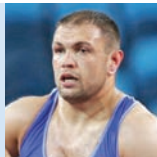




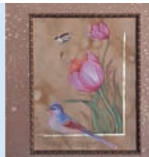
Zarif meets Assad, says Iran won't stop backing resistance front **2**



Rey's historical sites to be demarcated **8**



Takhti is my role model: Komeil Ghasemi **11**



Aqamiri institute to raise funds for healthcare staff, patients battling COVID-19 **12**

By Eshrat Mardi

TEHRAN — On the first day of the emergence of the novel coronavirus in the Chinese city of Wuhan, no one could have even imagined that the virus would hit the global economy, politics and social relations in the shortest time possible. Its repercussions have been so serious that the people around the globe have described the crisis as a milestone in human history.

The novel coronavirus spread rapidly across the Far East, West Asia, and Europe and finally hit the United States very hard. The largest world economies, which once could experience a horrible nightmare for only a short time lockdown, have now faced over a month of closure due to the spread of the virus.

The virus has impacted the entire human life in the world. The influences have been more obvious and devastating in the countries whose lifestyle had been formed based on profit-based mercantilism policy.

Mercantilism is an economic theory that trade generates wealth and is stimulated by the accumulation of profitable balances, which a government should encourage by means of protectionism.

It should not be ignored that the coronavirus first emerged in a country which enjoyed the largest economic growth in the world. But later it mainly influenced the most powerful economic power in the world, the United States. The impacts of the virus on the U.S. have been awful.

The United States of America which is considered as the largest economy in the world; the General Motors Company whose wealth has been estimated as equal as a wealthy West European country similar to the Netherlands; and the New York City, as the richest metropolis worldwide, whose wealth is equal to Canada's wealth, have all faced devastating challenges in various political, economic and social fields due. **→7**

End of federalism!?

By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN — American columnist Stephen Lendman believes that the federal system in the U.S. is on the path to breakdown.

"The U.S. is its own worst enemy. Its rage to dominate is self-destructive," Lendman tells the Tehran Times.

Andrew Gawthorpe, a historian of the United States at Leiden University in the Netherlands, also says federalism has become another casualty of Trump and the coronavirus.

"Many American institutions and traditions have been challenged in the era of Donald Trump. The latest is federalism, the idea that power should be shared between the federal government and the states," Gawthorpe wrote in the Guardian on April 18.

Lendman also says, "Imperial USA will crumble like all other empires in history. It's just a matter of time, its counterproductive policies hastening its decline."

Following is the text of the interview with Lendman:

■ The neo-liberalism paradigm seems to be failing in the U.S. at the moment. Different states are holding diverse positions in terms of Trumps' anti-corona policies. Many of these states oppose those policies insofar as Illinois governor ordered cargos of masks from China secretly without informing the federal government. It seems that federalism is on decline in the U.S. after almost 3 centuries. Is it true to say that the golden age of federalism in the U.S. is over?

A: The scourge of neoliberalism has been U.S.-led Western policy since what I and others call the neo-liberal 90s.

It's all about transferring wealth from ordinary people to privileged ones. It's been especially harmful since 9/11, a pretext for the U.S. to wage war on humanity at home and abroad by hot or other means. **→3**

Departed States of America

The U.S. on Saturday closed its deadliest week so far in the spread of the coronavirus, recording 16,580 deaths since Sunday amid signs that the rise of the death toll was slowing and political tensions were heightening.

The number of people who have died from the virus in the United States now stands at more than 40,000 as public debates over the lifting of restrictions spark partisan squabbling between the president and the leaders of a handful of states, U.S. News reported.

Democratic governors late Friday and early Saturday fired back at President Donald Trump's tweets and subsequent comments Friday afternoon that appeared to support protest movements aimed at ending social distancing protocols and reopening the economies of states whose governors the president has criticized frequently.

"LIBERATE MINNESOTA," Trump wrote in the first tweet, followed by another with, "LIBERATE MICHIGAN."

He later wrote, "LIBERATE VIRGINIA, and save your great 2nd Amendment. It is under siege!"

During a press briefing Friday, Trump said he thought the restrictions in some states were "just too much," repeatedly citing Virginia and the Second Amendment, and indicated that he didn't think the gatherings would result in people spreading the virus.

"No, these are people expressing their views. I see the way they are and I see the way they're working and they seem to be very responsible people to me, but it's — you know, they've been treated a little bit rough," he said.

Democratic governors in the states that Trump specifically targeted dismissed the president's statements. **→10**



Coronacracy in America



ARTICLE

Yuram Abdullah Weiler
Analyst and journalist

Armed groups in U.S. protest coronavirus shutdown

In the not-so-united United States, conservative-backed protests against state-ordered quarantines have erupted in a number of cities. Seeing an opportunity to push his open America agenda, U.S. president Donald Trump has encouraged the anti-shutdown demonstrations, which have included armed groups among the participants who are clamoring for an end to the stay-at-home orders. Many state governors, however, insist that opening for business too soon and without adequate testing would lead to a sharp jump in coronavirus infections.

■ America at the financial abyss

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the American economic behemoth to the edge of a financial abyss. On February 12, 2020, the Dow Jones Industrials stock index closed at over 29,500, but by March 23, it had plummeted to below 18,600, while the unemployment rate in February stood at the record low of 3.5 percent. Taking full credit for low unemployment numbers and high stock prices, Trump boasted on February 12 about a record-setting stock market run of 144 days. The month before, he had pointed to the record employment level of 160 million working, and bragged, "Nobody's ever even come close to that number."

Now, some ten million people have found themselves out of work due to mandatory business closures, pushing the unemployment rate, currently estimated at 13 percent, to levels not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s, and expected to soon surpass the level reached during the global financial collapse of 2008. One economist at Moody's has speculated that the actual number of unemployed may be 17 million, which would represent the greatest number of unemployed persons in U.S. history.

The U.S. economy has run into a metaphorical "brick wall." 22 million workers have applied for unemployment benefits, the Small Business Administration has run out of money to support its paycheck protection program, and the stimulus checks promised by the Trump cabal have been delayed due to "technical glitches." **→7**

May the Neoliberalism save you!

By Prof Michel Chossudovsky

There is a serious health crisis which must be duly resolved. And this is a number one priority.

But there is another important dimension which has to be addressed.

Millions of people have lost their jobs, and their lifelong savings. In developing countries, poverty and despair prevail.

While the lockdown is presented to public opinion as the sole means to resolving a global public health crisis, its devastating economic and social impacts are casually ignored.

The unspoken truth is that the novel coronavirus provides a pretext to powerful financial interests and corrupt politicians to precipitate the entire World into a spiral of mass unemployment,

bankruptcy and extreme poverty.

This is the true picture of what is happening. Poverty is Worldwide. While famines are erupting in Third World countries, closer to home, in the richest country on earth,

"millions of desperate Americans wait in long crowded lines for handouts"

"Miles-long lines formed at food banks and unemployment offices across the U.S. over the past week"

In India: "food is disappearing, in shanty towns, too scared to go out, walking home or trapped in the street crackdowns,

In India there have been 106 coronavirus deaths as of today, to put things in perspective 3,000 Indian children starve to death each day"

IMF should put politics aside, do its professional duties: Iran's central banker

TEHRAN — The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) governor has urged the International Monetary Fund to put politics aside and do its professional duties in regard to Iran's requests for financial aid during crises, especially in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

"I would like to repeat that all UN organizations, say the IMF or WHO, should stay away from politics and deliver on their institutional mandates," Abdolnaser Hemmati said in an interview with Bloomberg published on April 19.

The CBI governor had written to IMF last month to request \$5 billion from its Rapid Financing Initiative, an emergency program that gives loans to countries facing with sudden shocks such as natural disasters.

It was Tehran's first request for IMF loan since

the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Iran's request from IMF was then disputed by the U.S. as the senior officials in the Trump administration said Iran's government has billion-dollar accounts still at its disposal.

Iranian officials seriously blamed the U.S. interfering in the issue, saying that United States has no right to prevent the International Monetary Fund from giving loan to Iran.

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

The same day, President Hassan Rouhani said that the IMF must fulfil its duties unbiasedly.

Also, government spokesperson Ali Rabiei said in a press conference on April 13, "From

From Mumbai to New York City. It's the "Globalization of Poverty".

Production is at a standstill.

Starvation in Asia and Africa. Famine in the U.S. All countries are now Third World countries. It's the "Thirdworldisation" of the so-called high income "developed countries".

And what is happening in Italy?

People are running out of food. Reports confirm that the Mafia rather than the government "is gaining local support by distributing free food to poor families in quarantine who have run out of cash". (The Guardian)

This crisis combines fear and panic concerning the COVID-19 together with a sophisticated process of economic manipulation. **→7**

the legal point of view, the United States is not in the position to obstruct the legal performance of institutions and international organizations".

The following is the text of the interview published by Bloomberg.

■ Can you give the latest developments on your recent request for financing from the IMF?

A: This is not recent and I believe we were among the first countries who requested support through a Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI) on March 6, 2020, more than 40 days ago. Remember, we were among the first five countries who were hit hard by the coronavirus and when the managing director of the IMF announced that the IMF is ready to help countries using the RFI, we, as one of the member countries, submitted our request to access this facility. **→4**



Stage artists producing face masks at Tehran's Hafez Hall

Iranian stage artists produce face masks in a charity movement for Iranian health workers at Tehran's Hafez Hall on April 20, 2020.

The charity team was established about two weeks ago by a number of actors and musicians in collaboration with Rudaki Foundation to promote the motto "We Defeat Coronavirus with Solidarity".

Federalism has become another casualty of Trump and the coronavirus

By Andrew Gawthorpe

Many American institutions and traditions have been challenged in the era of Donald Trump. The latest is federalism, the idea that power should be shared between the federal government and the states. The president's response to the coronavirus epidemic has had a curious impact, overturning the historical preferences of both parties. Put simply, coronavirus has meant federalism for Democrats who have been abandoned in the face of the pandemic, and slavish devotion to federal authority for Republicans.

Federalism provides a logical way for the United States to respond to epidemics. States have the primary responsibility for their citizens' health — about which they have the best information — but the federal government needs to take the lead in coordinating a national response. Supplies need to be sent where they are needed most, and measures like lockdowns have to be implemented and lifted in accordance with a national plan rather than haphazardly at the state level — because, as Andrew Cuomo has said, "state boundaries mean very little to the virus".

Yet a vacuum of responsible leadership from the White House has meant that the system has not worked as intended. Rather than seeing it as his role to work with the states to develop a national plan, Trump instead spent months denying that a problem even existed and stating that he took "no responsibility" for fighting the virus. When the prospect of emerging as the hero who restarted the economy beckoned, he swung to the other extreme, claiming "total authority" to supersede decisions made by the states and suggesting that governors who wanted to lift lockdowns at their own pace rather than his direction were committing "mutiny". On Friday, Trump went on a bizarre, all-caps Twitter rampage, calling on citizens to "LIBERATE" Minnesota, Michigan and Virginia from state quarantine measures.

Many Republican governors have responded by following the president's lead. Even as the government's top infectious diseases expert was pleading for a nationwide lockdown, governors like Florida's Ron DeSantis chose to sacrifice the health of their constituents on the altar of their desire to please the president. **→7**

Judiciary chief urges government to close corruption loopholes

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Judiciary Chief Seyed Ebrahim Raisi said on Monday that the government must rectify structures that lead to corruption.



“There is no use in saying that ‘termite of corruption’ has attacked parts of the country’s administrative system. The termite must be identified and countered,” he said in a meeting of the Supreme Judiciary Council.

He noted that the supervisory bodies are expected to fight corruption by detaining and countering the corrupt elements.

The remarks by the top judge came after the chief of the State Audit Court had said that 4.8 billion dollars is unaccounted for. However, the government has refused the claim.

Continuation of Iran sanctions not justified: Webster University professor

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Warren Rosenblum, a professor at Webster University, has said that the continuation of the United States sanctions on Iran is not justified when the country is fighting the coronavirus pandemic.

“Unfortunately, the Trump administration does not pay attention to logical reasoning and international efforts to remove sanctions,” he told ILNA in an interview published on Monday. He noted that U.S. President Donald Trump lied about exemption of humanitarian aid from sanctions.

Democratic presidential contender Joe Biden said on April 2 that Trump’s administration must ease economic sanctions on Iran as a humanitarian gesture during the global coronavirus pandemic.

The former vice president said the U.S. has a moral obligation to be among the first to offer aid to people in need regardless of where they live when confronting a virus that knows no borders or political affiliations, according to Aljazeera.



Chris Murphy, the U.S. senator from Connecticut, warned on April 13 that the Trump administration could be partially responsible for “the death of innocent people” if it continues its current policies towards Iran amidst the 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 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 also wrote on his Twitter page on April 6 that Iranians are dying of coronavirus partly because of U.S. sanctions.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Zarif meets Assad, says Iran won’t stop backing resistance front

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who held talks with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus on Monday, refuted the speculation that Iran would change its policy of supporting the resistance front or fighting terrorism after the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani.

“There will be no change in the Islamic Republic of Iran’s path of supporting resistance and fighting terrorism in the region after martyrdom of General Soleimani,” Zarif stated. For his part, Assad said that General Soleimani played an important role in fighting terrorism.

He also praised the Iranians for supporting the Syrian people in hard times. In a drone strike on January 3, the U.S. military martyred General Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), in Baghdad’s international airport.

General Soleimani was a legendary commander in the war against terrorist groups, especially Daesh (ISIS), in Syria and Iraq.

■ **‘U.S. real intentions have been revealed’**

Zarif also said that the United States’ real intentions have been revealed as it refused to lift



sanctions on the countries that are struggling with the coronavirus pandemic.

“Now, the true intentions of the U.S. with regard to its refusal to lift cruel sanctions on nations under the difficult situation of fighting against this disease has been revealed,” Zarif said, according to Press TV.

The Syrian president also censured the West for its approach toward the coronavirus, saying it exposed the Western countries’ failure and immorality.

“The coronavirus crisis has exposed the failure of the Western regimes as well as their immorality, because the pandemic showed

that these regimes only serve a select few of individuals with vested interests, instead of serving their people,” Assad said.

The Syrian leader also offered his condolences to the Iranian government and people over the loss of lives caused by the deadly coronavirus.

He lashed out at certain Western countries, mainly the United States, for using the pandemic as a political opportunity to impose sanctions on other states despite the current exceptional humanitarian circumstances.

■ **Zarif, Assad discuss the Astana peace process**

Zarif and Assad also discussed the latest developments in Syria and the Astana peace process.

In line with their security cooperation, Iran, Turkey, and Russia - three power brokers in Syria - launched the Astana peace talks on the Syrian crisis. The talks were launched in January 2017 with the aim of putting an end to the Syrian conflict.

Kazakhstan has hosted multiple rounds of talks on Syria since January 2017 most of which involved delegations from the Syrian government and opposition.

Zarif also held a separate meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem.

Iran says foreign forces are source of regional tension

‘Persian Gulf is our region and our armed forces should be able to patrol without hurdles’

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on Monday that foreign forces’ presence in the region is the source of insecurity, instability and tension.

“We consider presence of the foreign forces, especially forces of the United States, in the region a source of tension, instability and insecurity. Their presence is illegal and illegitimate. This is our region and our armed forces must be able to patrol without hurdle,” he said in a press conference held through video conference.

He said, “This issue led to our forces’ response. It has been for thousands of years that Iran is in this region and the regional security must be provided by the regional countries, especially Oman which is in the Strait of Hormuz region.”

He urged foreign forces to leave the region and not make Iran give them warning.

On Monday, Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy Commander Alireza Tangsiri said, “Wherever the Americans have been, there has been insecurity.”

Tangsiri said “we see no place” in the world that the U.S. has brought security there.

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 Navy issued a statement on Sunday calling the U.S. claims “fake” and likening them to some “Hollywood” scenarios.

The statement said Iran will respond firmly to any miscalculation of the U.S., advising Washington to avoid any adventurism in the Persian Gulf.

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 U.S. 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.”

■ **‘U.S. seeks to divert public opinion from economic terrorism’**

Mousavi also said that the U.S. seeks to divert the public opinion from economic terrorism by extending arms embargo on Iran.

The spokesman made the remarks as U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has urged the United Nations Security Council to extend the international arms embargo on Iran, set to expire in October.

“The United States’ action violates law. If they are worried, we advise them not to sell [weapons] to other countries, especially in the region, which has had and will have negative consequences,” Mousavi said.

■ **‘Europeans’ commitments not limited to INSTEX’**

Mousavi also said that INSTEX (the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges) is a preliminary step for Europeans to fulfill their obligations and their commitments are not limited to it.

INSTEX has been designed by the European Union to facilitate legitimate trade with Tehran. It was introduced on January 31, 2019, by France, Germany, and Britain, the three European countries party to the nuclear deal.

Military chief predicts resistance front will expel U.S. from Iraq

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Chief of Staff of Iran’s Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Bagheri predicted on Monday that the resistance front will force the U.S. to exit its forces from Iraq.

