Vicelich, Arturo

Vidal, Javier Zanetti and Zinedine Zidane.

"To recognize the risks that doctors, nurses and other essential workers are having to take on a daily basis, football wants to show its support," said Carli Lloyd. "They are on the front line of the coronavirus battle, working as a team to defend us, to protect us and to keep us healthy. It is thanks to their dedication and professionalism, supported by everyone else's absolute commitment to following the rules of each national health authority, that we will win."

"As footballers, we are used to receiving applause, but this time, we have the opportunity to show our appreciation for the many people who are risking their lives to protect ours," added David Beckham. "You are humanity's heroes and we want to show that all of football supports you and everything that you do to defend all of us."

The video campaign is being published on various FIFA digital channels, with regular updates from players across the world set to be provided in the coming days.

(Source: FIFA.com)

Spoke to Federer, Nadal about how we can contribute to help lower-ranked guys: Djokovic

The tennis season was suspended in early March due to the pandemic, leaving players in the lower tiers who depend solely on tournament winnings without the chance to earn a living.

Novak Djokovic has been in touch with fellow ATP Player Council members Roger Federer and Rafa Nadal to discuss ways to assist lower-ranked players facing financial struggles amid the novel coronavirus outbreak, the world number one said on Saturday.

Answering a fan's question during his Instagram live chat with Stan Wawrinka, Player Council chief Djokovic said steps would be taken to ensure that only those players who are most deserving will benefit from any relief plans.

"spoke to Roger and Rafa a few days ago and we had a conversation about the near future of tennis. How we can contribute to help lower ranked guys who are obviously struggling the most," Djokovic said.

"A majority of players ranked between 250 to 700 or 1,000 don't have federation support or sponsors and are independent and left alone."

The tennis season was suspended in early March due to the pandemic, leaving players in the lower tiers who depend solely on tournament winnings without the chance to earn a living.

The plight of players ranked outside the top 100 in singles has prompted the game's stakeholders — the ATP, WTA, ITF and the organizers of the four Grand Slams — to devise plans to provide some assistance.

"Players hopefully will (also) contribute collectively to the relief fund that the ATP (and others) will distribute using models and criteria," Djokovic added.

"You want to avoid giving money to player who fits into this category (low ranking) but does not need the money compared to someone else... hopefully between \$3-4.5 million will be distributed to lower-ranked players."

Djokovic, a 17-times Grand Slam champion, said other short-term solutions could include diverting bonus money meant for top players from season-ending events like the ATP Finals into the relief fund.

"If we don't have any events (in 2020), maybe next year's Australian Open prize money can be contributed



to the fund," the Serb added.

"I'm glad the tennis eco-system is coming together. Everyone realizes the base of tennis. These guys ranked 250 onwards are the ones making the future of tennis.

"We have to show them they're not forgotten. We also have to send a message to young players that they can live out of tennis when there's a financial crisis."

(Source: Eurosport)

Azmoun on Atletico Madrid's radar: report

Atletico Madrid have shown interest in signing Sardar Azmoun, an Italian newspaper reported.

Italian club Napoli as well as West Ham United, Wolverhampton Wanderers and Leicester City have already set their sights on signing the Zenit St Petersburg Iranian striker.

The 25 years old forward has spent practically his entire career in Russia with Rubin Kazan, Rostov and since 2019 Zenit.

According to the Corriere del Mezzogiorno newspaper, Napoli will engage in a bidding war with Atletico Madrid.

It's believed the price-tag is going to reach €25m, as he scored 14 goals in 29 competitive games for Zenit this season.

Azmoun has 31 goals in 46 senior caps for Iran.

(Source: Football Italia)

Vanessa Bryant posts tribute to Kobe on wedding anniversary

Vanessa Bryant described her late husband Kobe as "my king" in a message posted on social media on Saturday on what would have been the couple's wedding anniversary.

"My king, my heart, my best friend. Happy 19th wedding anniversary baby," she wrote on Instagram to accompany a photo of the couple.

"I miss you so much. I wish you were here to hold me in your arms. I love you." Basketball superstar Kobe and one of the couple's daughters, 13-year-old Gianna, were among nine people killed in a helicopter crash in southern California on Jan. 26.

Kobe and Vanessa have three surviving daughters who were not on the helicopter.

Kobe, a five-times NBA champion, was a fierce advocate for women's basketball.

He loomed large over the Women's NBA draft on Friday, when commissioner Cathy Engelbert announced the new Kobe & Gigi Bryant WNBA Advocacy Award.

(Source: Reuters)

Coronavirus: Roma players give up wages for rest of season

AS Roma's players and coaching staff have volunteered to give up their wages for the remainder of the 2019-20 season to help steer the club through the coronavirus pandemic.

The Serie A side announced on Sunday that its players will forego four months' salary and will collectively make up the difference in non-playing staff's wages whose salaries were affected when they were placed on the Italian government's social safety net scheme.

