



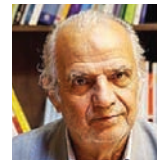
**U.S., Europe can't lecture Iran based on misreading of UNSCR 2231** **2**



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# Iran is ready to help

**Iran's aluminum output to rise 100%**



**We are ready to help Americans escape the helplessness of their government amid pandemic, minister says**

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People in the U.S. queue up to receive a free meal, during the coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19)

**TEHRAN** – Iran's industry, mining, and trade minister said the country's aluminum production is expected to be doubled after the inauguration of the country's biggest aluminum production complex in the central Fars province, IRIB reported. "With this unit going operational, the county's aluminum production will rise 100 percent," Reza Rahmani said in the inauguration ceremony of the mentioned complex.

The official put the value of the Iranian mining industry's production at about \$22 billion, saying that the country is relatively self-sufficient in minerals and a great deal is also exported every year.

He went on underlying the country's capacities in the sector, saying that Iran is ranked 18th among the world's top aluminum producers, and with this new plant going operational the country will climb four places to stand at 14th place. **→4**

## Satellite launch wins praise of ranking officials

**TEHRAN** – A number of top officials have praised the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps for its successful launch of Iran's first military satellite into the orbit.

The military satellite, dubbed Noor 1 [Light 1], was launched upon Ghased satellite carrier in the early hours of Wednesday from a location in the central desert of

Iran, Sepah News reported.

The satellite reached an orbit of 425km.

In a post on his Instagram page on Thursday, presidential chief of staff Mahmoud Vaezi said the successful launch of the satellite "marks another gem to the victories of the youth and scientists (active) in our country's space field." **→2**

## Experts react with horror to Trump coronavirus disinfectant idea

Doctors and epidemiologists have reacted with alarm to comments from U.S. President Donald Trump that injecting disinfectant and exposure to ultraviolet rays could help people with the coronavirus.

"Trump is absolutely wrong and irresponsible," Dr Eugene Gu, whose laboratory is involved in coronavirus testing, wrote on Twitter, adding "Clorox, Tide Pods and Lysol will kill coronavirus. No

question about it. But if you are infected then the coronavirus is inside your cells. If you use any of those disinfectants to kill the coronavirus in your own cells then you'll die right along with the coronavirus."

Trump was speaking at the daily press briefing at the White House, after a discussion on work by government researchers on the effect of heat and sunlight on the coronavirus, al Jazeera reported. **→10**



## ARTICLE

**Ali Miri**  
Journalist

## Developed nations can learn from developing states in coronavirus fight

I'm working in medical equipment supplier company. I have to go to many hospitals and medical laboratories to provide their needs. Recently, I found out some points that could be very important for all health systems around the world.

These days all of us are busy thinking about health and coronavirus. Up to now, the coronavirus has sickened more than 2.7 million people and killed more than 193,000 around the world.

Developed countries had a wrong imagination about the performance of developing countries in confronting the pandemic crisis. Now it is clear that pandemic has infected or killed much more people in some developed countries like Italy, Spain, and the U.S. In decades, many experts had argued that poor countries will face problems when a pandemic occurs, arguing their health systems are incapable to control pandemic and cure the patients.

We know for sure that non-Western countries have less

medical equipment or money to provide useful utilities to efficiently confront the virus. They have less facilities to keep people safe from the pandemic. However, such shortages showed us it wasn't true. They could control this epidemic with low cost and side effects better than expected.

But what did they do? We have two different instances today. First China and second Iran. Coronavirus began in China. The Chinese government ordered a strict lockdown of Wuhan, the epicenter of this virus, for an unlimited time.

China is a rich country but not as much as a Western European country. Nevertheless, the strict lockdown worked very well.

Now life has returned to normalcy in the country including in Wuhan, Hubei province. The second instance is Iran. After China, Iran was the hardest hit country in Asia.

At the beginning the government in Iran denied any case of the coronavirus in the country, but it acknowledged the outbreak of the virus after two persons died of the coronavirus on February 19. Thereafter, the government managed the problem very well. At the first step they activated a wartime act. **→2**

## IMF's political approach toward Iran's request casts doubt on its impartiality

**By Mahnaz Abdi**

**TEHRAN** — Fighting the coronavirus outbreak in the country, Iran has asked the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for emergency loan to help it contain the pandemic.

In a letter to IMF last month, Central Bank of Iran (CBI)'s Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati requested \$5 billion from the Fund's Rapid Financing Initiative (RFI), an emergency program that gives loans to countries facing with sudden shocks such as natural disasters.

While it was Tehran's first request for an IMF loan in nearly six decades, it raised opposition from the U.S. as the senior officials in the Trump administration said Iran's government has billion-dollar accounts still at its disposal.

The United States said it plans to block Iran's request.

The U.S. reaction was seriously blamed by the Iranian officials, 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 the legal point of view, the United States is not

in the position to obstruct the legal performance of institutions and international organizations".

Iranian officials are in fact urging 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.

In an interview conducted by Bloomberg and published on April 19, Hemmati said, "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. **→4**

## How Iran fights the coronavirus and the U.S.: Sanctioned, alone, but still more efficient

The 2019–20 coronavirus pandemic is taking a toll all over the globe, causing severe socioeconomic disruption, the stock market crash, millions of job losses, the postponement or cancellation of cultural and political events, and widespread fears of supply shortages resulting in panic purchasing. The coronavirus, which causes a respiratory disease known as COVID-19, is currently affecting more than 200 countries and territories. It has so far infected over 1.6 million people and killed around 100,000 others. The fact that, unlike many historical pandemics, the ongoing disaster has hit hardest the most developed countries of the world, even their most developed regions, left most of them surprised and unprepared. Thus, virtually all countries in the most difficult days sought and received foreign assistance, whether

from other countries or international organizations. On the other hand, there is also a country which, given the imposed circumstances, is forced to fight completely alone.