“The Iraqi government seeks to implement the approval regarding the expulsion of the United States’ forces, and the resistance front will follow the issue and realize it,” Bagheri said during a conference of commanders of police forces.

Pointing to assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the top commander said the Iranian armed forces gave a proper response and the Iraqi parliament approved a resolution to expel the U.S. forces, which is not a trivial matter.

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

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

The Iraqi Parliament also voted on January 5 to expel the U.S. troops from Iraq.

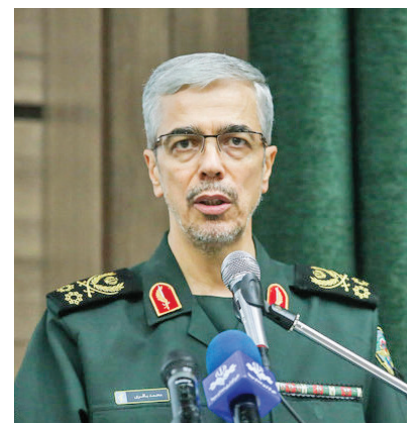
Hassan Danaeefar, the former Iranian ambassador to Iraq, has said that the United States has no choice other than exiting its forces from Iraq.

“The people of Iraq will not let the United States influence the country’s sovereignty, and Washington has no way but leaving Iraq,” he told ILNA in an interview published on April 11.

He noted that many of the U.S. forces are leaving bases in Iraq and the Iraqis’ demand is being fulfilled.

In an interview with the Tasnim news agency in January, Danaeefar said that it is essential that the U.S. leave Iraq now that the Iraqi parliament has voted to expel American forces from the country.

The Iraqi people have the experience of fighting the U.S. occupation, the former ambassador said, predicting the Iraqis will rise against U.S. forces if they refuse to leave the country.



“So, if the occupant does not respect the Iraqis’ approval, they [the Iraqis] will fight them,” he said.

He said if the U.S. refuses to leave, Iraq can file a complaint in international courts.

The U.S. invaded Iraq in March 2003 under the false claim that the country was hiding weapons of mass destruction. The invasion took place despite repeated confirmations by international bodies, including the UN’s International Atomic Energy Agency, that Iraq did not have any secret weapons program.

Majid Takht-Ravanchi, Iran’s ambassador to the United Nations, has said that the U.S. must leave the region, noting that the U.S. is unwelcome in the region.

“Iraq and the region are dissatisfied with the presence of the United States, and the United States must respect the Iraqi parliament’s approval to end the United States’ military presence,” IRNA quoted him as saying in an interview with Aljazeera in January.

He said the Iraqi parliament’s approval is the result of more than 17 years of the U.S. occupation of the country.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in January that the U.S. “corruptive presence” in the region must come to an end.

“This region does not accept the presence of the United States. The people in the region and the regional governments rising from the people do not accept this issue,” the Leader pointed out.

Iranian ambassador hails China for its help during battle against COVID-19

While some Western media outlets have been hyping up relations between China and Iran experiencing turbulence amid the coronavirus outbreak, the Iranian Ambassador to China told the Global Times that the friendly ties between the two countries will never be affected no matter how turbulent the international situation is, and that this bond has truly stood the test of time.

Ambassador Mohammad Keshavarzadeh told the Global Times in an exclusive interview that Iran and its healthcare system are now fighting a battle simultaneously on two fronts - against the coronavirus and U.S. sanctions, which have made it difficult for the country to purchase medical equipment to combat COVID-19.

The diplomat said that unlike other countries, their medical workers have “suffered a lot as they are targeted by the campaign of economic terrorism perpetrated by the U.S. government.”

The U.S. sanctions have made it impossible for Iranians to import medicine and medical equipment, and even if foreign suppliers are found and the required items can be purchased, myriad U.S. shipping, insurance, financial and banking sanctions make such trade inviable, said the ambassador.

Keshavarzadeh stressed that Iran and China “have always been successful in fostering friendly relations, especially during the last one and a half years as we have witnessed flourishing cooperation in various fields resulting in fruitful and tangible outcomes.”

“It goes without saying that both countries are managing their relations based on win-win cooperation, acknowledgement of their sovereign rights and independence and mutual respect for each other’s different social and governance systems,” he said.

To help Iran combat the pandemic, China earlier sent medical aid teams to the country, making it the first overseas destination to which China sent medical teams to since the coronavirus outbreak.

The ambassador said they have received reports on the consultation meetings in which members of these medical teams



have participated, and their expertise has been welcomed and carefully noted by the Iranian side.

Responding to the question of the transparency of China’s coronavirus statistics, the ambassador said that they have benefited from the first-hand information disseminated regularly and in a timely manner by the relevant authorities and adjusted their way of life based on the recommendations and guidelines of the Chinese government.

“This truly demonstrates our trust in the efforts and difficult job carried out [by the Chinese government] for containment of the spread [of the virus],” he said.

“High-ranking officials from the two countries are keeping close contact and this fact has never been undermined even during such a challenging time, and the striking coordination and prevalence of the sense of solidarity and integrity have brought about distinct scenes of strong bonds and friendship between the two nations, which will sweep away any hurdle and obstacle,” he added.

The ambassador also expressed his “sincere gratitude and heartfelt thanks” to the Chinese government and Chinese people for their help and donations of medical and health care equipment.

“I am confident that a brighter future for our relations is over the horizon through our joint efforts to conquer COVID-19,” he said.

(Source: Global Times)

Iran insists it is ready for dialogue with Persian Gulf states

Foreign Ministry welcomes improvement of cooperation between Iran and Persian Gulf states in face of coronavirus

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — On Monday, Iran reiterated it is ready to hold talks with regional countries, especially the Persian Gulf countries, without any preconditions.

During a press conference, Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi welcomed the improvement of regional cooperation between Iran and the Persian Gulf littoral states in the face of the coronavirus outbreak.

Mousavi said the coronavirus has resulted in a series of positive developments and opened up new opportunities among regional countries.

He added that the outbreak, apart from its negative impact, has brought the stances and priorities of the countries closer together to some extent.

"We have voiced our readiness for talks with our friends in the region without preconditions," he said, emphasizing that Iran is prepared for interaction with the Persian Gulf littoral states.

Mousavi also pointed out that Iran has already proposed a regional peace initiative, known as the Hormuz Peace



Endeavor (HOPE), and is still waiting to see readiness on part of the Persian Gulf countries for cooperation.

Addressing the UN General Assembly late in September 2019, President Has-

san Rouhani unveiled HOPE as Iran's new initiative for promoting peace and security in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.

"The goal of the Coalition for Hope is

to promote peace, stability, progress and welfare for all the residents of the Strait of Hormuz region, and to enhance mutual understanding and peaceful and friendly relations amongst them," Rouhani told the delegates at the UN.

"This initiative includes various venues for cooperation, such as the collective supply of energy security, freedom of navigation and free transfer of oil and other resources to and from the Strait of Hormuz and beyond," he added.

"The Coalition for Hope is based on important principles such as compliance with the goals and principles of the United Nations, mutual respect, equal footing, dialog and understanding, respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, inviolability of international borders, the peaceful settlement of all disputes, and more importantly, the two fundamental principles of non-aggression and non-interference in the domestic affairs of each other. The presence of the United Nations is necessary for the creation of an international umbrella in support of the Coalition for Hope," Rouhani underlined.

Police forces confiscate 116 kg of narcotics in Yazd



POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Police forces Yazd Province have confiscated 116 kilograms of narcotics, says a provincial police commander, according to Mehr.

The police forces identified and seized the illegal cargo of narcotics in a residential area in Yazd Province, Colonel Mohammad Reza Hashemifar said on Sunday.

The cargo included 91 kg of opium and 25 kg of hashish which were seized in the operation, Hashemifar said.

Three smugglers have also been arrested, he added. Iran, which has a 900-kilometer border with Afghanistan, has been used as the main conduit for smuggling Afghan drugs to narcotics kingpins across the world, especially Europe.

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

the past decades.

Iran has spent more than \$700 million on sealing its borders and preventing the transit of narcotics destined for European, Arab and Central Asian countries.

The war on drug has claimed the lives of nearly 4,000 Iranian police forces over the past four decades.

In late January, Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organizations, said Iran seized totally 814,477 kilograms of different types of narcotic drugs in 2019.

Poppy cultivation started rising in Afghanistan since the U.S. invaded the country after the September 11 attacks.

Speaking at the Wilson Center in Washington, DC, in November 2018, John F. Sopko, special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, said the counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan "has just been a total failure."

Iran's special envoy meets top Afghan officials, discussing pressing issues

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Mohammad Ebrahim Taherianfard, the special envoy of Iran's foreign minister for Afghanistan, on Sunday exchanged views with senior Afghan officials about the campaign against the deadly coronavirus and bilateral issues.

Afghanistan has reported just under 1,000 cases of the virus. But those numbers certainly underestimate the spread, officials say, since testing has been extremely limited. The country has conducted only about 7,000 tests. According to the New York Times, at least 40 staff members in Afghanistan's presidential palace have tested positive for Covid-19, Afghan officials said on Sunday.

Taherianfard met separately with President Ashraf Ghani, National Security Adviser Hamdollah Moheb and supervisor of Foreign Ministry Mohammad Hanif Atmar.

During the meetings, he touched upon bilateral relations and approaches applied



by the two nations to battle coronavirus, Fars reported on Monday.

In relevant remarks on April 12, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad

Zarif stressed the importance of unity among different Afghan parties for the promotion of peace and stability in the country.

Zarif made the remarks in a phone talk with Hanif Atmar. The two sides discussed bilateral ties and cooperation.

Earlier, he had phone conversations with incumbent President Ghani and incumbent Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah.

During the phone conversations, Zarif stressed the important status of political structures based on the constitution of the country with respect to peace and national reconciliation, saying that "Iran supports peace process in Afghanistan with participation of all Afghan political groups."

Iran's top diplomat also reviewed disputes which followed the recent presidential elections in Afghanistan.

The two sides also discussed peace and intra-Afghan negotiations as well as mutual cooperation on combating coronavirus.

Ghani and Abdullah also appreciated Iran's supports and its readiness for helping resolve Afghanistan's political problems.

End of federalism!?

U.S. policies can't stand the test of time forever

➔ notably against sovereign nations the U.S. doesn't control like China, Russia and Iran.

COVID-19 is being used by the Trump regime and its Western counterparts to inflict greater hardships on ordinary people — notably greater poverty, unemployment, underemployment and erosion of human and civil rights.

It's also a plot aimed at China to thwart its economic, financial, industrial, and technological development — aiming to prevent the country from becoming the dominant economic and political power in the years ahead.

I believe the scheme will fail. China, Russia, Iran and other countries are rising, the U.S. declining.

Because of this reality, dark forces in the U.S. are trying anything to retain dominance they're losing to other countries. It hasn't worked and I doubt will ahead.

By federalism, I think you mean neoliberalism and power concentrated in Washington.

U.S. dominance isn't over but it's fading, why I believe the 21st century already is multi-polar, no single country to dominate all others, notably not like in the 20th century.

Imperial USA will crumble like all other empires in history. It's just a matter of time, its counterproductive policies hastening its decline.

Whether or not countries remain intact or separate into smaller nation-states, local autonomy will gain strength in countries where central authorities inflict harm on ordinary people like the U.S. and other Western countries operate.

China, Russia, Iran and other countries are rising, the U.S. declining.

History always evolves over time. U.S. policies are so harmful to most people everywhere that its agenda can't stand the test of time forever.

■ We've seen a similar mindset among the people of other Western nations. Brexit could be underlined as an example. The Scottish independence referendum, recent events in Spanish Catalonia and so on. Is Western post-world war II civilization disintegrating? Is this a new rationality that breaks Western civilization into a new mental and geographical order?

A: History always evolves over time. U.S. policies are so harmful to most people everywhere that its agenda can't stand the test of time forever.

What can't go on forever, won't. The U.S. is its own worst enemy. Its rage to dominate is self-destructive.

It's just a matter of when its dominance ends. It's coming.

■ What changes the central government may make to keep states united?

A: The U.S. uses fear-mongering, war-wongering, and establishment media propaganda to promote its agenda, including control over its 50 states.

The U.S. 10th Amendment affords to the 50 states and their people powers not delegated to Washington by the Constitution.

It gives the states great latitude on policies they can institute, constraining them as well.

In theory, some of the states could break away and es-

tablish a separate nation.

California's GDP ranks it as the world's 5th largest economy. If federal power inflicts unacceptable harm on ordinary people for an extended duration, it's possible that some states could break away similar to how empires lose control over nations that declare their independence.

■ Many theorists believe that Trump's policies, overall, will bring an end to the American empire. What's your take on this theory? Can the social rupture in the U.S. accelerate this process?

A: U.S. presidents are figureheads, agendas set for them.

A cardboard cutout could sit in the Oval Office as president and it wouldn't change a thing. Every U.S. president since at least the 1980s has been worse than their predecessors based on their foreign and domestic policies.

I expect whoever succeeds Trump in 2021 or 2025 will be worse than him, a dismal prospect. At this time, he exceeds the villainy of all his predecessors in both domestic and foreign policies. He's also a bombastic, self-centered narcissistic geopolitical know-nothing and failed businessman who went bankrupt at least four times.

Because of the above explained long-term trend, the U.S. is growing weaker on the world stage. It's hastening its own decline which I believe is inevitable.

The wildcard is possible WW III by accident or design.

If launched and waged with nuclear weapons, we're all doomed.

Imperial USA will crumble like all other empires in history.

Army ready to counter biological threats: general

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Brigadier General Ahmadreza Pourdastan, head of the Iranian Army's Strategic Studies, has said the Army is ready to counter biological threats posed against Iran.

"We had developed this capacity in ourselves and today we have materialized this capacity in practice," Pourdastan said, ISNA reported on Sunday.



He said the Army has gained experience to fight biological wars since the outbreak of the coronavirus in Iran.

He also said Iran is ready to share its experience with other countries. "Our experience says we should produce some other equipment and boost this capability," the general added.

The coronavirus, also called COVID-19, initially emerged in China late last year and soon spread across the world.

In Iran, the outbreak has so far infected 83,505 people of whom 5,209 have lost their lives. Some 59,273 people have also recovered.

Head of the Health Department of the General Staff of the Armed Forces said earlier this month that Iran is investigating whether the spread of coronavirus in the country was part of a biological warfare.

"Every country is considering this matter to see the likelihood of any biological warfare behind the issue," General Hassan Araghizadeh said in an interview with Mehr.

"The Iranian scientific centers are also conducting researches in this regard; however, a definite decision needs more time and effort," Araghizadeh pointed out.

The Iranian armed forces have been playing an active role in combatting the new pandemic.

Last month, the commander of Civil Defense Organization said the novel coronavirus has many characteristics of a biological warfare.

"It cannot be said with certainty whether coronavirus is a biological warfare, but it has many characteristics of a biological warfare," Brigadier General Gholam Reza Jalali said.

Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami has also said Iran is currently engaged in biological warfare and will definitely win the war.

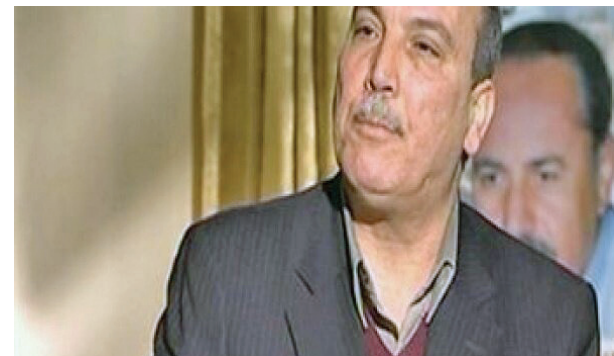
"Today, we are involved in biological warfare, but the country is resisting," Salami said.

"The enemy is still focusing on economic pressure and psychological operation (against Iran) and uses every opportunity to toughen the conditions for our people. The enemy is seeking to shape the regional developments in its own favor," the IRGC commander further warned in comments earlier this month.

Palestinian figure hails Zarif's trip to Syria

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — A member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) has termed Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's visit to Syria as a manifestation of the Islamic Republic's determination to address regional issues.

"Although such visits are common between the Syrian and Iranian officials, Mr. Zarif's current visit amid the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic shows the Islamic Republic is constantly monitoring the regional developments and is also the sign of Tehran's resolve to address such issues under any circumstances," Maher al-Taheri said in an interview with Mehr published on Monday.



Al-Taheri described the trip as an "important move" within the framework of Tehran-Damascus "strategic ties".

Zarif visited Damascus on Monday to meet Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Foreign Minister Walid Mualllem.

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

According to al-Taheri, visiting Damascus at a time when the Syrian Army has made considerable achievements in the fight against the terrorists in Idlib, has given more significance to the top diplomat's visit.

"After nine years of war and crisis in Syria, the constructive role of the Islamic Republic in the Middle East's political processes and regional nations' independence has become clear to all," he remarked.