"The club's players, first-team coach Paulo Fonseca, and his staff, have volunteered to forgo four months' salary this season to help the club navigate the economic crisis that has engulfed the world of football since the coronavirus outbreak," Roma said in a statement. "The players, coach and his coaching staff have also agreed to collectively pay the difference to ensure that all Roma employees who were placed on the government's social safety net scheme will still receive their regular net salary."

Serie A has been suspended since March 9 and it is not known if or when the season will be able to re-start. Roma last played on March 1 in a 4-3 away win over Cagliari.

Roma chief executive Guido Fienga said: "We always talk about unity at Roma and in volunteering to cut their salaries for the rest of the season, the players, the coach, and his staff, have all proved that we really are in this together."

"[Club captain] Edin Dzeko, all the players and Paulo have demonstrated they understand what this club stands for and we also thank them all for their superb gesture towards the employees at this club." Players at Juventus, Parma and Cagliari have also agreed to wage reductions.

However, a Serie A recommendation that similar cuts be made at all top flight clubs has been rejected by the players' union which argues that those at smaller clubs are less able to afford reductions.

(Source: ESPN)

Wuhan Zall make emotional return home

Wuhan Zall, the Chinese Super League team from the epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, made an emotional return to the city after more than three months torn from their families.

Wuhan Zall endured a turbulent 104 days on the road, including being stranded in Spain, because Wuhan was sealed off in January due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The city is now emerging from its weeks-long lockdown and hundreds of chanting fans met the Wuhan Zall players when they arrived at Wuhan's train station late Saturday, state media said.

Wearing masks, the players had bouquets of flowers thrust into their hands while supporters clad in the team's orange colors held banners and sang.

"After more than three months of wandering, the homesick Wuhan Zall team members finally set foot in their hometown," the team said on the Twitter-like Weibo.

The squad, led by their Spanish head coach Jose Gonzalez, will now spend a few days at home before resuming training on Wednesday.

"The local players will be reunited with their families, having not seen them for more than three months," said Wuhan Zall, who finished sixth last year in the top-flight CSL.

The squad's return home is the final chapter in a long saga. They began training for the new Chinese Super League season, since postponed indefinitely, in early January in the southern city of Guangzhou.

They flew to Malaga, Spain towards the end of January, by which time the city of Wuhan and its 11 million people were under restrictions because of the coronavirus outbreak.

But when the virus began taking hold in Spain in March, Wuhan Zall made arrangements to fly back to China, where the number of infections was slowing markedly.

Wuhan was still sealed off so the squad, via a prolonged transit in Germany, flew to China PR's southern city of Shenzhen on March 16.

They went into three weeks of quarantine, followed by training in the nearby city of Foshan, before taking a high-speed train from Guangzhou to Wuhan on Saturday evening.

(Source: AFP)

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Beware of making friends with a fool for he tries to attract you by his behavior and make you like himself.

mam Ali (AS)

Lessons on humanity from Persian literature

By Seyyed Mostafa Mousavi Sabet

All of Iran's celebrations this year to mark Sadi Day on April 20 will be organized online due to the COVID-19 disaster.

The day marks the anniversary of the completion of the Gulistan (The Rose Garden), a major work of the classical Persian literature by Sheikh Muslih od-Din Sadi Shirazi who lived during the 13th century CE.



A Persian calligraphy of a verse of Sadi's poem reading, "The sons of Adam are limbs of each other, Having been created of one essence."

Sadi was introduced to the generation of Iranians that are now in their fifties with the following verses at the primary school age:

*The sons of Adam are limbs of each other
Having been created of one essence.
When the calamity of time afflicts one limb
The other limbs cannot remain at rest.
If thou hast no sympathy for the troubles of others
Thou art unworthy to be called by the name of a man.**

Teachers usually spurred students on to memorize it in class or as homework, something that seemed boring and nonsensical!

Teachers and parents spent long hours talking to their children about the messages the verses convey. But most students only absorbed as much of the messages as they needed in order to receive a passing grade in literature.

Years have passed and the generation now knows that Sadi's poem is a great lesson about humanity, which has been neglected over history, and today's problems result from this negligence.

Now, as a result of the coronavirus, this very small living thing that has managed to infect the whole world, people's remarks are full of allusions to the poem.

In his call for unity for Spaniards on April 4, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez made a direct reference to the tour de force.

In addition, a group of Turkish Persian learners at Ataturk University in Erzurum released a video showing them reciting the poem to express their solidarity with Iranians in the battle against COVID-19.