Iran reported its first confirmed cases of SARS-CoV-2 infections on 19 February 2020 in the city of Qom, probably brought to the country by merchants who had travelled to China, and in the following days became a center of the spread of the virus in the region, as well as the second-worst affected country in the world. In the first week of March, Iran reported dozens of dead and hundreds infected each day, next only to China as the pandemic's epicenter. At the same time, the government closed schools, universities, shopping centers, bazaars, holy shrines, and cancelled public events and festival celebrations. As confirmed

cases mounted, health ministry announced that checkpoints would be placed between cities to limit travel. The unprecedented situation has left Iran in need of masks, respirators and other medical equipment, but imports are virtually impossible due to unilateral U.S. trade sanctions.

### ■ On its own feet

Faced with such inhumane anti-Iran policy, unseen in the history of economic warfare, Iran turned to its own resources. The government has allocated 1,000 trillion rials (about \$24 billion) to help lessen the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on the national economy. In early March, a five-day World Health Organization (WHO) technical support mission that included German and Chinese experts, confirmed Iranian rapid improvements in its testing capacity. **→3**



## Happy Ramadan

The holy month of Ramadan begins today in Iran. Fasting during Ramadan – which is one of the five pillars of Islam – is a way to learn patience and break bad habits, as well as an opportunity to become closer to God.

This year, though, the outbreak of coronavirus has forced mosques and holy shrines to be closed for at least two weeks to help curb the spread of the disease.

## COVID-19 enforcer of decade old tendencies: Rusnák

**By Zahra Mirzafarjouyan**

Dr. Urban Rusnák, Secretary-General of the Energy Charter Secretariat believes coronavirus outbreak is an accelerator of tendencies which have been present since last decade – the rise of nativism, the twilight of international institutions, strengthening of intercultural conflicts, widening of the income gap, and search for safe heaven by individuals and societies.

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

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

In an effort to make the dimension of the changes to the existing world order by coronavirus clearer, we reached out to Dr. Urban Rusnák, Secretary-General of the Energy Charter Secretariat in Brussels, Belgium.

Here is the full text of the interview:

■ What will be the effects of coronavirus on the current world order?

The current pandemic is already changing the world as we use to know it. I see it mostly as an accelerator and an enforcer of tendencies which have been present since last decade – the rise of nativism, the twilight of international institutions, strengthening of intercultural conflicts, widening of the income gap, and search for safe heaven by individuals and societies.

■ The current world order is majorly based on liberalism and to some extent on realism approaches. What are the deficiencies of the said approaches revealed by coronavirus?

The underlying base for the current system of the international relation is the UN Charter and other basic UN documents, which indeed promotes universal values. Liberal and realistic approaches are not in the contradiction per se. What we see now is that the fight for the COVID19 legacy in international relations already started. The access to the information in due time and quality based on the available scientific evidence is still the most essential instrument in the battle against the coronavirus propagation. **→7**



## Satellite launch wins praise of ranking officials

**1 →** Vaezi added said both the satellite and the Qased launcher, which uses solid fuel, are a “national achievement and symbol of the advance of space technology in Iran.”

Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi, the chief of Iran’s Army, congratulated the IRGC on the launch, describing it as “a show of power of the sons of the revolution”.

Ali Akbar Velayati, a top advisor to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, said in a message on Friday, “The Noor satellite is another example of power and determination of the Islamic Iran in protecting the country’s independence and development in second phase of the revolution.”

Tehran’s Ambassador to Moscow, Kazem Jalali, said in a tweet in Russian language on Friday that “the successful launch of the Noor satellite showed another dimension of the Iranian youths’ capabilities, and in addition to that it shows Iran’s determination in reaching the height of knowledge and technology.”

Gholamreza Jalali, chief of Iran’s Civil Defense Organization, said on Friday, “The Guards’ presence in space will promote the country’s deterrence power.”

The satellite launch was carried out on the anniversary of the 41st anniversary of the establishment of the IRGC.

## Over 70 civil society groups urge Trump to end Iran sanctions

*By staff and agency*

Over 70 civil society groups representing more than 40 million people urged U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday to issue immediate sanctions relief for numerous countries, including Iran, Syria, Venezuela, Cuba, and North Korea, for at least the duration of the coronavirus crisis which threatens to kill thousands in the hard-hit countries.

According to Common Dreams, the “urgent appeal” came in the form of an open letter sent by the groups to Trump, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and Secretary of the Treasury Steve Mnuchin, calling for curtailing the sanctions regime for the duration of the pandemic.

Entitled “Lift Sanctions, Save Lives,” the initiative is aimed at ensuring the economic warfare by the U.S. claims as few lives as possible as the nations fight off the health crisis.

“Denying people access to lifesaving resources now represents a risk to the entire world,” said Daniel Jasper of the American Friends Service Committee, a signatory to the letter. “The U.S. must rethink its approach to sanctions.”

According to a press release accompanying the letter, “The letter puts forth a framework for universal safeguards that include six specific categories. These include aid that is directly related to containing and providing treatment for COVID-19 (such as testing kits, personal protective equipment, ventilators, etc.). The letter also calls for safeguarding aid needed to address simultaneous challenges exacerbated by the pandemic, such as providing adequate water supply, food security, and urgent health services for other infectious diseases.”

Peace Action senior policy director Paul Kawika Martin said, “Sanctions kill innocents indiscriminately just like bombs.”

“During this pandemic crisis, the U.S. needs to remove all barriers, like sanctions, so countries can counteract COVID-19,” he said.