He also referred to the political deadlock in Israel, saying, "During the regime's political life, this is the first time they have been entangled with such domestic challenges, and they have not been able to walk through it with a solution yet."

Al-Taheri stressed that the Palestinian people, despite the strict sieges and the coronavirus situation, will continue their fight and resistance against the occupiers.

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 as well.

Shares turn cautious as U.S. crude gets crushed

Caution recaptured world markets on Monday as another drubbing for U.S. crude oil futures kicked off a week of data and earnings that will drive home the damage being inflicted by global coronavirus lockdowns.

European stocks made a choppy start, with the pan-regional EUROSTOXX 600 swinging in and out of positive territory in early trading. London's FTSE .FTSE and Germany's DAX .GDAXI were up 0.2%.

E-Mini futures for the S&P 500 EScl slipped nearly 0.5% too, after Wall Street enjoyed a strong end to last week, though it barely seemed to reflect the latest violent turbulence in oil markets.

With some global storage facilities nearly full to capacity, the 'front-month' May benchmark U.S. crude contract CLc1 was down \$3.40, or 18%, to \$14.87 a barrel, having at one point dived as low as \$14.47 a barrel - the lowest since March 1999.

European benchmark Brent was down a more manageable 3% LCOc1 at \$27.30 a barrel, but it all points to the same problem - too much supply, not enough demand.



“For oil there is a bit of a technical story (with storage), but still, if energy consumption is down 30% and OPEC reduces supply by 10%, there is still a large gap,” said Rabobank’s head of macro strategy Elwin de Groot.

The equity and other major markets however were still trading largely on the news flow of the European virus numbers gradually coming down, he added.

MSCI’s broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan .MIAPJ0000PUS eased 0.2% in slow trade, pausing after five straight weeks of gains.

Japan’s Nikkei .N225 fell 1.2%, but Chinese shares .SSEC edged up 0.4% as a benchmark lending rate was lowered to shore up the coronavirus-hit economy after it contracted for the first time in decades.

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Sunday that Republicans were “close” to getting a deal with Democrats on a support package for small business.

The United States has by far the world’s largest number of confirmed coronavirus cases, with more than 750,000 infections and over 40,500 deaths, according to a Reuters tally.

The S&P 500 .SPX has still rallied 30% from its March low, thanks in part to the extreme easing steps taken by the Federal Reserve. The Fed has bought nearly \$1.3 trillion of Treasuries alone, and many billions of non-sovereign debt it would historically have never gone near.

“The question is, are markets underestimating this in terms of the long-term impact on the economy. There will be damage and there will be damage in terms of the consumer psyche,” Rabobank’s de Groot said.

That damage should become all more clear this week with April global purchasing manager data - seen as some of the most forward-looking economic gauges - being published on Thursday.

A taster on Monday was that Japan reported its exports down almost 12% in March from a year earlier, with shipments to the United States down over 16%.

■ Testing times

In the currency markets, the dollar gained broadly as the concerns about global growth boosted the safe-haven appeal of the greenback and weighed on risk-oriented currencies such as the Australian dollar.

Against a basket of its rivals =USD, the U.S. currency rose 0.2% to 99.90 and edged closer towards a three-year high of near 103 hit last month.

It gained about 0.1% on the euro and British pound and 0.2% on the Japanese yen. It last bought 107.80 yen JPY=EBS and traded at \$1.2478 per pound GBP= and \$1.0870 per euro EUR=EBS.

The dollar’s gains were despite the latest trader positioning data showing investors have been ramping up their short positions or bets against the greenback.

Bond markets also suggested investors expected tough economic times ahead, with yields on U.S. 10-year Treasuries US10YT=RR steady at 0.63%, from 1.91% at the start of the year.

“We are dealing with scales of declining economic activity that nobody has seen before. The potential hit to GDP in the second quarter this year will probably far exceed what we saw at the worst point of the financial crisis,” Capital Group’s economist Robert Lind said in a note.

Italy’s borrowing costs rose meanwhile, heading back towards last week’s one-month highs, reflecting unease before a European Union summit later this week over how to tackle the economic fallout of the coronavirus crisis.

Selling pressure on Italian government bonds has returned in the past week, undoing some of the benefits of the European Central Bank’s massive bond-buying scheme, after euro zone politicians failed to agree to common debt issuance as a means of addressing the crisis.

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte used an interview with Germany’s Sueddeutsche Zeitung on Monday to repeat calls for the EU to issue common euro zone bonds to demonstrate the bloc’s solidarity in the face of the pandemic.

“Thursday is the key day this week with the EU leaders summit a potentially big event for the future of Europe as they discuss how close the region can get to joint issuance in the near future,” said Deutsche Bank strategist Jim Reid.

(Source: Reuters)

Over 146 idle small mines revived in a year

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Head **d e s k** of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA)’s Mining Committee says more than 146 idle small mines were revived by the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry in the past Iranian calendar year (March 2019-March 2020).

According to Bahram Shakouri, in addition to reviving and developing small-scale mines, 2,130 small mineral zones were also identified for them 364 projects were defined, IRNA reported.

“The continuation of this program could vitalize the small and medium-sized mines as the frontiers of a leap in the mining industry in the current year.

Back in March, the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) had announced that over 95 percent of the plan for reviving small mines across the country was realized in the first 11 months of the previous Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019-February 19, 2020).

Based on the mentioned plan, IMIDRO



was going to revive 150 idle small mines across the country in collaboration with

the Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry. Earlier in January, IMIDRO Head

IRICA to offer over \$1.4b of duty exemption for production line machinery

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Head **d e s k** Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) Mehdi Mir-Ashrafi announced that the IRICA has allocated 60 trillion rials (about \$1.41 billion) of facilities in the form of customs duty exemptions for renovation of the country’s production lines in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 20), Fars news agency reported.

According to Mir-Ashrafi, One of the IRICA’s measures that has been very effective in the promotion of domestic production is the granting of customs duty exemptions, and last year more than 45 trillion rials (about \$1.07 billion) of customs exemption was provided to producers to import production line machinery.

The program is going to be followed in the current year and manufacturers can import their necessary machinery and production lines benefiting from these facilities, he said.

Mentioning the IRICA’s duty revenues in the past Iranian calendar year, the official



noted that IRICA had forecasted 160 trillion rials (about \$3.8 billion) of revenues for the previous year which was completely realized.

Since the U.S. re-imposition of sanctions against Iran’s economy, Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration has been taking various measures to facilitate customs process both for exports and imports of the commodities to reduce the effect of sanctions.

In late December 2019, IRICA Deputy Head Mehrdad Jamal Orounqi announced a new bylaw for facilitating imports in line with combatting the sanctions.

IMF should put politics aside, do its professional duties: Iran’s central banker

1 → We have provided all the information and the data that the IMF requires to evaluate our eligibility. This information and the latest economic data are all available in the Central Bank of Iran’s website. I have also written a letter to the IMF’s managing director and expressed our appreciation for what the IMF is doing around the world and have urged her to take our request to the Board of the IMF soon.

■ The U.S. has said it will block the application and is opposed to the request. What’s your response to the U.S. government position?

A: We have not asked the United States for help! We have asked the IMF for support: an international, apolitical institution affiliated with the UN, and for which, we were one of the founder members and contributors over the past 75 years. The United States is a member of the IMF as all 190 or so other countries. The last time I checked, the United States is not running the IMF, but it’s management and the Board of Governors who oversee the work and ensure that the IMF delivers on its mandate. But I would like to repeat that all UN organizations, say the IMF or WHO, should stay away from politics and deliver on their institutional mandates.

■ The U.S. argues that Iran has enough of its own resources, that it has plenty of assets that it can use within the country to help with the coronavirus outbreak and it says that Iran won’t use the money for humanitarian needs, but for other activities such as regional policies, what’s your response to that?

A: Let me answer your question by looking at the conditions for the RFI’s eligibility and then address your concerns. According to the IMF, the RFI is designed to help a member country with immediate financial support once the country is faced with an exogenous shock that opens a financing gap in the balance of payments. The IMF then would like to ensure that the country is able to repay the fund and the country’s public debt is sustainable, these are all good. In our case, we were faced with a negative exogenous shock when the coronavirus hit us. Our estimates show that to contain the spread of the virus, strengthen our healthcare system and protect the frontline personnel in hospitals and elsewhere, and help our people who have lost their jobs, we would need an additional 10 billion euros in our external financing, this is about 2% of our GDP. This is an established fact and we have



shared this information with the IMF. Obviously, we have more than enough foreign reserves to cover this shortfall, but the unilateral U.S. sanctions has limited our access. If they want us to use our own resources rather than IMF’s facilities, why don’t they listen to many voices in the U.S. congress and ease the sanctions?

On the second point, we have enough reserves to repay the IMF, through channels that we have already used to pay our contributions to the IMF during these many years. And lastly, our public debt is also well below the threshold that is perceived to be sustainable for emerging economies. These are facts and I am confident that the IMF staff knows well.

In terms of how we will use this loan, I have already communicated to the IMF’s management, that the INSTEX and SHTA are readily available vehicles. These are specifically designed to help us import food and medicine. These channels have proper safeguarding mechanisms in place to address all concerns, if any. Besides, this is a good chance to activate these channels as many European countries such as France, Germany, Italy and Spain are trying to activate.

■ How realistic are you about getting the loan? What will you do if the IMF rejects the request?

A: I am very hopeful they will support the people of Iran during this extraordinary crisis that has affected every country in the world, and we included. We have lost so many lives, as the Americans and Europeans have lost, and my thoughts and prayers goes with them. I have been informed that the European countries are supportive of our efforts, I am sure that other countries around the world would also support

Iran’s request. Once again, I call on IMF’s management and Ms. Georgieva personally, to take this matter seriously. We want IMF management to take our RFI request to its Executive Board; this is the only thing we want. Ms. Georgieva should put the politics aside and discharge her professional duties. The IMF is very much similar to a firefighter in the neighborhood, once a house is on fire, it should come to the rescue, and not look for the biggest homeowner in the neighborhood and ask for his permission to act. The time to act is now, history will judge us all and that judgment will not be as easy as we might think.

■ You mention that Iran has foreign reserves to cover the shortfall. Is that money that is frozen overseas because of sanctions? Are you calling on the U.S. to allow those reserves to be diverted into the Swiss payment vehicle and INSTEX?

A: Yes, as you know well, Central Bank reserves are under U.S. sanctions overseas, which is illegal and unilateral, and I want to be clear about this. What we are saying is that the sanctions should be lifted altogether, however, sadly, there are actors in the U.S. government that have little regards for international law and order. The U.S. treasury has declared the Swiss channel as a vehicle for humanitarian purposes, the INSTEX is also designed for importing food and medicine, if the U.S. is honest about its claims, we should also be able to use our own reserves in these two channels.

■ How much money does Iran have frozen in overseas accounts because of sanctions?

A: We publish our reserves figures in our balance of payments accounts, the numbers are in line with what we had over the past few years.

■ What is the breakdown of your IMF request? How much is it money that Iran has paid into the Fund and how much is a loan?

A: There is no such breakdown. The IMF is like a credit union, member countries contribute to it over the years in a hope that the IMF would provide them and other countries loans when they need. In line with IMF regulations and access limits, we have requested about 3.6 billion SDR [Standard Drawing Rights] in the form of RFI; this equals to 100% of our quota at the IMF, and it should come from the pool of resources that the IMF has put together to fight the recent coronavirus crisis.



on March 19) witnessed a very fruitful performance for the country’s stock market.

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

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

China economy enters vicious circle as business cuts crush demand

Lured by thriving tourism in his hometown Chongqing in Southwestern China, Li Yi last year used a big chunk of his savings to start a bed-and-breakfast business. But two weeks after his venture kicked off, Li’s BnB overlooking the Yangtze River was hit by the coronavirus outbreak, which has killed nearly 4,700 people in China and infected tens of thousands more.

After no income for two straight months, Li was more than excited to reopen his business in April -- but he soon realized another

challenge lies ahead.

“I knew the demand could be bad, but I didn’t expect it to be this bad,” Li said. In the first two weeks of this month only two out of 11 rooms were occupied, even with Li offering a 70% discount. The rooms were fully booked before the coronavirus crisis.

“People in China are still afraid of going out,” lamented the 38-year-old, who has let go of one cleaner and more than halved another’s salary to the minimum 1,350 yuan (\$190). “I

think we will see a comeback in tourism next year in the best-case scenario.”

Li is hardly alone. Even though life is returning to normal in most Chinese cities, the suffering for hotels, restaurants, factories and many others is far from over, with many already going out of business.

Owners like Li have tried to hang on by cutting salaries and laying off workers, but economists worry those self-rescue measures will create a vicious circle: As Chinese workers

get paid less, they will spend less, weighing on the prospects for retailers, hoteliers, and other industries.

At stake is Beijing’s hopes of reviving the economy through domestic demand -- which had started to become more important as the government attempted to rebalance the economy. Consumption contributed to nearly 60% of China’s growth last year as traditional engines such as investment and exports lost steam.

(Source: Nikkei)

Petropars to start SP phase 11 drilling operations by late June

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — The Managing Director of Petropars Company, which is in charge of developing the phase 11 of Iran's South Pars gas field, said drilling operations over five wells in the offshore phase would begin by late June.

"Due to the coronavirus outbreak in the past few months loading of jacket to South Pars Phase 11 project was delayed but the operations are going to be started by early summer (spring ends on June 20)," Hamidreza Masoudi told Shana.

The official noted that the construction of the jacket was completed and preparations were under way for loading it.

Earlier this month, the managing director of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), which is in charge of developing the South Pars gas field, announced that the phase 11 jacket was going to be installed in the Persian Gulf in near future.

"The Phase 11 jacket will be installed in the early months of the current [Iranian



calendar] year (started March 20, 2020)," Mohammad Meshkinfam said.

Petropars is developing the phase 11 of South Pars which was initially intended to be

developed by a consortium of Total, CNPC and Petropars, but the first two companies pulled out of the project after imposition of sanctions on Iran by the U.S.

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

The field is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate. The field is divided into 24 standard phases.

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

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

National power grid expanded by 15,000 km in a year

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — The length of Iran's electricity network was expanded by more than 15,000 kilometers (km) in the previous Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended on March 19), IRNA reported, citing the portal of the Energy Ministry.

As reported, the country's 63-400 kilovolt transmission and distribution network will be expanded by 934 km, while the length of the low- and medium-voltage distribution networks increased by 14,700 km.

According to the data released by Iran's Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution Management Company, known as Tavanir, in the past year, the capacity of power stations in the transmission sector rose 7,645 megawatt-ampere (MVA), while in the power distribution stations the capacity

increased by 3,280 MVA, and finally regarding the capacity of substations the increase was reported to be 3,183 MVA.

The nominal capacity of electricity generation at Iranian power plants has reached 85,500 megawatts [85.5 gigawatts (GW)].

In early March this year, Tavanir's Operator for Rural Electricity Expansion Program Ali Chehel-Amirani announced that over 1,824 households in 140 villages across Iran have been provided with electricity from the national electricity network since the beginning of the past Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019).

According to the official, the country's rural network is comprised of 283,000 kilometers of high-voltage network as well as 86 kilometers of low-voltage networks.



Some 188 new transformers with a total capacity of 6,410 kVA have also been installed across the national power network to supply electricity to rural areas, the official said.

Oil falls on concern over storage and earnings

Oil prices fell on Monday, with a U.S. crude futures contract hitting its lowest level since 1999, depressed by concern that U.S. crude storage will soon be full while companies prepare to report the worst quarterly earnings since the financial crisis.

Brent was down \$1.12, or 4 percent, at \$26.96 a barrel by 1008 GMT.

The front-month May WTI contract fell \$4.79, or 26.2 percent, to its lowest since March 1999 at \$13.48, though the sell-off was exaggerated by the contract's imminent expiry.

"The May contract is set to expire tomorrow and the bulk of the open interest and volume is already in the June contract," said ING's head of commodities strategy, Warren Patterson.

The June contract, which is more actively

traded, fell \$2.18, or 8.7 percent, to \$22.85 a barrel.

The volume of oil held in U.S. storage, especially at the Cushing delivery point for the U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) contract in Oklahoma, is rising as refiners throttle back activity in the face of weak demand.

"As production continues relatively unscathed, storage is filling up by the day. The world is using less and less oil and producers now feel how this translates in prices," said Rystad's head of oil markets, Bjornar Tonhaugen.

Oil in floating tanker storage is also estimated at a record 160 million barrels.

The mood in other markets was also cautious as the first-quarter earnings season gets

underway. Analysts expect STOXX 600 companies to post a 22 percent plunge in earnings, which would represent the steepest decline since the 2008 global financial meltdown, IBES data from Refinitiv showed.

The German economy is in severe recession and recovery is unlikely to be quick, given that many coronavirus-related restrictions could stay in place for an extended period, the Bundesbank said on Monday.

Japanese exports declined the most in nearly four years in March as U.S.-bound shipments, including cars, fell at their fastest rate since 2011.

Bearish sentiment was reinforced by lowered oil consumption forecasts from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting

Countries (OPEC) and the International Energy Agency (IEA).