This is the power of literature, and the influence of Persian literature in particular. People need to revise their outlook on the world. They need to unite to tackle the blight and many other disasters that may strike the world in the future, as another poem composed by an unsung contemporary Persian poet in 1980 calls for:

*Let us all join together, my dear ones,
Do not remain isolated in pain,
AS our mutual afflictions,
Shall never be relieved all alone,
The tribulations in our lives,
Shall never be overcome unless we fight on a joint*

warfront

It would be pity if the article comes to an end without a reference to the Divan of Hafez, Sadi's fellow citizen and another great figure of the classical Persian literature. The following poem from his Divan brings us a message of hope for change in the prevailing situation:

*From Canaan Joseph shall return, whose face
A little time was hidden: weep no more
Oh, weep no more! in sorrow's dwelling-place
The roses yet shall spring from the bare floor!
And heart bowed down beneath a secret pain
Oh stricken heart! joy shall return again,
Peace to the love-tossed brain — oh, weep no more!***

* The Golestan of Saadi translated by Richard Francis Burton.

** The Divan of Hafez translated by Gertrude Bell.

Posters represent Gulistan's appeal for Imam Khomeini

CULTURE DESK **TEHRAN** — An online exhibition, which will open on Monday to mark Sadi Day, is scheduled to display posters representing the interest of Imam Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, in the Gulistan, the masterpiece of the Persian poet Sheikh Muslih od-Din Sadi Shirazi.

The exhibition entitled "The Gulistan of Imam" has been inspired by "A Government Based on Morals", the memoirs of Hojjatoleslam Abdolkarim Biazar Shirazi, a pupil of Imam Khomeini, the Imam Khomeini Cultural Center in Tehran, which is the organizer of the showcase, announced on Sunday.

"Perhaps, it seems really surprising for many people that a revolutionary leader and politician like Imam Khomeini was interested in literature and poetry," the center wrote in a statement for the exhibition.

"However, they would show no surprise if they learned that Persian poetry and literature are not merely a rhythmic language, but it is a common culture and civilization linking people in Central Asia, Caucasasia, the Indian Peninsula and Iran," it added.

The cultural center has also published an excerpt from "A Government Based on Morals" in a brochure for the exhibit.

"Months before Imam Khomeini's death, I remember that one day in the morning I received a telephone call from Hojjatoleslam Rasuli Mahallati, the director of Imam Khomeini's office, who asked me to prepare a three-volume divan of Sadi for Imam Khomeini," Biazar Shirazi



A poster for the online exhibition "The Gulistan of Imam".

wrote in his memoirs.

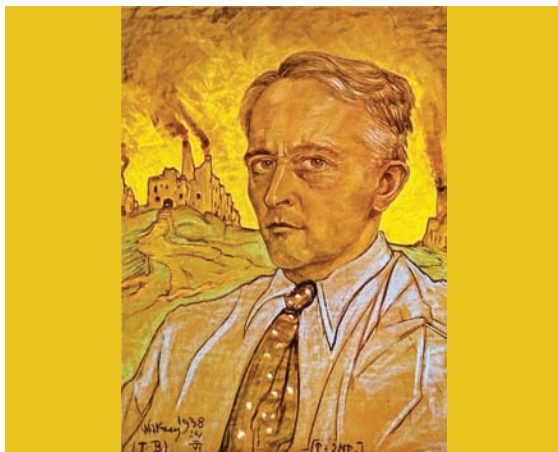
"Why not a one-volume?" I asked. He answered that Imam wants to take the book with himself in his daily walking so he needs

a book with a lower weight," he added.

"This story was very inspiring and interesting for me from several points of view: Imam's attention to reading and Sadi's work at that age

and with all his preoccupation with the country were more interesting," he wrote.

The exhibition will be held on the center's Instagram [imam.farhangsara](https://www.instagram.com/imam.farhangsara).



A self-portrait by Stanislaw Witkiewicz in 1938.

Plays by Polish writer Stanislaw Witkiewicz translated into Persian

CULTURE DESK **TEHRAN** — Stage actor and director Ali Shams has translated three plays by Polish writer Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz into Persian.

"The Pragmatists" (1919), "Country House" (1921) and "The New Deliverance" (1920) have been translated from the Italian versions of the books, Shams told the Persian service of MNA on Sunday.

"This is the first time works by the Polish writer commonly known as Witkacy has been translated into Persian," he said.

"It is quite a big surprise for me that no book or article by this influential theatrical figure of the 20th century has been published in the country," he noted.

"Fortunately I had this chance to work on the books

during the home quarantine. These books help one to learn more about the writer and the theater of the 20th century," he said.

"The three plays will be published in one book and I am planning to introduce Witkiewicz in an article in an introduction to the book," he said.

He added that Witkiewicz is believed to be one of the influential theatrical figures in his time and has had great impact on theater afterwards.

Polish theater director Tadeusz Kantor, Romanian-French playwright Eugene Ionesco and Irish avant-garde writer Samuel Beckett have made allusions to Witkiewicz in their works.