## Developed nations can learn from developing states in coronavirus fight

**1 →** Ironically, this pandemic happened while Iran is under the harshest sanctions in history by the United States. Its economy is in recession, and the health system is facing shortage of medical supplies and equipment. But officials applied practical ways to counter the crisis.

In the first step, they put some limitations on broadcasting of rumors about the virus also called Covid-19.

Citizens also did not react hurriedly or in an uncivilized way. They behaved normally.

The stress of a shortage of toilet paper and foods were not seen in Iran. Nobody attacked stores. They did not store face masks, gel or toilet paper. They continued their normal life. In the second step, they activated many companies and military facilities and used the capacity of volunteers to produce face shields and gel.

You should notice that drinking alcohol is banned in Iran and there are far less alcohol producers in the country. In the first week, you could see that the shortage of alcohol was noticeable. But later many places, even many mosques, started to produce medical alcohol.

The third step was very essential. The government used the internet and applications to screen all people by using self-declaration information.

Iran’s health system has a shortage in many aspects. They cannot hospitalize all patients. Due to lack of enough experts and trained staff, Iran used self-declaration to find the infected people. This manner changed all the routine guidelines and led to improving, managing and allocating resources better than expected.

Now, through cooperation of the people, new cases of coronavirus can be found and divided into different groups: from moderate to severe. All the infected could take enough medical services and attention.

The fourth step is that the government started to control everything directly from the capital. The government buys masks, gels and all things necessary from producers and sends them directly to different province by the amount needed. In Iran, hospitals are not needed to offer higher prices to buy necessary commodities.

Hospitals focus only on healing patients.

As a sanctioned country, in which prices have increased greatly and the country is being deprived of incomes, the government cannot afford to quarantine citizens. Its economy in 2019 decreased 9.5 percent and it cannot hand out enough money to citizens. However it seems that 80-million Iran is acting faster and more efficiently than what the World Health Organization had expected.

Now, this disastrous pandemic could teach us many lessons. We need to learn from each other. Developing countries have some experiences that may prove useful to developed countries. If all nations start to learn from each other’s experience we will can expect a better future.

# Zarif says U.S., Europe can’t lecture Iran based on misreading of UNSCR 2231

**POLITICAL**

**TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Friday that both the U.S. and Europe cannot lecture Iran based on misreading of the UN Security Council Resolution 2231 which endorsed the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

Zarif said the United States has violated the Resolution 2231 and Europe has obeyed Washington instead of abiding to the resolution.

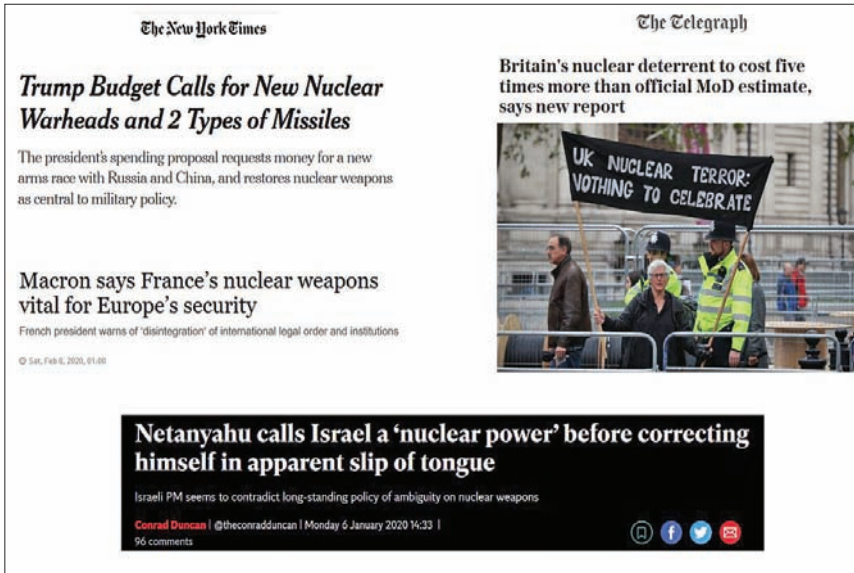
“US has been bullying all against UNSC Resolution 2231 since 2017. Europe obeyed US instead of 2231. Neither can lecture Iran based on flimsy misreadings of UNSCR 2231,” Zarif tweeted.

The tweet by Zarif followed after Unites States, France and Germany criticized Iran’s launch of a military satellite into space on April 22.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo claimed the launch violated the Security Council resolution.

“I think every nation has an obligation to go to the United Nations and evaluate whether this missile launch was consistent with that Security Council resolution,” Pompeo told reporters, according to the Guardian.

In a statement on Thursday, France also claimed the launch was in contravention of



Resolution 2231 and called on Tehran to immediately cease all activities related to the development of ballistic missiles designed to be capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

Germany also said that Berlin’s position on the Islamic Republic’s missile program

has not changed, and the program has a destabilizing impact on the region.

In response, Foreign Minister Zarif said, “Iran neither has nukes nor missiles ‘DESIGNED to be capable of carrying’ such horrific arms.”

## Iran summons Swiss envoy over Trump’s provocative statement



**POLITICAL**

**TEHRAN** — Iran’s Foreign Ministry on Thursday summoned the Swiss ambassador to protest President Donald Trump’s provocative statement and the U.S. Navy’s acts of harassment in the Persian Gulf.

Switzerland’s embassy in Tehran represents the United States interest section in Iran.

“The Swiss envoy to Tehran, as representative of the United States’ interests, was summoned to the Foreign Ministry in this respect. Iran’s strong protest over the country’s presence and illegal and destabilizing actions in northern parts of the Persian Gulf and Iran’s coasts was conveyed in a note,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi stated.

Iran has also warned that it is essential for all sides to observe international law of shipping, Mousavi said.

He added Iran has warned that it will give proper response to any threat and illegal action.