The oil industry has been reducing output swiftly to counter an estimated 30 percent decline in fuel demand worldwide.

Production cuts from OPEC and allies including Russia will take effect from May. The OPEC+ group has agreed to reduce output by 9.7 million bpd.

Officials in Saudi Arabia have forecast global supply cuts from oil producers could total nearly 20 million bpd, but that includes voluntary cuts from the likes of the United States and Canada, which are unable to turn production on or off in the way that most OPEC nations can.

(Source: Reuters)

China doubled crude oil storage inflows during coronavirus demand hit

China doesn't release official data on flows into strategic and commercial stockpiles, but an estimate can be made by subtracting the amount of crude processed by refineries from the total volume of oil available from both imports and domestic output.

China's crude oil imports were 10.2 million barrels per day (bpd) in the first three months of the year, according to customs data.

Domestic output was 3.74 million bpd, giving a total of available crude for the quarter of 13.94 million bpd.

Refinery throughput for the first quarter was the equivalent of 11.96 million bpd, meaning of the total available crude 1.98 million bpd wasn't processed by refineries.

Doing the same calculations for the first quarter of last year shows imports of 9.83 million bpd, domestic production of 3.84 million bpd, and refinery processing of 12.6 million bpd, leaving a gap of 1.07 million bpd.

The numbers suggest that China almost doubled the rate at which it put oil into storage in the first quarter of 2020, in order to deal with the loss of consumption as the coronavirus caused much of the country to be placed in some form of lockdown.

It's also worth noting that China's exports of refined fuels also rose in the first quarter of this year, reaching 18.02 million tons, up 9.7 percent from the same period last year.

A breakdown by type of refined product isn't yet available, but it's likely the bulk of the increase was in gasoline and in middle distillates such as jet kerosene and diesel.



Overall, the picture that emerges from the first quarter is that China decided to increase crude storage flows rather than cut back on imports.

The other factor in dealing with the loss of demand from the coronavirus was that refinery throughput did drop and exports of refined fuels increased, but not by huge margins.

■ China's unique circumstances

However, rather than being a template for the rest of the world as it battles to contain the coronavirus, China is likely to be something of an outlier.

Other major crude importing countries lack the ability to simply divert oil into storage on the scale that China can, meaning they will have to lower the amount of crude being

imported.

Even countries with large commercial and strategic storages, such as the United States, will find that the volume of crude available is so much that it will overwhelm available tank space within weeks, rather than months.

China's ability to double storage flows to almost 2 million bpd over an entire quarter makes it unique, not a model.

To put China's storage flows in perspective, at about 2 million bpd they are 25 percent higher than the total crude consumption of the United Kingdom, the world's sixth-largest economy.

It's also likely that China will continue to suck up crude oil for its stockpiles, especially given the collapse in prices since the coronavirus caused much of the developed world to put their economies into some form of lockdown.

China is on track to import at least 9.35 million bpd of seaborne crude in April, up from 8.8 million bpd in March, according to Refinitiv vessel-tracking data, filtered to show only cargoes already discharged, awaiting discharge or underway and due to offload prior to the end of the month.

Seaborne imports exclude pipeline volumes from Russia and central Asia, which were around 843,000 bpd in March.

China's appetite for imported crude for storage is probably one of the few bright spots for the embattled oil industry currently, although by itself it's nowhere near enough to compensate for the loss of an estimated 30 million bpd of global consumption.

(Source: Reuters)

OPEC's no.3 scrambles for lifeline as oil income tanks

Even before the current spate of Saudi-led lunacy in the shape of the oil price war with the two biggest oil producers in the world loomed into view, Kuwait's 2020/21 budget projected a KWD 9.2 billion (\$30 billion) deficit. This will be the sixth year of enormous deficits for the country due to initially production curbs due to the OPEC+ deals and then to plummeting oil prices thanks to the Saudis. Kuwait's Finance Minister, Mariam al-Aqeel, underlined at that point that the budget breakeven price was \$81 per barrel of Brent, but now of course it is much higher, in keeping with all other OPEC members that followed Saudi Arabia into the ranks of the intellectually bereft.

Al-Aqeel added that the government was likely to try to fill the gap from the state reserve fund to finance the deficit because the National Assembly has so far refused to approve a

public debt law that would raise the ceiling on maximum public debt to KWD25 billion dinars. In short, Kuwait, like all of Saudi Arabia's followers, is in deep trouble and needs every source of revenue it can get, beginning with new oil exports from the Partitioned Neutral Zone (PNZ) that it shares with Saudi.

In this context, Kuwait's Oil Ministry announced last week that the first shipment of Al Khafji crude oil from joint operations in the PNZ has been exported, and a tanker carrying two million barrels of crude oil is headed to Asia. This shipment comes some five years after the Saudis closed the joint operations in the PNZ for the official reason that the site was not compliant with new environmental air emission standards issued by Saudi Arabia's Presidency of Meteorology and Environment Authority. According to this 'august' agency, a

gas leak had sprung in one of its 15 platforms (in addition to producing around 280,000-300,000 barrels per day [bpd] of crude just before its closure the site also produced around 125 million standard cubic feet per day of associated gases). The real reason was that Saudi wanted to show its neighbour who was boss as Kuwait had been increasing its competition to Saudi Arabia in the key Asian export markets at that point to the degree that it was selling oil to buyers in Asia at the widest discount to the comparable Saudi grade for 10 years.

Additionally, Kuwait had been increasing the difficulty for Saudi Arabian Chevron (SAC) in obtaining work permits to operate in the Zone, jeopardising SAC's ability to move ahead with its full-field steam injection project in Wafra that was intended to boost output of heavy oil there by more than 80,000 bpd. When Saudi

started talking again about levels of oil production and capacity that it has never produced or sustained, respectively, then Saudi's need to find all the oil it could finally allowed for the re-opening of the PNZ for Kuwait.

Kuwait's big budget deficits began in the very year that Saudi closed Khafji – in 2014 – as it effectively wiped out its spare capacity in one fell swoop. Additionally, the closure made it all the more difficult for Kuwait to achieve its cornerstone economic plan ('Project Kuwait') of increasing crude oil and condensate production to four million bpd by the end of this year, up from just over three million bpd currently. These production targets included the expansion of PNZ production, which at minimum was designated to produce 350,000 bpd this year.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Bailing out the oil industry brings a fate worse than death

Whenever things went wrong growing up, my dad would tell me, "What doesn't kill you only makes you stronger." Dying was supposed to be the worst-case scenario. He never mentioned zombies. But that's what a bailout for the oil industry would create: zombie companies that can't earn the cost of staying in business, kept afloat with taxpayer dollars.

The oil patch in the US has been hit by a double whammy. The Saudi-Russian fight for market share helped drop the price of West Texas Intermediate, the American benchmark, to just above \$20 a barrel. Then came coronavirus lockdowns, and an unprecedented collapse in demand for oil. While Easter Sunday's Opec+ deal should reduce the supply glut, it is dwarfed by demand problems: fell to around \$18 a barrel on Friday.



With storage facilities near full, there will soon be no place to put the oil. Drillers, producers and oilfield servicers will be forced to halt production and lay off workers. Washington is now in bailout mode. The Trump administration offered storage space in the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. The Energy department is developing a plan to pay producers to leave crude in the ground.

There are valid economic arguments for a bailout. Energy is an important driver of investment. The last time WTI dropped significantly, in 2015-16, capital expenditures contracted and the US fell into an industrial and manufacturing recession. Employment in the oil and gas sector fell by about one-third. Some say it contributed to the discontent that pushed Donald Trump to the presidency in 2016.

But the business model for many exploration and production companies was broken before oil prices fell. Fuelled by cheap credit, U.S. shale producers borrowed heavily to invest in drilling, causing the U.S. energy bond market to triple in size over the past decade. The focus has been on producing quantity to conquer market share and the flood of oil has yielded low returns for equity investors, as frackers reinvested windfalls and raised top executive pay. U.S. fracking pioneer Chesapeake Energy, for example, hasn't generated a single year of positive free cash flow in the past decade. As debts rose along with oil supplies, a shakeout was inevitable.

A bailout would throw good money after bad, propping up an industry desperately in need of productivity gains and consolidation. Instead, the industry should be left to adapt. According to analysts at Rystad Energy, shale producers should be able to cut costs by 16 percent this year, productivity gains that would not happen with government funding. High-cost or highly indebted small producers — and their infrastructure — should be taken over by larger, solvent companies. While that would result in bankruptcies and debt write-offs, it would reduce financing costs for those left standing. The industry would come out stronger and more profitable.

A backhanded industry argument for a bailout is that bankruptcies threaten investors and banks with big losses. That's the nature of capitalism. Investors take risks and are often rewarded with high returns. Sometimes investments go south and they have to absorb losses, but it's not a systemic risk. A compilation of annual disclosures by Bloomberg News shows Citigroup, Bank of America, Wells Fargo and JPMorgan are the largest U.S. bank energy lenders. Only about 1 to 3 percent of their portfolios are exposed to the industry. A series of defaults would hurt, but it would not alone bring down the big banks.

Of course the government should offer support for energy workers facing inevitable lay-offs, along with all the other Americans losing their jobs in the crisis. But while many companies closed by coronavirus were healthy businesses beforehand, many in the oil industry were already on a path to failure. This is no time to create zombies.

(Source: Financial Times)

Japanese-backed Australian LNG import project wins fresh NSW approval

A Japanese-backed consortium has won state approval for changes in its plan to import liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Port Kembla on Australia's east coast, allowing the terminal to bring in more gas during the southern hemisphere winter months.

Australian Industrial Energy (AIE) said on Monday that with the planning approval from the state of New South Wales (NSW) in hand, it would now focus on securing customers for the A\$250 million (\$159 million) terminal.

The project is backed by the world's biggest LNG buyer, Japan's JERA, as well as Japanese trading house Marubeni Corp and Australian mining billionaire Andrew Forrest's Squadron Energy.

Though vast resources elsewhere in the country make Australia the world's second-largest LNG exporter, dwindling sources in its southern, most populous states mean imports are required.

If AIE reaches a final investment decision this year, it could start importing LNG by 2022, nearly two years later than first hoped, with construction expected to take 14 to 16 months.

"This terminal will make the state of NSW more self-sufficient when it comes to energy and will create greater access to the global gas market," said Mike Young, the NSW planning department's energy, resources and compliance head.

AIE applied last year to modify its original plan in order to increase the terminal's permitted output and step up the number of LNG cargoes it can receive, giving AIE more flexibility to meet seasonal demand shifts to appeal to gas retailers like Origin Energy.

"The modification will allow increased volumes of gas to flow through the terminal, satisfying the market need for more gas during winter months," AIE said in a statement.

As of June last year, the project had lined up the country's no. 3 gas retailer, EnergyAustralia, as its first customer. It has also booked a floating storage and regasification unit and contractors to build wharf facilities.

AIE's Port Kembla import terminal is one of four projects aiming to bring gas into southeast Australia to fill a looming shortage.

(Source: Reuters)

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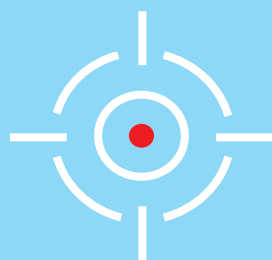
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Oil min. holds phone talk with Russia's energy min. on reducing oil output

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

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May the Neoliberalism save you!

1 → Let us first examine the impacts pertaining to the developing countries.

■ Developing Countries. The IMF's "Economic Medicine" and the Globalization of Poverty

Is the coronavirus crisis part of a broader macro-economic agenda?

First some historical background.

I spent more than ten years undertaking field research on the impacts of IMF-World Bank economic reforms in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

Since the early 1980s, "strong economic medicine" was imposed on indebted developing countries under what was called the "structural adjustment program" (SAP).

From 1992 to 1995, I undertook field research in India, Bangladesh and Vietnam and returned to Latin America to complete my study on Brazil. In all the countries I visited, including Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt, Morocco and The Philippines, I observed the same pattern of economic manipulation and political interference by the Washington-based institutions. In India, directly resulting from the IMF reforms, millions of people had been driven into starvation. In Vietnam – which constitutes among the world's most prosperous rice producing economies – local-level famines had erupted resulting directly from the lifting of price controls and the deregulation of the grain market. (Preface to the Second Edition of the Globalization of Poverty, 2003)

The hegemony of the dollar was imposed. With mounting dollar denominated debt, eventually in most developing countries the entire national monetary system was "dollarized".

Massive austerity measures were conducive to the collapse in real wages. Sweeping privatization programs were imposed. These deadly economic reforms – applied on behalf the creditors – invariably triggered economic collapse, poverty and mass unemployment.

In Nigeria starting in the 1980s, the entire public health system had been dismantled. Public hospitals were driven into bankruptcy. The medical doctors with whom I spoke described the infamous structural adjustment program (SAP) with a touch of humor:

"we've been sapped by the SAP", they said, our hospitals have literally been destroyed courtesy of the IMF-World Bank. From Structural Adjustment to Global Adjustment

Today, the mechanism for triggering poverty and economic collapse is fundamentally different and increasingly sophisticated.

The ongoing 2020 Economic Crisis is tied into the logic of the COVID-19 pandemic: No need for the IMF-World Bank to negotiate a structural adjustment loan with national governments.

What has occurred under the COVID-19 crisis is a "Global Adjustment" in the structure of the World economy. In one fell swoop this Global Adjustment (GA) triggers a Worldwide process of bankruptcy, unemployment, poverty and total despair.

How is it implemented? The lockdown is presented to national governments as the sole solution to resolve the COVID-19 pandemic. It becomes a political consensus, irrespective of the devastating economic and social consequences.

■ A Global People's Bailout for the Coming Financial Crash

No need to reflect or analyze the likely impacts. Corrupt national governments are pressured to comply.

The partial or complete closing down of a national economy is triggered through the enforcement of so-called "WHO guidelines" pertaining to the lockdown, as well as to trade, immigration and transportation restrictions, etc.

Powerful financial institutions and lobby groups including Wall Street, Big Pharma, the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation were involved in shaping the actions of the WHO pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The lockdown together with the curtailment of trade and air travel had set the stage. This closing down of national economies was undertaken Worldwide starting in the month of March, affecting simultaneously a large of number of countries in all major regions of the World. It is unprecedented in World history.

Why did leaders in high office let it happen? The consequences were obvious.

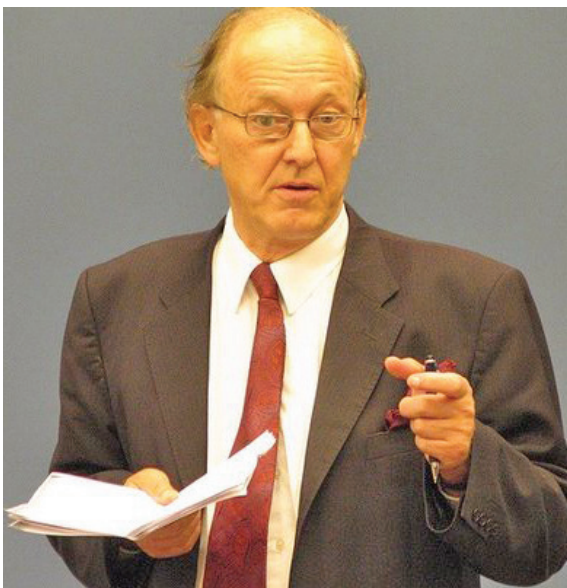
This closing down operation affects production and supply lines of goods and services, investment activities, exports and imports, wholesale and retail trade, consumer spending, the closing down of schools, colleges and universities, research institutions, etc.

In turn it leads almost immediately to mass unemployment, bankruptcies of small and medium sized enterprises, a collapse in purchasing power, widespread poverty and famine.

What is the underlying objective of this restructuring of the global economy? What are the consequences? Cui Bono?

* A massive concentration of wealth and corporate capital,

* the destabilization of small and middle sized enterprises in all major areas of economic activity including the services economy, agriculture and manufacturing.



* facilitates the subsequent corporate acquisition of bankrupt enterprises

* It derogates the rights of workers. It destabilizes labor markets.

* It creates mass unemployment

* It compresses wages (and labor costs) in the so-called high income "developed countries" as well as in the impoverished developing countries.

* It leads to an escalation of the external debt

* It facilitates subsequent privatization

Needless to say this Global Adjustment (GA) operation is far more detrimental than the country-level IMF-WB structural adjustment program (SAP).

It is neoliberalism to the nth degree.

In one fell swoop (in the course of the last months) the COVID-19 crisis has contributed to impoverishing a large sector of the World population.

And Guess who comes to the rescue? The IMF and the World Bank:

The IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva has casually acknowledged that the World economy has come to a standstill, without addressing the causes of economic collapse.

"The WHO is there to protect the Health of the People, The IMF is there to protect the health of the World economy" says Georgieva.

How does she intend to "protect the World economy"?

At the expense of the national economy?

What's her "magic solution"?