His influence can be traced in works like Ionesco's "Rhinceros" or Beckett's "Waiting for Godot".

IIDCYA to stream "Bald Pigeon Fancier"

CULTURE DESK **TEHRAN** — The Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) will screen "Bald Pigeon Fancier" on its portal on Monday.

Directed by Sadeq Javadi in 2011, the acclaimed animated film is based on a story of the same title written by Iranian writer Samad Behrangi in 1966.

The story that criticizes the widening gap between the rich and the poor in the 1960's Iran is about a relationship between a princess and a poor bald man who lives with his

old mother, a goat and several pigeons.

The film was named best animated film in 2010 during the 8th Tehran International Animation Festival, which was organized by the IIDCYA.

The movie will available for 24 hours on the IIDCYA portal [omid.kpf.ir](https://www.iidcy.ir).

The film is screened in line with a program started by the IIDCYA in early March to entertain children during home quarantine due to the new coronavirus epidemic in the country.



A scene from director Sadeq Javadi's animated film "Bald Pigeon Fancier".

"Untimely" named best at Kansas City FilmFest

CULTURE DESK **TEHRAN** — "Untimely" by Iranian director Puya Eshtehardi has won the Best World Cinema Feature Award at the Kansas City FilmFest International, which ran online from April 13 to 19, the organizers have announced.

"Untimely" is about Hamin, a young private doing his military service in a watchtower on the border of Iran and Pakistan. Impatient for a day off to attend his

sister's wedding ceremony, he gets into a fight with his commander.

"Potluck" co-directed by Olivia Squires and Jared Goudsmit from the U.S. received the award for Best Heartland High School Student Short at the festival.

The award for Best Heartland Narrative Short was given to "Mildred's Crime Show" by American director Joshua Leonard.



A scene from "Untimely" by director Pouya Eshtehardi.

AMC says it has enough cash through July as movie theaters aim to reopen

LEAWOOD (Reuters) — AMC Entertainment Holdings Inc (AMC.N), the world's largest movie theater operator, said on Friday it has enough cash to withstand a global suspension of operations until a possible partial reopening of its locations in July.

The company said it was seeking to raise \$500 million in a new debt offering that would provide enough liquidity to withstand coronavirus-related closures until the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday, on Nov. 26, if necessary.

Movie theaters worldwide have been shuttered since mid-March to help prevent further spread of the novel coronavirus. In the United States, the individual states are now considering when to allow businesses to reopen.

Shares of AMC surged on Friday, closing up 31% at \$3.20 on the New York Stock Exchange. Shares of rival Imax Corp (IMAX.N) and Cinemark Holdings Inc (CNK.N) rose 9% and 16%, respectively.

Even after Friday's surge, AMC's stock remained down roughly 60% from

late February, just before fears of the coronavirus sent Wall Street tumbling.

U.S. theater operators are aiming to reopen some locations as early as late June and nationwide by late July, but all plans are tentative

On Thursday, President Donald Trump released guidelines that call for reopening of businesses in three stages. Movie theaters were listed among large venues that could open their doors in the first phase with "strict physical distancing protocols".

States may use the guidelines to decide when to begin easing their restrictions on business operations.

AMC said its theaters would remain closed through June, and that timeline could be extended.

The company, which has put many employees on furlough, said it had a cash balance of \$299.8 million as of March 31.

Rival Cinemark (CNK.N) also is working to raise \$250 million through a debt sale.

Beauty in radishes: Parisian tells lockdown story in watercolor

PARIS (Reuters) — From a bunch of radishes to a sleeping cat, Parisian Agnes Goyet has turned to her life indoors for inspiration as France's coronavirus lockdown frees her up to pursue her hobby - art.

Goyet, who normally works as a real estate manager, is among many amateur artists finding new forms of expression as governments order confinements to contain the outbreak.

Professional musicians, chefs, actors and athletes around the world are also taking to social media to reach out to the public from inside their homes.

After nearly five weeks in her apartment, Goyet said that updating her watercolor journal had become a daily necessity, as an outlet to escape the pressures of quarantine.

"My journal of drawings is my door, my small opening to the world," she said, showing off sketches depicting everything from her television set as it beamed French

President Emmanuel Macron's latest speech to her indoor plants.

"I think the lockdown has fostered a lot of creativity," she said. "We find beauty in everything. Even a simple bunch of radish becomes pretty."

Goyet, who has been posting her watercolors on Instagram, lives in a 94-square-metre apartment with her two adult children. Since the lockdown began on March 17, she has only stepped out to shop for groceries and once to go jogging.

She said she normally kept journals of her travels, and her usual subjects included nature, architecture and street life. Despite finding joy during confinement, Goyet added that she had one date in mind: May 11, when the French government has said it will start easing some lockdown measures.

"I wait for only one thing, which is to go back to a bistro, take a seat the terrace and to be able to draw outdoors," Goyet said.