U.S. Navy issued a statement on April 15 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”.

Following the statement, U.S. President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that he had told the Navy to “shoot down and destroy” Iranian gunboats that “harass” U.S. ships.

Mousavi said, “The Islamic Republic of Iran condemns threatening and provocative remarks by the President of the United States and advised Mr. Trump to use its military

fleet in helping contain the coronavirus inside the United States, which has turned into the most contaminated spot in the world, instead of seeking adventurism.”

In a video press conference on Monday, Mousavi said 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,” the spokesman pointed out.

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.

Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy issued a statement on Sunday calling the U.S. claims “fake”, 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 April 16, 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.

## Russia: Iran’s military satellite launch not against UN resolution



*By staff and agency*

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Thursday that Iran’s launch of a military satellite into the orbit does not contradict UN Security Council resolution on the Iranian nuclear program.

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) successfully launched Iran’s first military satellite into the orbit on Wednesday.

The first military satellite, dubbed Noor 1 [Light 1], was launched upon Ghased (Messenger) satellite carrier in the early hours of Wednesday from a location in the central desert of Iran, Sepah News reported.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo doubted the launch’s compliance with UN resolutions. France and Germany have also criticized Iran’s launch of a military satellite into space.

Zakharova said at a briefing, “This is not the first time that a state, which grossly violates international law and UNSC resolution 2231, is trying to deflect international condemnation by accusing Iran of unproven violation of the requirements of the Security Council. We qualify such methods as unscrupulous, they have long discredited themselves, and have proved their full insolvency. This is confirmed by the results of numerous discussions

Zarif also posted news headlines which say the U.S., France, Britain and the Zionist regime of Israel possess nuclear weapons.

Resolution 2231 terminated the provisions of previous UN resolutions against Iran. It also “calls on” Iran “not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such ballistic missile technology.”

Tehran has always said it has no nuclear warheads and that none of its missiles have been designed to carry nuclear weapons.

However, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, on Thursday dismissed the U.S. claim that Iran violated resolution 2231 and accused Washington of being in violation of the nuclear deal.

Addressing a news conference in Moscow on Thursday, she said that this would not be the first time that a nation (U.S.) that has “flagrantly breached the norms of international law and violated the UNSC resolution 2231”.

The 2015 nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA, was endorsed by the Resolution 2231. The United States officially quit the JCPOA in May 2018 and the European countries have since failed to guarantee Iran’s benefits from the international deal.

in the UN Security Council on the implementation of resolution 2231,” UrduPoint News reported.

“As you know, neither the resolution itself, nor the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the Iranian nuclear program in any way limits Tehran’s rights and capabilities in terms of space exploration and development of relevant national programs,” she said.

Iran does not develop ballistic missiles that can carry nuclear weapons, Zakharova said.

“The futile attempts of some analysts in Washington to present the case as if Iranian space rockets were capable of carrying nuclear weapons is, of course, a fraud that breaks down once it faces reality. There are no, there were no, and hopefully there will never be nuclear weapons in Iran. Iran just as what the resolution calls for does not develop, test or use ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons, unlike the United States, which surprises the world every single day with news about plans to develop their nuclear missile capabilities,” she said.

She stressed that over the past few years since the conclusion of the JCPOA, Iran has remained the most audited state by the IAEA, and the agency has not found any nuclear weapons there.

## Tehran has proven it will not succumb to threats: Iranian mission to UN

*By staff and agency*

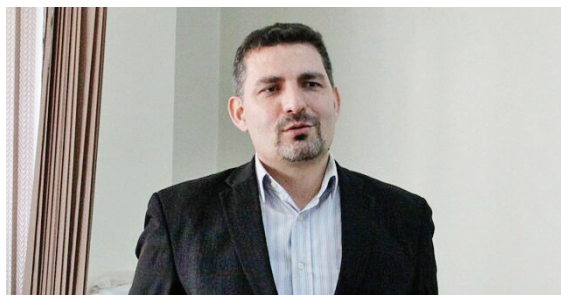
Iranian mission to the United Nations spokesperson Alireza Miryousefi has said that Tehran has proven that it will not succumb to intimidation and threats.

“Iran has proven that it will not succumb to intimidation and threats, nor will it hesitate to defend its territory, in accordance with international law, from any and all aggressions,” he told Newsweek in an interview published on Wednesday.

His comments came as a response to U.S. President Donald Trump’s threat on Wednesday in which he said he had told the Navy to “shoot down and destroy” Iranian gunboats that “harass” U.S. ships.

Miryousefi questioned the Pentagon’s priorities, especially as both countries battled the same novel coronavirus disease.

“In the midst of a global coronavirus pandemic when all



attentions worldwide is to combat this menace, the question is what the U.S. military is doing in Persian Gulf waters, 7000 miles from home,” he said.

U.S. Navy issued a statement on April 15, claiming that

## 40 years since the U.S. military fiasco in Iranian desert

**TEHRAN** — On April 24, 1980, an ill-fated military operation to rescue the 52 American hostages held in Tehran ends with eight U.S. servicemen dead and no hostages rescued.

Then U.S. president Jimmy Carter ordered the military mission to free the hostages. During the operation, three of eight helicopters failed, crippling the crucial airborne plans. The mission was then canceled at the staging

area in Iran, but during the withdrawal one of the retreating helicopters collided with one of six C-130 transport planes, killing eight soldiers and injuring five.

The failure of the military operation, dubbed “Operation Eagle Claw”, is remembered as a fiasco among Iranians for the U.S. military. The incident happened in desert province of great Korassan, now part of South Korassan. Some

call the incident a divine vengeance against the U.S. The hostage crisis began on November 4, 1979, when a number of students angry over U.S. behavior toward the Islamic Revolution seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran. The students said the embassy, called the espionage center, was engineering a coup in Iran to return the toppled regime of the shah.