"We rely on \$1 trillion in overall lending capacity." (IMF M-D Georgieva, Press Conference in early March)

At first sight this appears to be "generous", a lot money. But ultimately it's what we might call "fictitious money", what it means is:

"We will lend you the money and with the money we lend you, you will pay us back".

The ultimate objective is to make the external (dollar denominated) debt go fly high.

The IMF is explicit. In one of its lending windows, the Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust, which applies to pandemics, generously,

"provides grants for debt relief to our poorest and most vulnerable members."

Nonsensical statement: it is there to replenish the coffers of the creditors, the money is allocated to debt servicing.

"For low-income countries and for emerging middle-income countries we have ... up to \$50 billion that does not require a full-fledged IMF program."

No conditions on how you spend the money. But this money increases the debt stock and requires reimbursement.

The countries are already in a straight-jacket. And the objective is that they comply with the demands of the creditors.

That's the neoliberal solution applied at a global level: No real economic recovery, more poverty and unemployment Worldwide. The "solution" becomes the "cause". It initiates a new process of indebtedness. It contributes to an escalation of the debt.

The more you lend, the more you squeeze the developing countries into political compliance. And ultimately that is the objective of the failing American Empire.

The unspoken truth is that this one trillion dollars ++ of the Bretton Woods institutions is intended to drive up the external debt.

In recent developments, the G20 Finance ministers decided to "put on hold", the repayment of debt servicing obligations of the World's poorest countries.

The cancellation of debt has not been envisaged. Quite the opposite. The strategy consists in building up the debt.

It is important that the governments of developing countries take a firm stance against the IMF-World Bank "rescue operation".

The Global Debt Crisis in the Developed Countries

An unprecedented fiscal crisis is unfolding at all levels of government. With high levels of unemployment, incoming tax revenues in developed countries are almost at a standstill. In the course of the last 2 months, national governments have become increasingly indebted.

In turn, Western governments as well as political parties are increasingly under the control of the creditors, who ultimately call the shots.

All levels of governments have been precipitated into a debt stranglehold. The debt cannot be repaid. In the US, the federal deficit "has increased by 26% to \$984 billion for fiscal 2019, highest in 7 years". And that is just the beginning.

In Western countries, a colossal expansion of the public debt has occurred. It is being used to finance the "bailouts", the "handouts" to corporations as well as "the social safety nets" to the unemployed.

The logic of the bailouts is in some regards similar to that of the 2008 economic crisis, but on a much larger scale. Ironically, in 2008, US banks were both the creditors of the US federal government as well as the lucky recipients: the rescue operation was funded by the banks with a view to "bailing out the banks". Sounds contradictory?

■ The Privatization of the State

This crisis will eventually precipitate the privatization of the state. Increasingly, national governments will be under the stranglehold of Big Money.

Crippled by mounting debts, what is at stake is the eventual de facto privatization of the entire state structure, in different countries, at all levels of government, under the surveillance of powerful financial interests. The fiction of "sovereign governments" serving the interests of the electors will nonetheless be maintained.

The first level of government up for privatization will be the municipalities (many of which are already partially or fully privatized, e.g. Detroit in 2013). America's billionaires will be enticed to buy up an entire city.

Several major cities are already on the verge of bankruptcy. (This is nothing new).

Is the city of Vancouver up for privatization?: "the mayor of Vancouver has already indicated that he feared the bankruptcy of his city." (Le Devoir, April 15, 2020)

In America's largest cities, people are simply unable to pay their taxes: The debt of New York City for fiscal 2019 is a staggering \$91.56 billion (FY 2019) an increase of 132% since FY 2000. In turn personal debts across America have skyrocketed.

"U.S. households collectively carry about \$1 trillion in credit card debt". No measures are being taken in the U.S. to reduce the interest rates on credit card debt.

■ The New World Order?

The lockdown impoverishes both the developed and developing countries and literally destroys national economies.

It destabilizes the entire economic landscape. It undermines social institutions including schools and universities. It spearheads small and medium sized enterprises into bankruptcy.

What kind of World awaits us?

A diabolical "New World Order" in the making as suggested by Henry Kissinger? (WSJ Opinion, April 3, 2020):

"The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order"

Recall Kissinger's historic 1974 statement: "Depopulation should be the highest priority of U.S. foreign policy towards the Third World." (1974 National Security Council Memorandum)

The political implications are far-reaching.

What kind of government will we have in the wake of the crisis?

Concluding Remarks

There is a lot of misunderstanding regarding the nature of this crisis.

Several progressive intellectuals are now saying that this crisis constitutes a defeat of neoliberalism. "It opens up a new beginning".

Some people see it as a "potential turning point", which opens up an opportunity to "build socialism" or "restore social democracy" in the wake of the lockdown.

The evidence amply confirms that neoliberalism has not been defeated. Quite the opposite.

Global capitalism has consolidated its clutch. Fear and panic prevail. The State is being privatized. The tendency is towards authoritarian forms of government.

These are the issues which we must address.

That historical opportunity to confront the power structures of global capitalism, –including the U.S.-NATO military apparatus – remains to be firmly established in wake of the lockdown.

Coronacracy in America

1 → General Motors Company, commonly referred to as General Motors (GM), is an American multinational corporation headquartered in Detroit that designs, manufactures, markets, and distributes vehicles and vehicle parts, and sells financial services, with global headquarters in Detroit's Renaissance Center. It was originally founded by William C. Durant on September 16, 1908, as a holding company. The company is the largest American automobile manufacturer, and one of the world's largest ones. As of 2019, General Motors is ranked #13 on the Fortune 500 rankings of the largest United States corporations by total revenue.

Perhaps, none of the American residents have experienced such hard days in their life. Those busy streets in large cities are now mired in a very deep panic. The panic, resulting from the outbreak, has had negative impacts on the U.S. citizens' social relations. Nowadays, the U.S. citizens are witnessing the challenges of major decisions made by the federal government or individual states.

The American citizens are caught in contradictory decisions made by officials at federal or state level. Such decisions pose one of the most important challenges threatening the U.S. regarding social relations and political power-sharing.

When the new lands in the northern part of the American continent were discovered, the then politicians decided to form a Confederation of States to have a say in global policies. At that time, the mentioned politicians could not even imagine that once their United States would face such a horrible internal challenge.

The United States' economy cannot tolerate any halt. Its economy is merely founded on gaining more and more profits, with a preference on citizens' soul and life. From the point of view of pro-profit people, the issue that has granted honor to the Americans is the country's economic strength, not the country's people. Therefore, in a conflict between the United States' economy and the societies' health, the economy must survive by victimizing citizens.

President Donald Trump, as the chief of the federal government, ordered reopening of the economy in all 50 states across the United States but the governors opposed his decision. It was the challenge that had not been predicted by the politicians when the confederation was established. In such situations, the pro-profit citizens have no choice to protect themselves but purchasing and using a gun.

From economic and moral point of view, the United States is passing its hardest days. Citizens are not only struggling with each other while shopping necessary goods but also they have to fight against the rulers and managers to run a country's economy whose pillars are ordinary people.

Such dangerous conflicts can go beyond a state. Certainly, pro-federal government protests in some states, using weapons to end virus restrictions, is a flash decision, but after the coronavirus crisis is over the United States will enter a post-coronavirus era with huge challenges. The mentioned short-run and long-run issues will surely have unprecedented impacts on the country's political scene too.

The current situation in a short period of time will influence the November presidential election. Trump has promised that if his administration overcomes the virus outbreak with less than 100,000 death toll his government has accomplished the mission with a good record which will strengthen his standing in the upcoming election. But the voters know well that such claims and predictions have their roots in Trump's pride that he has received by inheritance from his British mother and his racist approach from his German father. Trump should find another way to collect votes otherwise he will be the first U.S. president following George H. W. Bush that may fail to remain in the White House for four more years as the president.

However, in the long-run, the current crisis will influence deeply the U.S. society. If the White House officials fail to handle the current crisis well and in time, a question will arise in the minds of the Americans which is, «should the Americans continue caring this inefficient federalism?»

Ultimately, the largest economy in the world will certainly face a huge challenge, which may direct the United States towards utilizing its first defense equipment but this time in a well-managed way. This can trigger the collapse of the largest economic system which has been caring the half-dead capitalism for decades.

Federalism has become another casualty of Trump and the coronavirus

1 → When DeSantis did eventually issue a stay-at-home order, he explicitly cited Trump's changing "demeanor" as his reason for doing so. Other Republican governors took their cues from the federal government too, for instance by waiting for Trump to issue a national emergency declaration before they issued their own. Some Republican governors – such as Mike DeWine of Ohio and Larry Hogan of Maryland – acted earlier, but they represent states in which Trump's popularity is much lower than average among Republican-governed states.

Democratic governors have been more in tune with the needs of their localities than the president's shifting moods, issuing emergency declarations and lockdown orders sooner than their Republican counterparts. When their pleas for a more effective federal response were ignored, they turned to self-help instead. As it becomes clear that Trump is pushing for an irresponsible reopening of the economy, Democratic governors in the west and north-east have established working groups consisting of public health experts and economists to plot their own way forward.

Why did Republican governors stick with the president while Democratic governors went their own way? Much of the explanation can be found in the power of partisanship, and the nationalization of state politics. Trump's grip on the Republican base is so absolute that the governors of red states value their relationship with him above almost any other. And so much of local politics is now filtered through a national lens that Republican governors must be seen to be toeing the president's line even on local issues in order to please that base.

The particular way that Trump exercises power has also contributed to the reaction of governors from both parties. Trump has made clear that he will dole out federal largesse according to political loyalty, even preventing Colorado's Democratic-led government from purchasing ventilators on the open market and later sending a hundred units "at the request" of the state's Republican senator, who is facing a tough re-election battle. The message is clear: Democratic governors need to help themselves, because Trump sure won't. And Republican governors need to stick close to a president who sees himself as his party's feudal patron rather than the leader of the entire nation.

The result has been an inversion of what the Founders intended, with some states slavishly following federal dictate in flagrant disregard of local needs, and others hung out to dry as a national crisis looms and Washington does little to shepherd a national response. Democratic governors cannot rely on the president to protect the lives of their citizens, and Republican governors find themselves acting more as the lackeys of a monarch than representatives of the interests of their states. Taken together, these developments suggest that federalism has become another casualty of a president unprecedented in his disregard for everything which truly makes America great.

Armed groups in U.S. protest coronavirus shutdown

1 → Despite the \$2.2 trillion stimulus package passed by the U.S. Congress, the economy remains in financial gridlock, and frustrations among U.S. citizens, who have been enduring a virtual lockdown for over a month, are reaching an unprecedented critical level.

■ Enter the armed protesters

Given the paucity of specific information on when the stay-at-home orders might be lifted, and if their former jobs will even exist in the post-pandemic U.S., some Americans have taken to the streets in protest. From Texas to Wisconsin, and at the capitals of Ohio, Minnesota, Michigan, Virginia and elsewhere, protesters have gathered in open defiance of shelter-in-place orders to voice their grievances, waving American flags and chanting, "Let us work!" Trump, a Republican, has encouraged and further inflamed the passions of the protesters with a series of posts on Twitter, calling upon them to "Liberate" a number of states with Democratic governors.

Common among the protesters is a conviction that the U.S. government is lying about the severity of COVID-19, or, at a minimum, exaggerating the risk of spreading the disease through social contact. "I don't fear a potential pathogen," declared protestor Dave Litrell of Austin Texas, who stated his belief that potential pathogens are always present around us.

Others chanted, "Fire Fauci," referring to Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease. In apparent approval, the U.S. president opined, "There are a lot of protests out there. And I just think that some of the governors have gotten carried away."

In Concord, New Hampshire joining in with other demonstrators were armed members of the "Boogaloo Movement," a rightwing extremist network that wants to start a second U.S. civil war by targeting liberals and law enforcement. While the name sounds humorous, the groups making up the movement, and their participation in right-leaning protests, is no laughing matter. "The topic network for boogaloo describes a coherent, multi-component and detailed conspiracy to launch an inevitable, violent, sudden, and apocalyptic war across the homeland," states a report by the Network Contagion Research Institute (NCRI).

■ DeVoss funds gridlock in Michigan

The largest of the anti-lockdown demonstrations so far took place in Lansing, Michigan, where an estimated 3,000 joined in protest on April 15. Dubbed "Operation Gridlock," the event was organized by the Michigan Conservative Coalition to target the state's Democratic governor, Gretchen Whitmer, and her so-called "radical, progressive agenda" of trying

to halt the spread of coronavirus by means of her stringent stay-at-home restrictions and thereby save people's lives. The Michigan Conservative Coalition, whose goal is "to train an army of conservative activists," is associated with Michigan Trump Republicans, which co-chairs Trump's re-election campaign in the Wolverine State.

The Michigan Conservative Coalition, in turn, is promoted by the Michigan Freedom Fund, one of the sponsors of Operation Gridlock, and is mainly funded by the DeVoss family, of whom Betty DeVoss, Trump's Secretary of Education, is a member. Predictably, Michigan Freedom Fund chair denied that his organization was funded by the DeVoss family, whose spokesman, Nick Wasmiller, claimed likewise that Operation Gridlock did not receive any of the family's funding. However, Facebook confirmed that the Michigan Freedom Fund paid for an ad posted on its Facebook page featuring the Gridlock protest.

Among the participants in the well-funded and publicized demonstration were a number of extremist rightwing armed groups, including the neo-fascist Proud Boys and Michigan Liberty Militia. In regard to the DeVoss involvement in the Operation Gridlock event, Governor Whitmer remarked that "it's really inappropriate for a sitting member of the United

States president's Cabinet to be waging political attacks on any governor, but obviously, on me here at home."

Concerning Trump's unabashed support for the anti-shutdown protesters and blatant lack of condemnation of the involvement of armed extremists, Governor Jay Inslee of Washington, a state hit very hard by the coronavirus pandemic, commented, "The president is fomenting domestic rebellion and spreading lies even while his own administration says the virus is real and is deadly, and that we have a long way to go before restrictions can be lifted."

■ A soon-to-be-fascist America

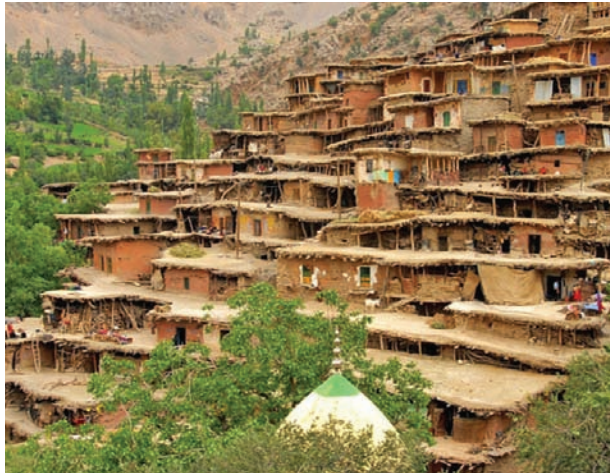
Juan Cole, Professor of History at the University of Michigan, has compared the machinations of Trump and his comments inciting political violence with those of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. "I have consistently argued that the analogy for Trump is with Mussolini," he wrote. In October 2018, Cole warned that Trump "intends to mobilize his supporters in the far rightwing gangs, in the police and the armed forces as [Mussolini's] Black Shirts if he can, to break heads." Unfortunately, this is what we are witnessing now at the anti-quarantine protests erupting around America. It is only a matter of time before armed conflict breaks out, and Trump, no doubt, will be cheering it on,

Gilan province arranges virtual tours of tourist sites

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Tourist attractions in the northern province of Gilan are available online for the people who are in home quarantine over the coronavirus outbreak in the country, said provincial tourism chief Shahroud Amir-Entekhabi, CHTN reported on Sunday.

Over 70 videos have been produced to introduce the province's historical sites, natural sights and handicrafts to the online visitors, he added.

He also noted that the project will continue until the end of the coronavirus pandemic in the country.



A view of Masouleh, a touristic village in northern Iran

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

Rasht, capital of Gilan province, has long been a weekend escape for residents of Tehran who are looking to sample the famous local cuisine and hoping for some pluvial action — it's the largest, and wettest town in the northern region. Gilan is divided into a coastal plain including the large delta of Sefid Rud and adjacent parts of the Alborz mountain range.

Over 70 sites in Isfahan inscribed as national heritage

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Seventy one historical and natural sites in central province of Isfahan have been inscribed on the national heritage list during the previous Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended March 20), provincial tourism chief has said.



File photo shows trekkers hiking across the sun-scorched Maranjab Desert in central Iran

Besides thousands of intangible cultural heritage and natural sightseeing, over 22,000 historical and archaeological sites have been identified across the province, CHTN quoted Fereydoun Allahyari as saying on Monday.

Soaked in a rich history, Isfahan was once a crossroad of international trade and diplomacy in Iran and now it is one of Iran's top tourist destinations for good reasons. Its profusion of tree-lined boulevards, Persian gardens and important Islamic buildings gives it a visual appeal unmatched by any other Iranian city.

Arrival in Tehran and I am already at home!

By Monica Scaccabarozi

(Part 5 / 5)

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

Like in the Hotel California; You can leave at any time, you can check out any time you like, but you can never leave! You can check out any time you like.

The real problem of the Western "East" conflict, of which I have already written, lies, in my opinion, mainly in the immense work of media manipulation information put in place by governments with a formidable propaganda apparatus.

So let's not be influenced, we always think with our head. Let's check and watch. We try and never stop evolving.

As has happened in the past, we break down the walls but this time of ignorance, stupidity, anger, wickedness, greed, the lust for power.

Those who know and know others will also recognize this: the East and the West can no longer be separated "(Goethe, The Western-Oriental Sofa 1814).

Visit IRAN is a really beautiful country!

Thank you all.

But I want to thank some friends for their kindness and hospitality. For spontaneity.

Ehsan at first!

Ours, at the beginning of the driver, later became a family friend! Come and see us!

Noushin! The attention with which you helped was incredible.

Elzmn, Elezmn and all the friends of the Junky food table, who invited us to a party ... really fun!

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

Rey's historical shrines, monuments, bazaar, cistern, and watermill to be demarcated

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Nine centuries-old sites, including holy shrines, caravansaries, mansions, a bazaar, a subterranean cistern, and a watermill in the city of Rey, southeast of Tehran, are scheduled to be demarcated.

Holy shrines of Shah Abdol Azim and Bibi Shahr-Banu, traditional bazaar, Arad cistern and Kenargerd caravansary, which all are inscribed on the National Cultural Heritage list, are among the sites which are to be demarcated by the end of the current Iranian calendar year 1399 (started March 21), Rey's cultural heritage department director Amir Mosayeb Rahimzadeh said on Sunday, CHTN reported.

The demarcation projects aim at protecting these historical sites from illegal constructions within their boundaries.

About 40 out of 197 historical sites of Rey are inscribed on the National Cultural Heritage list.

Rey was one of the capital cities of the Parthian empire (3rd century BC–3rd century CE) and it was captured by the Muslim Arabs in 641 CE. During the reign of the Muslim caliph al-Mahdi in the 8th century, the city grew in importance until it was rivaled in western Asia only by Damascus and Baghdad.

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, Islamic writers described it as a city of extraordinary beauty, built largely of fired brick and brilliantly ornamented with blue faience (glazed earthenware). It continued to be an important city and was briefly a capital under the rule of the Seljuqs, but in the 12th century it was weakened by the fierce quarrels of rival religious sects. In 1220 the city was almost entirely destroyed by the Mongols, and its inhabitants were massacred. Most of the survivors of the massacre moved to nearby Tehran, and the deserted remnants of Rey soon fell into complete ruin.



A view of the holy shrine of Shah Abdol Azim in Rey, southeast Tehran

Coronavirus causes \$1.5m loss to Iran's top tourism site

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran's Alisadr water cave, a top destination for domestic and foreign sightseers, researches, history buffs, and day-trippers, has taken 70 billion rials (about \$1.5 million) hit from the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) over the last two months.

Two-thirds of the employees of the tourist site have also lost their jobs temporarily, manager of the site Mehdi Majidi announced on Monday, ISNA reported.

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. Sightseeing 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.

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

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

Handicraft exports from Isfahan surge 27%, hit \$40 million

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Handicrafts exports from Isfahan province, long been home to talented artisans and craftspeople, reached \$40 million during the past Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended March 20), showing 27 percent growth year on year.

"According to statistics provided by the customs office of Isfahan province, handicraft exports increased by 27 percent to more than 40 million dollars in 1398, and these figures exclude non-customs purchases by travelers," provincial tourism chief Fereydoun Allahyari announced on Sunday, CHTN reported.

In January, the Iranian parliament (Majlis) approved a bill to exempt craftspeople and handicraft producers from paying value-added tax (VAT), noting that domestic production of handicrafts is subject to article 1 of the law on the protection of artisans and craftspeople.

Handicrafts exports of the country reached \$289 million in the year 1397,



showing three percent growth year on year, according to data announced by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts. The exports usually include traditional ceramics, pottery vessels, handwoven textiles, glasswork, woodwork, metalwork, embroideries, personal ornamentations, as well as precious and semi-precious gemstones.

Iranians stranded in Italy by coronavirus outbreak return home

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — A flight carrying Iranian students stranded in Italy by coronavirus lockdown arrived in Tehran early on Sunday.

Operated by the flag carrier, IranAir, it was the second batch of the students who were returned home from Italy after travel restrictions announced in Iran, Italy and many other countries, Donya-e Eqtasad reported on Monday.

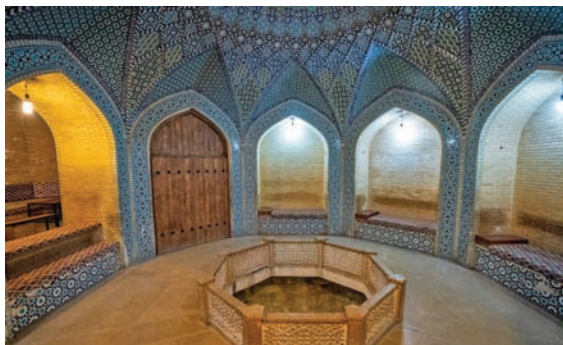
The flight was carried out in full compliance with Iran's Health Ministry, leaving Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport on 7 p.m. local time on April 18 for Rome with no passenger on board.

The return flight, boarding over 180 passengers, left Leonardo da Vinci International Airport at 11 p.m. local time and landed at IKIA on Sunday 6:25 a.m. local time.

In March, IranAir resumed flights to European destinations, excluding



Vienna, Stockholm and Goteborg, following a temporary suspension over the virus outbreak. The move came after the European Union Aviation Safety Agency banned three Airbus models within IranAir's fleet from European airspace, because they did not meet required airworthiness standards.



Sadi National Day: constantly hectic mausoleum records unprecedented lockdown

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Photos depict mausoleum of Sheikh Muslih od-Din Sadi Shirazi, known by his pen name Sadi, being deserted amid COVID-19 pandemic on April 20, which marks the national day of the 13th-century Iranian poet.

Thousands of Iranians and foreign nationals traditionally convene at the scenic mausoleum to celebrate the day that marks the completion of his Gulistan (The Rose Garden), a major work of the classical Persian literature.

Similar scenes of shuttered places have played out in nearly all museums, historical sites and touristic destinations across the country as the tourism ministry has announced restrictions to help contain the virus.



Lake Urmia in best condition over past decade

By Faranak Bakhtiari

TEHRAN — About 10 years ago, Lake Urmia, northwestern Iran, began its gradual death. Photos of the country's largest saltwater lake were going viral those days, worrying every Iranian. But the lake is now experiencing its best condition over the past decade, turning back to the former glory.

'Let's go cry and fill Lake Urmia with our tears' was a poem chanted by the people as a way to express sympathy over the falling of the precious lake.

As news spread that Lake Urmia had dried up to 80 percent, experts warned that if restoration measures are not taken, the population living along the lake would be forced to migrate due to sand and dust storms.

Issa Kalantari, head of the Department of Environment, also warned that if Lake Urmia dried up, the city of Tabriz would have to be evacuated.

Now, however, after several years of concern and regret for Lake Urmia, the spectacular blue-white scene is catching every eye, and the level of the second largest lake of the world, with a figure of 1271.70, has hit a 10-year record.

According to the latest statistics of the Meteorological Organization, since the beginning of this water year, West Azarbaijan province received 279.2 millimeters of rain, which demonstrates an increase of 21 percent compared to the long-term average. Also, 396 mm of rain and snow fell in the province last year. Which was 71 percent higher than the long-term average.

The above normal levels of rain came to help conservation measures to preserve the Lake Urmia which have now increased by 37 centimeters compared to [the Iranian calendar month of Farvardin (March 19-April 18)] last year.

Farhad Sarkhosh, head of the Lake Urmia Restoration Program's office in West Azarbaijan province said that the lake's level has reached 1,271 meters and 70 centimeters, which is 37 centimeters higher than the last year's level, he stated, IRNA reported.

The lake's water volume was estimated at more than 4.620 billion cubic meters, which indicates an increase of 1.010 billion cubic meters compared to the last year, he highlighted.



He went on to say that Lake Urmia's surface area has now reached more than 3,093 square kilometers, adding that the figure has increased by 244 square kilometers compared to the same period last year.

In previous years, not providing the water right of the lake was considered as the most important cause of its gradual drying up; in the past, the main rivers in the catchment area were not dredged and due to sedimentation, the water that entered them had no way to Lake Urmia, but now all the rivers at the entrance of the dredging lake are connected to its main body, Sarkhosh explained.

The two rivers of Zarrineh Rud and Simineh Rud are among the largest ones in the Urmia Lake catchment area, the two are connected to the main body of the lake by a 25-kilometer canal, which was built to prevent flooding, and damage to surrounding villages during natural incidents, he also said.

He went on to point out that excessive farming and cultivation of water consuming crops in the surrounding areas are other causes of its drying up. Although this factor still threatens the Lake, so that the Restoration Program seeks to ensure the sustainability of the lake by reducing water consumption

by 40 percent in agriculture.

Therefore, modern irrigation and modification of cultivation patterns are on the agenda, Sarkhosh said, pointing out that in the past, water-consuming crops such as beets and corn were abundantly cultivated in its catchment area, but we improved and replaced medicinal plants such as saffron to minimize the use of water, he explained.

Emphasizing that our efforts to revitalize Lake Urmia are still ongoing, he noted that since the beginning of the Program, many people believed that the lake could not be returned to life.

However, we have been working for three years to stabilize the Lake's level, and now, to improve the situation and prevent a recurrence of the crisis, we must continue to take some measures for years to come; also, Lake Urmia must always have specific management to be able to provide its water, he stated.

This is while Lake Urmia still needs 9.5 billion cubic meters of water to reach its ecological level of 1274.10, Sarkhosh said, expressing hope that with the completion of projects designed to save the Lake, they will be able to increase 3.5 million cubic meters of water into the lake annually to reach its ecological level.

These days, life has returned to Lake Urmia. The lake now has so much water that tourists can swim in its shiny water and birds and aquatic species such as flamingos and Artemia have returned to it, but we should not forget the hard days it went through. Lake Urmia still has a long way to completely survive, and neglect can threaten this precious gem of Iran again.

Shared between West Azarbaijan and East Azarbaijan provinces in northwestern Iran, Lake Urmia, was once the largest salt-water lake in West Asia. It was a home to many migratory and indigenous animals including flamingos, pelicans, egrets and ducks and attracted hundreds of tourists every year who had bathed in the water to take advantage of the therapeutic properties of the lake.

However, decades of long-standing drought spells and elevated hot summer temperatures that speed up evaporation as well as increased water demands in agriculture sector shrank the lake drastically. In 1999 the volume of water which was at 30 billion cubic meters drastically decreased to half a billion cubic meters in 2013. Moreover, the lake surface area of 5,000 square kilometers in 1997 shrunk to one tenth of that to 500 square kilometers in 2013.

Japan delivers \$4m anti-corona consignment to Iran

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Japan sent a shipment of medical equipment worth \$4 million to Iran to help the country combat the coronavirus outbreak, IRIB news agency reported on Sunday.

Japan has allocated \$7 million aid to Iran, \$4 million of which has been so far provided to the World Food Program in Iran, head of Rescue and Relief Organization Morteza Salimi stated.



In the current critical situation, the first batch of aid including 370,000 three-layer masks, 370,000 N90 masks, and 370,000 scrubs were delivered to the Iranian Red Crescent Society.

The consignment will be distributed among high-risk patients, Salimi said, adding, in the next stage, the new consignments will be delivered to the medical centers in coordination with the Ministry of Health.

The second shipment was scheduled to be imported on Monday and delivered to the Red Crescent Society, he concluded.

World Earth Day: online seminar to convene global climate change experts

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — The Institute of Environmental Science and Technology, affiliated to the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), will host international environment experts in an online seminar on April 21-23.

Speakers from Australia, India, Italy, the United Kingdom, Ghana, Germany, Turkey, Granada and Pakistan will speak at the virtual conference coinciding with the 50th anniversary of World Earth Day, IRNA reported.

Organized by Institute of Environmental Science and Technology in the Iranian city of Karaj, the event will be attended by prominent international figures in the fields of environment, agriculture and business.

The global impact of the coronavirus pandemic, education, water crisis, nature conservation policies and their impact on the economy and livelihoods will be discussed in the conference.

Observed annually on April 22, Earth Day seizes all the tools and actions, big and small, to change lives and world, not for one day, but forever.

The theme for Earth Day 2020 is climate action. The enormous challenge, but also the vast opportunities, of action on climate change have distinguished the issue as the most pressing topic for the 50th anniversary.

Climate change represents the biggest challenge to the future of humanity and the life-support systems that make our world habitable.

WORDS IN THE NEWS

The future of the British Monarchy

(July 16, 2003)

The British Queen should no longer be head of the Church of England according to an influential left-wing organisation. The Fabian Society has published a report into the future of the monarchy and it says that the monarchy needs to properly represent the country's different religions. This report from Jane Little: The report **calls for a comprehensive** modernisation of the monarchy to bring it more into line with other European **constitutional monarchies**. It says that members of the royal family should have to pay inheritance tax and the Queen's role in **the annual state opening of parliament** should be changed. But its biggest challenge to the current form of monarchy is to **its entanglement with** the Church of England. It argues that the Queen should no longer be the Supreme Governor of the church. It also urges the **overturning** of the controversial Act of Settlement. Under that law passed in 1701, no Catholic or anyone married to a catholic can **succeed to the throne**.

These changes would be the most radical in five hundred years, since Henry the Eighth **broke away from** the Roman Catholic faith and became head of the Church of England. But there is considerable pressure for changes to a system many regard as **out of step with** modern, multi-cultural Britain. The Queen has herself said the monarchy needs to adapt to modern times, while **the heir to the throne**, Prince Charles, has in the past declared his desire to be the "defender of faiths" rather than «the faith».

Words

calls for: formally demands

comprehensive: complete, including everything
constitutional monarchies: countries which have a king or queen who are head of state but also has a democratically elected government. The king or queen does not take part in the process of government

the annual state opening of parliament: the historic ceremony in which the British king or queen formally opens parliament after the summer break

its entanglement with: its close relationship with

overturning: here, removing, ending a law

succeed to the throne: become king or queen

broke away from: formally stopped being a part of

out of step with: here, old-fashioned and not relevant to

the heir to the throne: the person who will be king or queen next because of their birthright

(Source: BBC)

EU, UNDP allocate €10m to revive Iran's Hamoun wetland

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — The European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) have announced their €10- million support for the rehabilitation of Hamoun international wetlands, Ahmad Lahijanzadeh, deputy head of the Department of Environment (DOE), has said, ISNA reported.

The DOE and the UNDP signed a memorandum of understanding on April 4 to carry out a joint project for the revival of Hamoun wetland.

The project is called "improving the comprehensive management of natural resources for the rehabilitation of the wetland ecosystem and supporting alternative living in local communities in the Hamoun wetland", which aims to focus on the role and connection of people's lives on Hamoun wetland as well as Hamoun's life on people's lives and at the same time be able to work on the protection of this wetland along with improving the living standards of the people around it.

The project is set to run for five years with European Union financial support, minimizing the pressure on



Hamoun wetland resources, and at the same time help strengthen the cross-border connection of Hamoun wetland with Afghanistan to allocate water right of the wetland.

The implementation of the project requires the coordination and participation of all stakeholders and de-

partments, Lahijanzadeh noted.

The main partners in the project are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Labour at the national level, and the Sistan-Baluchestan governorate at the provincial level, he concluded.

The Hamouns are transboundary wetlands on the Iran-Afghan border made up of three lakes: Hamoun-e Helmand, which is entirely in Iran, Hamoun-e Sabari on the border, and Hamoun-e Puzak, almost entirely inside Afghanistan. The three lakes are linked and fed by water from the Helmand River which starts in the Hindu Kush Mountains in Afghanistan.

In the last two decades, once fertile wetlands have drastically dried up. The Taliban government closed the sluices to the Kajaki Dam on the Helmand until 2002, which aggravated the impact of the worst drought the region has experienced in many decades, brought about partially by climate change and warming temperatures.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Iran to carry out cloud seeding project within two weeks

A cloud seeding project will be carried out within the next two weeks in some northern, central and southern provinces of the country, Farid Golkar, head of Iran's National Cloud Seeding Research Center, has announced.

Golkar explained that the operation will be carried out on the Zagros and Alborz Mountains in the north, Isfahan and Yazd provinces in the center, and Fars and Kerman provinces in the south.

The first cloud seeding project was launched in the Iranian calendar year 1395 (March 2016-March 2017), he stated, adding that, each operation can lead to a 10-15 percent increase in precipitation.

He went on to highlight that this year, a total budget of 70 billion rials (about \$1.6 million) has been earmarked in this regard.