Upon the order of Ayatollah Khomeini, the

founder of the Islamic Revolution, non-U.S. hostages and female and minority Americans, were released. The remaining 52 captives remained in custody for the next 14 months.

Finally, in November 1980, with the assistance of Algerian intermediaries, U.S. agreed to stop interference in Iran’s internal affairs and Iran agreed to release the hostages after 444 days.



# Sanctions hamper Iran's anti-coronavirus efforts: leaked intel

**POLITICAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A leaked intelligence brief reveals U.S. sanctions have “left Iran bereft of financial resources to mount an effective public health response,” according to The Nation.

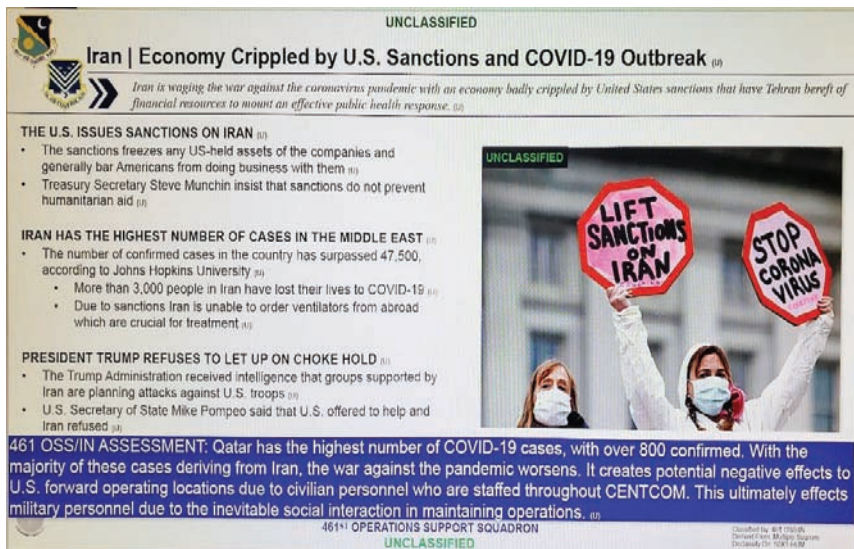
Citing the military intelligence cable, The Nation reported on Wednesday that the U.S. sanctions have “badly crippled” Iran’s economy as well as its ability to respond to the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The document, which dated April 3, warns that U.S. sanctions have left Iran “unable to order ventilators from abroad, which are crucial for treatment.”

One segment of the briefing says “President Trump refuses to let up on choke hold.” Norman Roule, a retired CIA official who served as national intelligence manager for Iran until 2017, told The Nation that the international community should do everything it can to enable the Iranian people to obtain access to medical supplies and equipment partly because “as Iranians travel throughout the region, they will continue to disperse the virus.”

Roule, a 34-year veteran of the CIA, stressed that if the coronavirus spreads unchecked throughout the country, it threatens everyone.

The intelligence brief appears to echo Roule’s concern about the threat of the virus spreading outside Iran’s borders, warning, “It creates potential negative effects to U.S. forward operating locations due to civilian personnel who are staffed throughout CENTCOM. This ultimately affects military personnel due to the inevitable social interaction in maintaining operations.”



The intelligence brief, produced by the Air Force’s 461st Operations Support Squadron and marked For Official Use Only, was provided to The Nation by a Pentagon official on the condition of anonymity to avoid professional reprisal. It notes that “Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that [the] U.S. offered to help and Iran refused.”

While Pompeo has rhetorically expressed openness to easing sanctions, no concrete offer has been made, and he has not given any indication that he has dropped his 12 preconditions for sanctions relief.

Jake Sullivan, who negotiated with Iran

while serving as the State Department’s director of policy planning under the Obama administration, reportedly said of Pompeo’s preconditions, “The 12 requirements the secretary set seem intended to ensure that no deal ever happens.”

Iran suffers from the highest number of reported coronavirus cases of any country in the Middle East. As of Friday, it reported 88,194 cases, with 5,574 deaths.

The Trump administration maintains what it calls a “maximum pressure” campaign against Iran. Not only has the administration barred U.S. firms from doing business with

## IRGC commander warns U.S. against threatening Iranian vessels in Persian Gulf

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami warned the US against threatening Iranian vessels in the Persian Gulf, stressing that Iran is serious in defending its security, territorial integrity and maritime borders.

“We (warn) the Americans that we are fully determined and serious in defending our national security, maritime borders, maritime interests, maritime security and security of our forces at sea and any (wrong) move (by enemies) will meet our decisive, effective and prompt response,” Major General Salami said on Thursday, in reaction to the US of-

ficials’ recent threats.

He added that the Americans have seen Iran’s responses in the past and should take them as lessons.

“We have also ordered our military units at sea that if a vessel or military unit of the navy of the US’ terrorist military seeks to threaten the security of our civilian ships or combat vessels, they should target that (enemy) vessel or military unit.”

The senior commander also stressed that the Americans’ unprofessional and hazardous behavior caused the IRGC Navy vessels’ confrontation with US vessels last week.



## How Iran fights the coronavirus and the U.S.: Sanctioned, alone, but still more efficient

**1→** When the team arrived, Iran had only 22 testing laboratories, and by the time they left on 10 March, there were around 40 laboratories. Five days later, Alireza Beglari who heads the Pasteur Institute of Iran (IPI), the flagship organization fighting infectious diseases in the country, announced that the country is daily doing 6,000 coronavirus test at 50 laboratories, and two weeks later, he also announced that the numbers had risen to 20,000 tests and 100 labs.

At the same time, several Iranian biomedicine companies have obtained certificates from health authorities to produce COVID-19 testing kits on a commercial scale, each producing at least 80,000 kits a week. Besides diagnostic testing, Iran’s health authorities have screened over 10 million people for symptoms until 15 March, 41 million a week later, and 65 million by the end of the month. By early April, Iran conducted about a quarter of a million diagnostic tests, as much as France and the United Kingdom.

Various governmental organizations have also demonstrated tremendous efforts and success in fighting the pandemic. Iran’s Volunteer Basij Force Organization has unveiled portable rapid testing laboratories, delivering the ultimate result in just two hours. Iran also unveiled homegrown smart software that helps physicians diagnose the novel coronavirus pneumonia with the help of artificial intelligence that is used to analyze computed tomography (CT) scans. The software has been developed in a joint project involving researchers from various Iranian universities in only one month. According to the professor of AI technologies at Sharif University, software’s error margin in detection of COVID-19 is much lower than the similar ones developed by China and Stanford University of the U.S.

Researchers at Shahid Beheshti University also developed diagnostic kits that could be used to diagnose the disease in 20 minutes, as well as anti-coronavirus masks and light ventilators. The university has developed six scientific-research departments to help authorities in charge of the health sector in their efforts to curtail the outbreak. Numerous scientific institutions have become involved in the development of drugs and therapies for the coronavirus, including stem cell scientist Dr. Masoud Soleimani, recently illegally detained in a U.S. prison, who is developing a method which uses mesenchymal stromal cells (MSC) to treat coronavirus patients.

The Headquarters for Executing

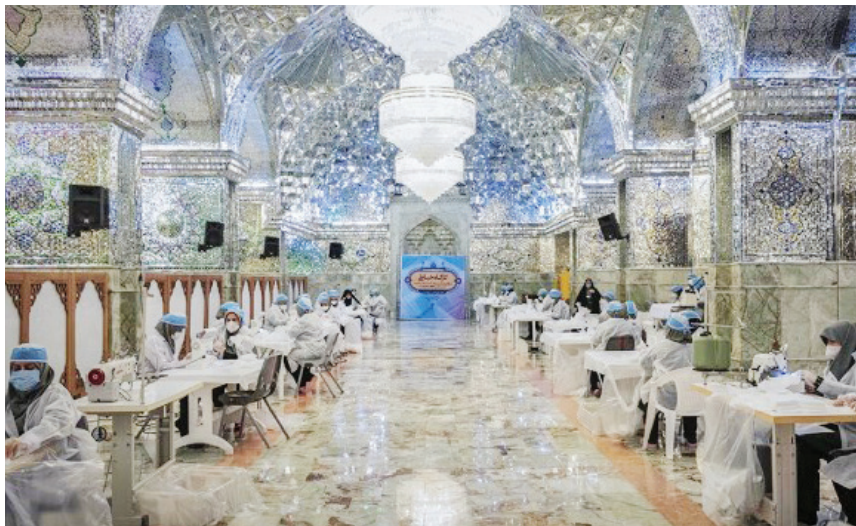
Imam Khomeini’s Order (EIKO) known as Setad, mobilized all the equipment at hand to provide the necessities of the people and the sanctioned medicines in the very beginning of the outbreak. To date, their services include 25 million three-layered and N95 masks, launching a production line of medical masks despite U.S. attempts to prevent Iran from having breathing machines (respirators), production of Iranian test kit for coronavirus infection, research on the medicine of the disease, launching the 4030 phone line with the help of 2,200 doctors and paramedics for answering people’s questions about coronavirus, breaking the monopoly of the U.S. in making oxygen concentrator (with producing 50 machines every day), production of 400,000 liters of disinfectant gel, etc.

Ruptly reported that the organization’s “authorities also inaugurated a mask manufacturing facility that is reportedly the largest in Southwest Asia amid soaring demand due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in a town of Eshtehard, Alborz province on Tuesday.

The head of the Execution of Imam Khomeini’s Order, Mohammad Mokher said the factory will produce every day four million masks equipped with a nano filter, which guarantees a high level of protection.

The Barakat Foundation, an EIKO subsidiary, launched a production line with a capacity of manufacturing 1.5 million three-layer face masks containing nanofibers. Hadi Johari, its deputy director, expressed hope that the company could be able to increase its face mask production to three million per day, thus being able to meet a major part of the domestic demand for the product. Commenting on Barakat Foundation’s measures to curb the coronavirus spread in Iran, he said since the beginning of the outbreak, a company in northwestern Iran affiliated to the foundation, which solely produced hospital gowns, began manufacturing isolation gowns once the country was faced with a shortage in this regard. He put the daily number of isolation gowns produced by the company at between 2,000 and 2,500, noting that it has so far manufactured 35,000 isolation gowns and distributed them among the country’s hospitals and medical centers.

Commenting on face mask production by the foundation, Johari said a number of small clothing workshops across the country are working in this field under the supervision of the foundation. He said these workshops are mostly located



ed in deprived areas and rural districts, adding they produce close to 70,000 face masks per day, which are distributed in the regions where they are located. Johari said manufacturing face masks in the deprived areas has led to a surge in their production and job opportunities. He noted that Barakat Foundation has distributed?, through medical and health centers, ?isolation gowns, face masks and disinfectants among people in seven deprived areas in the country, including regions in the provinces of Yazd, Sistan and Baluchestan and Kerman, as well as northeastern parts.