آغاز عملیات باروری ابرها تا دو هفته دیگر

عملیات بارورسازی ابرها تا دو هفته دیگر در بخش هایی از شمال، مرکز، و جنوب کشور انجام می شود.

فرید گلکار، رئیس مرکز ملی تحقیقات و مطالعات باروری ابرها، در گفت‌وگو با ایسنا، توضیح داد این عملیات روی کوهستان‌های زاگرس و البرز در شمال کشور، استان های اصفهان و یزد در مرکز ، و استان های فارس و کرمان در جنوب انجام می‌شود.

او با بیان این‌که نخستین پروژه بارورسازی ابرها در سال ۱۳۹۵ انجام شد، اظهار کرد تاثیر یکبار عملیات در میزان افزایش بارش‌ها ۱۰ تا ۱۵ درصد است.

گلکار اضافه کرد: امسال هفت میلیارد تومان بودجه برای این موضوع در نظر گرفته شده است.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“omni-”

■ **Meaning:** all, every

■ **For example:** the *omnipresent* threat of natural disasters.

PHRASAL VERB

Pull over

■ **Meaning:** to move over to the side of the road

■ **For example:** She pulled over to make way for the ambulance.

IDIOM

Do a good turn

■ **Explanation:** If you do someone a good turn, you act in a helpful way

■ **For example:** Mike is a great guy - always ready to do a good turn.

Departed States of America

U.S. marks deadliest week as some States make secret deal with China

→ 1 "I do not have time to involve myself in Twitter wars," Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam said in a press conference on Friday. "I will continue to make sure I do everything I can to keep Virginians safe and to save lives."

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz told KTOE news radio in Eagle Lake, Minnesota, that he is "not going to read into what something is supposed to mean."

"That's why I called to ask what we're doing differently to get people back to work in as safe a manner as possible. The response will likely be longer than a two-word tweet, but I think there's a responsibility to tell us that."

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, discussed as a contender to become Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden's running mate, did not comment publicly on Trump's tweets as of Saturday morning.

The protests so far appear to be largely composed of Trump supporters and a particularly vocal bloc of conservatives and libertarians. However, the message the president appears to endorse also contradicts federal guidance he approved on Thursday, saying these states and others must maintain public health precautions as the virus continues to spread.

And they come as states increasingly turn to one another for support, saying they aren't receiving the leadership they need from the federal government. The governors of New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Massachusetts and Rhode Island earlier this week announced they would form a pact to begin planning for reopening businesses and schools. The governors of California, Oregon and Washington said they would form a similar plan.

But some good news emerged. The work week ended with 32,000 new cases as of Friday and nearly 3,800 deaths, a drop from the highest single-day total recorded Thursday, when 4,600 people died from the virus in the U.S., according to numbers compiled by statnews.com.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat whose state has been hardest hit by the virus, said Saturday that hospitalizations and intubations – a patient whose condition requires a ventilator, for whom only 20 percent recover – had decreased consistently over the prior three days.

"You could argue we are past the plateau and we're starting to descend," Cuomo said, adding caution: "Happy days are not here again. ... We still have about 2,000 people yesterday who were new admissions to a hospital or new COVID diagnoses."

More than 500 people died in New York in the prior 24 hours.

Though Cuomo declined to comment on Trump's political statements, other state leaders who have previously clashed with the president fired back at his latest tweets. Washington Gov. Jay Inslee called them "grossly irresponsible" and "dangerously bombastic."

"It inspires people to do dangerous things," Inslee told CNN late Friday. "And it is a dangerous thing today to go out and congregate. It is a dangerous thing to ignore that yesterday Donald Trump put out guidelines that we now need to follow."

Inslee said Trump's tweets contradicted instructions from the federal government on Thursday that some states, including the three Trump singled out, should not remove social distancing guidelines because too many people remain infected with the virus.

■ **Illinois blows \$17M on shoddy face masks from China**

Meanwhile, Illinois, in its desperate search for masks to protect its medical workers and first responders, laid out \$17 million for KN95 masks from China.

The state did so after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said earlier this month these types of masks were an acceptable alternative to the United States approved N95 masks, New York Post reported.

They were wrong.

On Thursday, similar masks were recalled by multiple states — including Missouri, whose Department of Health and Senior Services director Sandy Kartsen said the masks did not meet their standards.

The Illinois Department of Public Health sent out an alert saying that the KN95 masks might not meet performance standards and advised agencies to remove them, according to local WGNTV.

U.S. sends huge convoy of logistics supplies for Syria militants

U.S. forces have reportedly dispatched a convoy carrying logistics supplies from Iraq to Syria's Kurdish-populated city of Qamishli in the northeastern province of Hasakah.

Local sources told Syria's official news agency SANA that the convoy consisting of 35 vehicles carrying cement blocks and logistic supplies entered Syria via the al-Walid border crossing point on Saturday.



The sources said the convoy headed from al-Yaroubiya countryside northeast of Hasaka towards U.S. bases near Qamishli. The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) also reported that nearly 50 U.S. trucks carrying logistical supplies had crossed into Hasakah city, via al-Walid crossing on Iraq's border to support militants from the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

On April 10, the UK-based group reported that a convoy of military reinforcement including 25 military vehicles and trucks carrying ammunition had arrived at the U.S. base in al-Shaddadi city, south of Hasaka.

The U.S. has long been providing the SDF with arms and militant training, calling them a key partner in the purported fight against the terrorist group of Daesh. Many observers, however, see the support in the context of Washington's plans to carve out a foothold in the Arab country.

Such support has also angered Washington's NATO ally, Turkey, which views militants from the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) – the backbone of the SDF – as a terrorist organization tied to the homegrown Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) that has been waging a destructive war inside Turkey for decades.

Trump campaign concludes there is more to be gained by attacking Biden than trying to promote pandemic response

President Trump's campaign is preparing to launch a broad effort aimed at linking Joe Biden to China, after concluding that it would be more politically effective than defending or promoting Trump's response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The decision by top campaign advisers, which has met pushback from some White House officials and donors, reflects polling showing a declining approval rating for Trump among key groups and growing openness to supporting Biden in recent weeks, according to officials familiar with the data who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

The shift represents a remarkable acknowledgment by aides to a self-described "wartime president," leading during what might have been a rally-around-the-flag moment, to effectively decide it is better to go on the attack than focus on his own achievements. Campaign polling found more than three-quarters of voters blamed China for the coronavirus outbreak, underscoring the potential benefits of tying the presumptive Democratic nominee to Beijing, Washington Post reported.

The planned China push, which has already been embraced by pro-Trump outside groups, comes as both the Trump and Biden campaigns have been anxiously recalibrating their plans in response to the most catastrophic economic and health crisis in the United States in generations. The two title contenders for the 2020 elections are finally set, but neither campaign, with their mismatched strengths and weaknesses, knows what the election arena will look like.

With the public distracted by economic collapse and disease, strategists have been trying to craft campaign blueprints that can accommodate everything from a country that reopens this summer to a fall election season without any door-knocking or massive rallies and with limited Election



Day voting in person. They also face a challenge in inducing persuadable voters to focus on politics when they are consumed by their personal situations.

The Biden campaign faces an uphill battle with limited money to scale up its campaign to match the overwhelming scale and reach of the Trump operation, as the Democrats' likely candidate is forced to operate from his basement

recreation room while the president hosts daily events from the White House. Meanwhile, Trump's reelection slogan "Keep America Great," still printed on \$30 campaign hats for sale online, now seems like a relic of a lost era before more than 34,000 deaths from the virus and about 22 million Americans seeking unemployment benefits in the last four weeks.

Bolsonaro Leads Crowded Anti-Lockdown Protest in Brazil

While U.S. President Trump has cheered on anti-lockdown protests from the safety of his Twitter feed, he hasn't actually been brave—or stupid—enough to step out among the crowds. But Brazil's right-wing President Jair Bolsonaro attended a public rally Sunday to attack lockdown measures designed to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus. Reuters reports Bolsonaro, who was not wearing a face

mask, addressed a crowd of hundreds in Brasilia—and repeatedly coughed during his speech. He called the protesters "patriots" and said they were helping defend individual freedoms. Brazil has more cases of the novel coronavirus than any other country in Latin America, with over 38,000 confirmed cases and 2,462 deaths.

(Source: The Daily Beast)

Thousands of Israelis maintain social distancing while protesting Netanyahu

More than 2,000 Israelis stood 6 feet apart in Tel Aviv's Rabin Square on Sunday to protest what they consider the erosion of democracy under the coronavirus-era government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Haaretz reports.

The "Black Flag" demonstrations, which began in March, are a response to stringent coronavirus policies that include phone tracking for civilians. Police marked spots

on the ground where protesters could stand, and organizers were required to provide participants with masks, Haaretz notes.

As Netanyahu and his former rival Benny Gantz work to form a unity government, Yesh Atid chairman Yair Lapid — who was part of the same Blue and White party as Gantz up until last month — accused them of destroying Israeli democracy, according to the Times of Israel.

Hamas spares no effort in combating COVID-19 in Gaza Strip: Official

A high-ranking official with Hamas says the Palestinian resistance movement has made strenuous efforts at all possible levels to help the besieged Gaza Strip contain the spread of COVID-19 disease in the enclave.

Khalil al-Hayya, a member of Hamas' political bureau, made the remarks during an interview published on the movement's official website on Sunday, saying meetings were held on a regular basis between Hamas and government representatives to take the most effective measures against the pandemic, Press TV reported.

Elaborating on the role the resistance movement is playing in combating COVID-19, he noted that Hamas has already devoted its financial resources to win the battle against the highly contagious disease.

The movement has set up a 1,000-room field hospital in the Gaza Strip, and purchased 30 respirators and handed them to the government last week, Hayya said, stressing that Hamas has put all its charitable institutions, human forces and military resources at the disposal of authorities in Gaza to contain the pandemic.

"On the internal level, we in Hamas have abided



by the government's coronavirus-related instructions and halted most of our activities, sessions and meetings," he said.

Protests in Washington, Colorado against U.S. coronavirus curbs

Protests flared in parts of the United States against stay-at-home orders while governors disputed President Donald Trump's claim they have enough tests for the coronavirus and should quickly reopen their economies.

An estimated 2,500 people rallied at the Washington state capitol in Olympia on Sunday to show their opposition to Democratic Governor Jay Inslee's stay-at-home order, in defiance of a ban on gatherings of 50 or more people.

Despite pleas from rally organisers to wear face coverings or masks as recommended by public health authorities, many did not.

"Shutting down businesses by picking winners and losers in which there are essential and non-essential are violations of the state and federal constitution," rally organiser Tyler Miller, 39, an engineer from Bremerton, Washington, told Reuters news agency.

In Denver, hundreds of people gathered at the state capitol to demand the end to Colorado's shutdown. As protesters clogged streets with cars, healthcare workers in scrubs and face masks stood at intersec-

tions in a counter protest.

The medical workers were greeted with insults, honking horns, and placards waved by hundreds of motorists saying "End the virus, not the economy" and "Fear is the real virus".

Police were called in after several motorists threatened to run the healthcare workers over. "You can go to work why can't I go to work?" one woman asked.

Many people expressed concerns that their personal freedoms and constitutional rights were being curtailed in the fight to contain the pandemic.

Stay-at-home measures, which experts say are essential to slow the spread of the virus, have battered the US economy and more than 22 million Americans have filed for unemployment benefits in the past month.

Shutdowns have disrupted economic, social, cultural and religious life and plunged the world into an economic slump unseen since the Great Depression in the 1930s.

The International Monetary Fund expects the global economy to contract three percent this year. Tens of millions of workers have lost their jobs and millions more fear they will be next.

Gunman kills 16 in Nova Scotia in Canada's worst mass shooting

A man disguised as a police officer went on a shooting rampage in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia on Sunday, killing 16 people, in the worst such attack in the country for 30 years.

A police officer was among those killed. Several bodies were found inside and outside one home in the small, rural town of Portapique, about 100km (60 miles) north of Halifax - what police called the first scene, al Jazeera reported.

Bodies were also found at other locations and buildings set on fire.

"This is one of the most senseless acts of violence in our province's history," said Nova Scotia Premier Stephen McNeil.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) spokesman Daniel Brien confirmed 16 people had been killed in addition to the suspect.

The dead officer was identified as Constable Heidi Stevenson, a mother of two and a 23-year veteran of the force. Another officer was also wounded.

Police identified the man believed to be the shooter as Gabriel Wortman, 51, who was thought to live part of the time

in Portapique. Authorities said he wore a police uniform at one point and made his car look like a RCMP vehicle.

Authorities believe he may have deliberately singled out his first victims before he began attacking randomly. Police said they had no indication of a motive and the killer had acted alone.

"The search for the suspect ended this morning when the suspect was located and I can confirm that he is deceased," RCMP Chief Superintendent Chris Leather told a press conference.

Leather said the gunman had exchanged fire with police at one point.

"Our officers were involved in terminating the threat," he said, adding the independent Serious Incident Response Team (SiRT), which probes incidents involving the province's police, was now handling that part of the investigation.

SiRT said in a statement a confrontation had occurred in Enfield, which is near Halifax airport, "resulting in officers discharging their firearms. The suspect was found to be deceased at the scene".

Turkey blocks official Saudi, UAE news websites in retaliation

Turkey has blocked public access to the websites belonging to the official news agencies of Saudi Arabia and its regional ally the United Arab Emirates amid simmering tensions between Ankara and Riyadh over the 2018 murder of a prominent Saudi journalist in Istanbul.

The ban was enforced on Sunday against the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) and the UAE's Emirates News Agency (WAM) as well as more than a dozen other websites.

Earlier this month, Saudi Arabia blocked several Turkish media websites, including those of state broadcaster TRT and Turkey's official Anadolu news agency. The UAE, however, is yet to take any action against any Turkish website.

The action by Riyadh came after a move by a Turkish court on April 12 to accept an indictment brought against 20 Saudis, including two former associates of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, for the brutal murder of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October 2018.

Khashoggi, a former advocate of the Saudi royal court who had become a critic of bin Salman, was killed and his body dismembered by a Saudi hit squad after being lured into the consulate.

The indictment identified the associates as former deputy intelligence chief Ahmad Asiri and former royal aide Saud al-Qahtani.

According to The Washington Post, for which Khashoggi was a columnist, the CIA has concluded that bin Salman personally ordered his killing. Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan has also said the killing was ordered at the «highest levels» of the Saudi government.

«We believe the tensions between Saudi Arabia and Turkey reflected on us,» said Nevzat Cicek, editor of the Turkish website of the UK-based Independent newspaper, which is operated by a Saudi company and was one of the websites to be blocked by Turkey.

Riyadh, though, has spurned all the allegations linking the killing to bin Salman and instead claimed that the murder was committed by a "rogue" group.

Mahdavikia reveals reason why he didn't join Tottenham

S P O R T S **TEHRAN**— Former **d e s k** Iran winger Mehdi Mahdavikia has revealed that he had offer from Tottenham Hotspur in the prime of his career and fell into a deep depression after the transfer failed.

The 42-year-old retired football star is currently at home in Hamburg, Germany amid the coronavirus pandemic. In a live interview on the Persepolis club Instagram, Mahdavikia revealed he is relishing the opportunity to spend time with his family and review memories of his career, in particular, his failed links with the English Premier League.

"This is the first time that I'm talking about this. After the Tottenham's offer, we went to London and even signed a three-year contract with the club. But there was a clause in the contract that I would join the London club after completing my military duty in Iran, but at the end, my certificate was not issued and I could not go to Tottenham.

"After a while, the representatives of Hamburger SV came to Tehran to sign a contract with me, but again at that time, I could not join the German team due to the same problem. These issues caused me to become so depressed and I got fat. However, at the end, fate led me to German football. To

play and to live in Germany have been one of the best parts of my life," Mahdavikia said.

Mahdavikia currently is under contract by Hamburger SV as a youth coach, and also manages his own youth academy, FC KIA.

During his playing career, Mahdavikia internationally represented the Iranian national team, which he captained from 2006 to 2009, and currently is the fourth most capped player of all-time. He played for Iranian clubs Bank Melli, Persepolis, Steel Azin and Damash Gilan, as well as German clubs VfL Bochum, Hamburger SV, and Eintracht Frankfurt, spending 12 consecutive seasons in Bundesliga.

"I played about 110 national games, while I did not participate in about 52 national camps just because I wanted to provide an opportunity for younger players to play.

"I retired from the Iranian national team at the age of 32 and maybe I had the opportunity to play in the national team until 36. I didn't want to fall the fans' out of favor, that's why I decided to say goodbye to the national team," he stated.

Mahdavikia currently represents Asian Football Confederation (AFC) in the Football Advisory Panel of International Football Association Board (IFAB), joining the body in 2019. On 15 May 2013, Mahdavikia was appointed as AFC Grassroots Ambassador.



Takhti is my role model: Komeil Ghasemi



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Olympic gold medal winner Komeil Ghasemi says Iran's legendary wrestler Gholamreza Takhti is his role model.

The 2012 Olympic champion and member of UWW athlete commission Ghasemi, was joined by the 1996 Olympic champion Rasoul Khadem as they visited cities in Gilan Province to help provide doctors and nurses with new equipment for fighting COVID-19.

"It's normal to see these kinds of heroic behaviors from the Iranian wrestlers"

Ghasemi said.

"My role model is late Takhti who helped the victims of the earthquake occurred in Bou'in-Zahra," he added.

Iran's death toll from the new coronavirus has risen by 87 to 5,118, Health Ministry spokesman Kianush Jahanpur said in a statement on state TV on Sunday.

The total number of infected cases in Iran, the Middle Eastern country hardest hit by the outbreak, has reached 82,211, he said.

Meeting held on appointment of coach for Iran volleyball



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — In an effort to find the best option for Iran national volleyball team, the officials of Islamic Republic of Iran Volleyball Federation (IRIVF) came together on Monday.

In the meeting headed by President Mohammadreza Davarzani at the IRIVF's headquarters, they discussed ways to find the best replacement for Igor Kolakovic.

The federation parted ways with the Montenegrin coach in late March following

cancellation of 2020 Olympic Games due to the pandemic coronavirus (COVID-19).

"We want to achieve the best possible results in the Olympics and we've come here to find the best option for the national team. The consultation will take place in the future," Davarzani said.

The media reports suggest that the federation has been linked with the Italian coaches but Davarzani said the Iranian coaches also have equal chance of being named as the coach.

De Biasi: I was close to Iran hotseat

Gianni De Biasi says it was an 'intense experience' to coach Albania and reveals he 'lacked motivation' after five and a half years.

The former Brescia boss took Albania to Euro 2016, their first ever major tournament, and was fighting with Spain and Italy for a place in the 2018 World Cup.

But he left with four games remaining and wanted to give the new coach an opportunity to get a head start before the inaugural UEFA Nations League.

"Not having to follow 20-30 people, on one side, is an advantage," he told Gianluca Di Marzio. "As a national coach, it seemed like I only saw players once in a while.

"It's an intense experience, you need to work a lot with the players' heads. It's not easy to prepare two matches with months in between.

"In the meantime, you carry on scouting to follow all the



players. I did my best with Albania. I also received many awards from the government, that's a wonderful feeling.

Sharp rise in footballers reporting depression symptoms

BERN (Reuters) — The global players' union FIFPRO says there has been a sharp rise in the number of players reporting symptoms of depression or anxiety since the sport was brought to a standstill by the COVID-19 outbreak.

FIFPRO said that 22% of women players and 13% of men players who took part in a survey reported symptoms "consistent with a diagnosis of depression" such as lack of interest, lack of appetite, lack of energy and self-esteem.

This compared to 11% and 6% respectively in a similar survey conducted in December and January.

It said that 18% of women players and 16% of men reported symptoms of generalized anxiety such as worry or tension. There was some crossover with 11% of women players and 7.5% of men reporting both sets of symptoms, FIFPRO said.

"In football, suddenly young men and women athletes are having to cope with social isolation, a suspension of their working lives and doubts about their future," said FIFPRO's chief medical officer Vincent Goutteborge.

"It is a time of huge uncertainty for the players and

their families due to the insecurity of their future and the social isolation."

FIFPRO said that the survey, conducted with the Amsterdam University Medical Centre, included 1,134 male players, with a mean age of 26, and 468 female players, with a mean age of 23, in 16 countries.

On a more positive note, Goutteborge said that nearly 80% of players surveyed reported that they had access to sufficient resources and support for their mental health, often through their national player associations.

FIFPRO general secretary Jonas Baer-Hoffmann said they were not trying to make a special case for footballers.

"We are very conscious that this is a reflection of a problem in broader society than and there is no suggestion that it is more severe for our members," said Baer-Hoffmann.

"Footballers are more similar to average society than most people think, and that is simply because of the misconceptions about how players live."



He reiterated that many footballers lived a precarious financial existence at the best of times.

"The average contract length is under two years and the average income is close to that of the general public," he said. "Many are incredibly dependent on their footballing skills and are not prepared for what would come after."

Ayanda Patosi wants to stay in Iran

South Africa international midfielder Ayanda Patosi hopes to leave Cape Town City in order to make his loan spell at Foolad Khuzestan FC permanent.

The 27-year-old is on loan at the Iranian outfit and has scored two goals in four appearances in the Persian Gulf Pro League.



Patosi says even though he loves South African football, he is enjoying his stay at Foolad and is keen to make a permanent move to the club.

"I'm enjoying my football (in Iran), I'm telling you. Now I'm in the team and I've been doing good with this team. I'm happy, also," Patosi told Far Post.

"Hopefully, they (Foolad) will come up with an offer to buy me out from Cape Town City. But we will see after the (national) lockdown... I want to stay outside. I love South African football, but I'd rather play outside for now," he said.

(Source: Goal.com)

Azmoun linked with Arsenal

Iranian international forward Sardar Azmoun has been linked with a move to Arsenal.

AreaNapoli.it has reported that the Zenit striker has caught the eye of the Gunners.

Azmoun has been also linked with a move to English top-flight teams West Ham United, Wolverhampton Wanderers, Everton and Leicester City

Italian club Napoli have also set their sight on signing the striker.

The 25 years old forward has spent practically his entire career in Russia with Rubin Kazan, Rostov and since 2019 Zenit. Azmoun has 31 goals in 46 senior caps for Iran.

(Source: AreaNapoli.it)

Indonesian Olympian Niode dies after contracting coronavirus

Southeast Asian Games swimming gold medallist and Indonesian Olympian Lukman Niode has died aged 56 after contracting COVID-19.

Niode, who won gold at the 1983 Southeast Asian Games and represented Indonesia at the following year's Olympic Games in Los Angeles, passed away at the Pelni Hospital in Jakarta last week.

His brother Idrus told the Kompas.com website that he had tested positive for coronavirus two days before his death.

Idrus said Lukman had previously tested negative on two separate occasions at a different hospital before testing positive.

"We are deeply sorry to hear about the death of Lukman Niode, who was one of our prominent athletes in the swimming field," said Youth and Sports Ministry secretary Gatot S. Dewa Broto.

Niode went on to work for the National Sports Council (KONI) after his retirement from competitive swimming.

"Indonesia has lost one of its greatest swimming athletes who changed our history thanks to his excellent achievements," KONI head Marciano Norman told the Jakarta Post.

According to latest figures, COVID-19 has infected more than 2.4 million people and killed over 165,000 worldwide.

Indonesia has reported 6,760 cases and 590 deaths from the virus.

(Source: Insidethegames)

Spurs' Son begins three-week military training: report

Tottenham Hotspur striker Son Heung-min began his three-week military training at a marines boot camp on Monday, a report said, with the Premier League on hold over the coronavirus pandemic.

All able-bodied Korea Republic men are obliged to serve in the military for nearly two years but Son was among the footballers who earned an exemption by winning gold at the 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia.

The 27-year-old's Premier League season ended even before the coronavirus outbreak spread to Europe when he broke his arm against Aston Villa on February 16, and Spurs said he returned to Korea Republic for "personal reasons".

Son reported to a marines camp on the southern island of Jeju for his three-week basic training, Yonhap news agency reported.

A Yonhap photo showed Son walking past a military truck and soldiers, wearing a green sweatshirt, a black cap and a face mask.

Son's agency had earlier urged fans to refrain from attending the venue over virus concerns.

"Son Heung-min is up for basic military training in April," his agency said on his official Facebook account this month.

"We have decided to not open to the public in active compliance with the government's measures on the COVID-19," it added.


(Sources: Yonhap/AFP)

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One who is sure of God's compensation, shows much generosity himself.

Imam Ali (AS)

VOD platforms in Commonwealth of Independent States to offer Iran's "Last Fiction"

A R T **TEHRAN** — The platforms providing the video on demand (VOD) service in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) will offer the award-winning Iranian animation "The Last Fiction" in the region.

The movie can be downloaded on the platforms from April 28, announced Hoorakhsh Studio, the producer of the film.



A scene from "The Last Fiction".

Aurora Trade, the distributor of "The Last Fiction" in the region, had previously canceled the Russian premiere of the film, which had been set for late March, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The movie can currently be downloaded on the VOD platforms Filmin in Spain and Cinesquare in Macedonia, which covers Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Bosnian and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Croatia, Slovenia, Albania, Cyprus, Greece and Turkey.

The 7th Sky Entertainment in Pakistan and Hoorakhsh are jointly distributing the film in the world.

Directed by Ashkan Rahgozar, the movie recounts a story from Persian poet Ferdowsi's epic masterpiece Shahnameh about Zahak's treacherous rise to the throne in Jamshid in Persia. The young and naive hero Afaridoun will have to save the kingdom and its people from darkness, but he must first conquer his own demons in this portrayal of Persian mythology that reveals human nature.

The movie has been screened in numerous international events, winning over a dozen awards.

"The Last Fiction" was among the submissions for the 2020 Oscars consideration, but it failed to receive a nomination.

COVID-19 turns into topic of new Iranian game

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian game designer Keivan Malekmohammadi is working on a new android game with COVID-19 as its main topic.

"The gamers appear in the shape of a green and happy virus trying to infect individuals," Malekmohammadi said in a press release published on Monday.

"The new virus knows it can infect people through the chain of transmission of the coronavirus, and the chain can be cut only via those who wear masks and observe social distancing," he added.

"Some people still have no perfect imagination about the chain of transmission of the new virus and they believe if they visit close relatives and friends they will not be infected," he stated.

"People are not aware of their own roles in cutting the chain, and I got the idea for the game by observing these important facts. It is very important to give a clear image of transmission and cutting the chain of the new virus through a game," he added.

"The idea was that gamers play the role of the virus themselves. When one sees him/her in the role of a virus that tries to infect others, he/she can better understand the chain of transmission, and when he/she observes social distancing, he/she can feel and touch the effects in cutting the chain, and fully understands how one can stop the spread of the new virus," he explained.

He added that at the end of each round, a health care tip appears on the screen.

He also said that he is producing the game in his personal studio and plans to release the game within the next week.



This image shows the green coronavirus in the game.

Aqamiri institute to raise funds for healthcare staff, patients battling COVID-19

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Aqamiri Illumination Art Institute has launched a campaign to raise funds for the healthcare staff and patients battling with the COVID-19 in the country.

A collection of 1399 artworks created by the Aqamiri family and several other artists will be put on sale during the campaign ehsan.sepid.iran, the veteran miniaturist and illustrator Amir-Hushang Aqamiri, who is the director of the institute, said in an Instagram post.

Poems from the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam and Ferdowsi's Shahnameh illuminated by Aqamiri are among the artworks on sale in the campaign.

He invited people to take part in the campaign and purchase the artworks to raise funds for the medical staff and the patients.

Also included is a gold-plated copy of the Holy Quran inscribed by calligrapher Ahmad Neyrizi during the 18th century and Aqamiri illuminated it over the past few years.

"I used to do some charity works in secret such as releasing prisoners and helping patients suffering from serious diseases, but this time I decided to make it public to encourage the youth to do more charity activities," he added.

"Coronavirus taught us life is too short and the main value of mankind is to help others," he said.

"Artists can accompany the medical staff and give them hope and tell them they are not alone and that people appreciate their hard works," he concluded.



A selection of works by veteran miniaturist Amir-Hushang Aqamiri.

Behzad Shishegaran displays artworks on coronavirus in online exhibit



A poster for online exhibit of Behzad Shishegaran on coronavirus.

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian painter and graphic designer Behzad Shishegaran is displaying a collection of his artworks on coronavirus in an online exhibition, which opened on Monday.

The exhibition will run on the Instagram, Facebook and Telegram accounts of the artist for 10 days.

"I will upload one new work every day for 10 days," Shishegaran told the Persian service of ISNA on Monday.

"During the home quarantine, I thought so much about my artistic life. Art is connected with the hearts

of people and I have this honor to have been connected with their hearts for over half a century," he added.

"The truth is that we are all living in isolation with great limits these days. We are all in pain and we are all strangers in one another's hearts. Art, which is ignorant of people's life and pain, surely remains neutral, and that is why I used these restrictions as a great opportunity to hold a painting exhibition to reflect the atmosphere we are living in," he explained.

"I think this can be considered as a tribute to our devoted medical staff and those who died of COVID-19," he added.

Iranian Artists Forum to organize Asma-ul-Husna Annual Poster Exhibition online



A combination of posters submitted to the 16th Asma-ul-Husna Annual Poster Exhibition.

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Artists Forum announced on Monday the 16th edition of the Asma-ul-Husna Annual Poster Exhibition, a showcase for typographical works featuring the names of Allah, will be organized online this year due to the new coronavirus pandemic.

The exhibition will open on the Instagram page asmaulhusna261 on April 25, which will likely be the first day of the holy month of Ramadan.

The Iranian Artists Forum based in Tehran organizes the exhibition every year to observe Ramadan.

Over 40 posters will be put on view during the exhibition this year and the top three works of the exhibition will be awarded during a special ceremony, which will be held during Id al-Fitr, the celebration marking the end of the month of Ramadan, if the virus epidemic diminishes.

For the first time this year, one artwork will be honored with an audience award based on the number of likes it receives on the Instagram showcase. Five posters will also receive honorable mentions.

The exhibition will be organized in collaboration with Today Posters — Iran Independent Design Society (IIDS).

Elba and wife, recovering from coronavirus, to help others

NEW YORK (AP) — Even though they only had mild symptoms, Idris Elba says he and his wife had their lives "turned around" after contracting the coronavirus, calling the experience "definitely scary and unsettling and nervous."

"You know, everyone's sort of feeling the way we have been feeling, but it has definitely been sort of just a complete upheaval," he told The Associated Press late last week.

But the British actor feels that there are life lessons to be learned, and the pandemic serves as a reminder that "the world doesn't tick on your time."

"I think that the world should take a week of quarantine every year just to remember this time. Remember each other. I really do," he said.

The British actor and his model wife, Sabrina Dhowre Elba, spoke to the AP as they began a push with the United Nations to lessen the impact of COVID-19 on farmers and food producers in rural areas.

"People forget that 80 percent of the poor population live in these rural areas," Dhowre Elba said. "What we are really worried about at the moment, and why we are launching this fund is that those people are being forgotten."

In their new roles as U.N. Goodwill Ambassadors, Elba and his wife, have joined forces with the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to launch the new \$40 million fund.

The actor believes people in rural and poor areas are likely to suffer more in the pandemic.

"If you imagine being in a village where no one even knows the name of your village or your population, and that you live in a slum where there is one room and six of you live in it," he said. "Social distancing is almost laughable."

"What we are really worried about at the moment, and why we are launching this fund is that those people are being forgotten," Dhowre Elba said. "While health, you know, is so important at the moment ... we don't want people to forget about what comes after that."

Both Elba and his wife have roots in Africa; Elba's parents are from Sierra Leone and Ghana, while Dhowre Elba is of Somali descent. The pair went to Sierra Leone in December with the United Nations to see how IFAD has assisted people there.

Elba said he was particularly concerned as to what the coronavirus pandemic could do on the continent in countries already suffering economically.

"We have to think about the forward planning. What's what's the fallout going to be?" he said.

The couple have been recovering in New Mexico, where the actor was filming when he became sick, but plan to return to London as soon as they can get a flight. Elba said he had to miss his 6-year-old son's birthday because of the lockdown but he's "hoping to see him as soon as I can."

"We've been fortunate," he added. "We have been staying in a lovely place that's been very comfortable for the time. But we're looking forward to going home."

U.S. animator, filmmaker Gene Deitch dies in Prague at 95

PRAGUE (AP) — Gene Deitch, an American Oscar-winning illustrator, animator, film director and producer has died. He was 95.

His Czech publisher, Petr Himmel, told The Associated Press Deitch died unexpectedly during the night from Thursday to Friday in his apartment in Prague's Little Quarter neighborhood. No further details were given.

Deitch's movie "Munro" won the Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film in 1960. He was also nominated for the same award twice in 1964 for "Here's Nudnik" and "How to Avoid Friendship."

Earlier, he had created the "Tom Terrific" series, while the "Sidney's Family Tree", which he co-produced was nominated for an Academy Award in 1958.

Born Aug. 8, 1924, in Chicago, Deitch arrived in Prague in 1959 intending to stay for 10 days, but fell in love with his future wife, Zdenka, and stayed in the Czechoslovakian capital.

Working from behind the Iron Curtain, he directed 13 episodes of "Tom and Jerry" and also some of the "Popeye the Sailor" series.

He captured life in communist Czechoslovakia and later in the Czech Republic after the 1989 anti-communist Velvet Revolution in his memoirs "For the Love of Prague."

In 2004, he received the Winsor McCay Award for his lifelong contribution to animation.

Deitch is survived by his wife and by three sons from his first marriage, all of whom are cartoonists and illustrators.



In this February 20, 2018 file photo the American director and animated film producer Gene Deitch poses for the photographer with his book of memories 'For the Love of Prague' in Prague, Czech Republic. (CTK via AP/Vit Simanek)