Increased demand for masks has given rise to an amazing phenomenon, namely temporary conversion of mosques and holy shrines into local mask factories. Inside the Imamzadeh-Masum mosque, located south of the capital city of Tehran, women have taken up positions in front of table-top sewing machines to produce face masks, while other women fold and arrange the printed sheets of material as they are produced. In another room, men sitting on prayer mats make plastic gloves with rudimentary heat-sealing devices. “We distribute these products to hospitals and deprived areas in Tehran and several other cities,” explained Fatemeh Saidi, a 27-year-old woman involved in the Basij with her husband. The holy shrine of Shah Cheragh in the southern Iranian city of Shiraz has also been turned into a workshop for local women producing more than 3,000 masks a day. Rated by many travellers as the most beautiful mosque in the world, the Shah Cheragh today is the most beautiful factory in the world.

In a similar way, the Iran Mall, the world’s largest shopping mall which was

Iran but in May 2019, the administration ended sanctions exemptions for foreign countries buying Iranian oil.

The coronavirus will likewise severely damage the economy. Daniel Russel, a former U.S. diplomat who served as the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs until 2017, told The Nation that while pandemics have a devastating initial effect on public health, a brutal second wave can come in the form of an economic downturn—particularly in developing countries like Iran.

“I ran the Asia Bureau in the State Department, and I was constantly reminding people that no matter how bad things seem, they can always be made worse,” Russel said.

Iran has unsuccessfully requested \$5 billion in loans from the IMF in order to combat Covid-19, in addition to a \$50 million loan from the World Bank. This marks the first time that Iran has asked the World Bank for a loan since 2005.

Secretary of State Pompeo has vociferously opposed Iran’s request for a loan.

Iranian government spokesperson Ali Rabiei said on April 13 that the United States has no right to prevent the IMF from giving loan to Iran.

“From the legal point of view, the United States is not in the position to obstruct the legal performance of institutions and international organizations,” Rabiei said in a press conference.

He added, “The United States must understand that the international institutions are not its property.”

## Zarif: U.S. forces have no business 7,000 miles away from home

**POLITICAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says U.S. forces have no business in the Persian Gulf, which is 7,000 miles away from their homeland.



“The US military is hit by over 5000 #covid19 infections. @realdonaldtrump should attend to their needs, not engage in threats cheered on by Saddam’s terrorists,” Zarif tweeted on Thursday.

“Also, US forces have no business 7,000 miles away from home, provoking our sailors off our OWN Persian Gulf shores,” he added.

It came after U.S. President Donald Trump said he had ordered the U.S. Navy to destroy Iranian boats “if they harass” U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf.

“I have instructed the United States Navy to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea,” Trump said in a tweet on Wednesday.

In response to the threat by Trump, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps chief Hossein Salami on Thursday said, “We declare to them that we are absolutely determined and serious in defending our national security, water borders and maritime interests, and that any move [against us] will be effectively and swiftly met with a decisive, effective response.”

The top general added Iran has ordered its naval units “to target any flotilla or military unit of the U.S. Navy’s terrorist forces if they were to put at risk the safety of our vessels or warships.”

A U.S. Navy statement published on Wednesday claimed that 11 Iranian Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) boats had closed in on up to six U.S. naval vessels in the Persian Gulf “in dangerous and harassing approaches”.

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

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

“Or maybe it doesn’t know what it’s doing in our backyard, 7,000 miles from home,” Zarif’s tweet added.

## Trump retweets praise from fake anti-Iran account

**POLITICAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — U.S. President Donald Trump has shared an appreciative tweet for his anti-Iran policies by a fake account belonging to the terrorist group of Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK).

The tweet, posted by Heshmat Alavi on Wednesday, read: “The mullahs’ regime ruling #Iran harasses UN Navy ships for propaganda purposes.”

“Thank you, President Trump, for reminding this regime that the Obama years are gone,” it said. “And BTW, this regime does not represent the Iranian people.”

Trump had earlier ordered the U.S. Navy to shoot down Iranian gunboats “if they harass our ships” in the Persian Gulf.

“I have instructed the United States Navy to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea,” he said in an earlier tweet.

Retweeting Alavi’s appreciative comment, Trump said: “Sleepy Joe thought this was OK. Not me!”

He was referring to Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, who served as vice president under Obama.

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

In an interview with the Balkans Post last week, Murtaza Hussain, who had written in The Intercept article, said Alavi is a persona used by the MEK to “continue its public relations work in the Western countries, aiming to sway elite and public opinion by placing news articles and running social media campaigns promoting its vision for itself as the future government of Iran.”

On Twitter, people responded to Trump, reminding him and his followers that Alavi is not a real person, highlighting the Trump administration’s close links with the MEK.

“Behold Donald Trump’s open coordination with an Iranian terrorist organization,” commented Trita Parsi, the co-founder and executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft.

“The person he retweets does not exist, the account is run by six people in the MEK’s terrorist base in Albania,” he said. “Yes, the president of the United States is retweeting a terrorist account.”

Massoud Khodabandeh, the director of Middle East Strategy Consultants, wrote: “Like it or not, #Trump is certainly not up to running a corner shop never mind a country and he has proved it on daily bases and Americans are paying for this disaster on daily bases.”

Khodabandeh, who has written extensively along with her wife Anne Khodabandeh about the MEK, said in another tweet: “Never thought I will see a head of a state as low as @POTUS. Next he can go to Albanian to visit her queen of terrorists #Rajavi.”

Negar Mortazavi, an Iranian-American journalist, noted that Trump “retweets a troll account linked to MEK, a terrorist Iranian opposition group that’s killed Americans and Iranians.”

“This fake account is constantly promoted and amplified by Saudi government media,” she added.

(Source: Strategic Culture Foundation)



## China's rust belt struggles to revive virus-hit economies as brain drain continues

China's northeastern rust belt provinces are battling an influx of coronavirus cases from across their borders, a problem that is threatening to exacerbate the ongoing exodus of skilled workers to more prosperous parts of the country.



This hollowing out of talent in Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning threatens to deepen the provinces' long-standing economic troubles, just as they struggle to recover from the fallout of the coronavirus outbreak.

Heilongjiang province, which sits in China's far north on the border with Russia, has become the epicenter of China's second wave of coronavirus infections.

As of Thursday, the province had China's highest case-load with more than 400 infections. Many were imported from abroad, notably from Russia, and the spike in new cases comes as local governments are preparing to reopen schools and businesses.

Local authorities are under increasing pressure to prevent imported cases from Russia and to control transmissions in the community and at hospitals. In one case, an 87-year old man in a local hospital infected 78 people, according to local health authorities.

At the same time, the provincial governments are still struggling with an old challenge — the continued decline of its pool of skilled labor that is making it harder to confront the new one.

Heilongjiang's population fell by 218,000 to 37.5 million last year, the sixth consecutive annual decline, according to official data published in March.

From 2013 to 2019, the province lost more than 840,000 people in total — equivalent to the total number of migrants last year into Zhejiang province, an economic powerhouse in China's southeast.

Jilin and Liaoning are also watching their populations fall. Liaoning, the most populous of the three rust-belt provinces, lost 76,000 people last year, while Jilin's population fell by 133,300, according to government figures from earlier this month.

While talent is draining out of the provinces, local authorities have also had to contend with declining birth rates.

All three had more deaths than births last year — although the problem has persisted since 2015 in Liaoning.

The rust-belt provinces have also become the biggest drag on revenues for China's largest banks, partly because of surging non-performing loans (NPL) as their economies weaken.

The Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), the nation's largest state-owned bank by assets, derived only 0.7 percent of its gross profits from the three provinces last year, with its NPL ratio rising to 4.5 percent, well above the national average of 1.86 percent, the bank said in its annual statement in late March.

China's fifth largest bank, Bank of Communications, reported its profits in all three northeast provinces fell 1.5 billion yuan (\$211.6 million) last year, with its NPL ratio rising to 6.5 percent.

"The economies in the northeast are facing a much worse outlook this year, after the coronavirus hit an already uncertain recovery," Fan Hengshan, a former senior official overseeing regional economies for the National Development and Reform Commission, China's top economic planning agency, said at a forum earlier this month.

In the first quarter, Jilin's economy declined by 6.6 percent from a year earlier, slightly below the average national contraction of 6.8 percent. Output in its industrial sector dropped by 13.2 percent, the local government said. Heilongjiang and Liaoning have not yet released their first quarter results.

The provinces' falling population has exacerbated demographic problems and imposed additional stress on local pension funds and government finances.

At the end of last year, the number of people aged over 65 accounted for 16.2 percent of the total population in Liaoning, 13.8 percent in Heilongjiang, and 13.9 percent in Jilin, compared to the national average of 12.6 percent, official statistics showed.

At the end of 2018, one worker was needed to support 0.53 retirees in the three rust-belt provinces, according to a report on China's pension fund published by Chinese Academy of Social Sciences last year.

But by 2050, one worker contributing to the pension fund will have to support 1.24 retirees, according to separate calculations from Zhao Fei, a researcher with the finance ministry's Chinese Academy of Fiscal Sciences.

Zhao estimated that even with the help of government subsidies, pension funds in the three provinces could have a total deficit of more than 1.5 trillion yuan (US\$211.7 billion) by 2035 and 2.9 trillion yuan by 2050, compared with a surplus of 63.1 billion yuan in 2017.

That would mean the shortfall in the rust-belt pension funds would be twice the national average in 2050.

The Chinese government has started to plug the gap by asking that provincial governments hand over 10 percent equity in state-owned assets to local pension funds.

(Source: South China Morning Post)

# Iran's aluminum output to rise 100%

➔ "In steel production, we have reached the tenth place in the world, in the past six years, surpassing countries like France and Italy", he said, adding: "In copper production, we are ranked 15th in the world, and we already have it on the agenda to reach the 12th place in [the Iranian calendar year of] 1400 (March 2021-March 2022)."

South Aluminum Corporation (SALCO) was inaugurated on Wednesday by Iranian president Hassan Rouhani during a ceremony via video conference.

The project has an output capacity of 300,000 tons per year and was launched with an investment of around \$1.2 billion.



SALCO is jointly owned by Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), and Ghadir Investment Company, where Iran's Social Security Organization and pension funds related to the armed forces are the main shareholders.

Iran's major aluminum producers produced 275,716 tons of aluminum ingots in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19).

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

## IMF's political approach toward Iran's request casts doubt on its impartiality

➔ 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. approach toward Iran's request also evoked reaction from other countries, as they strongly blamed this stance.

On Tuesday, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said that Germany, France and the United Kingdom, known as European trio, do not oppose the International Monetary Fund's loan to Iran which Tehran needs to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

Germany, France and the United Kingdom are three European countries signatory to the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran.

"In fact, the German government is positive about the possibility of providing the IMF loan to Iran to fight coronavirus and its consequences, but the final vote of the German government depends on a format of the loan the IMF and Iran will agree on," Maas said after talks with the foreign ministers of Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Austria and Switzerland, UrduPoint News reported.

### 'IMF should not give weight to political calculations'

And on Wednesday, during the meeting of the finance ministers and central bankers of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, which was held through video conference because of coronavirus global pandemic, CBI governor warned IMF that if the Fund's impartiality comes under doubt, it will be hard to repair the damaged image.

Hemmati further appreciated IMF's support and financial aids to the countries fighting with coronavirus outbreak, and said Iran is one of the countries mostly hit by the pandemic in the MENA region.

The central banker also addressed the IMF head and said, Iran was among the first countries requesting emergency aid under the RFI program, reiterating, "We see IMF an independent and apolitical institute and we hope that it will remain so."

The official went on to say, "Iranian people expect the IMF to stand by them and not to give weight to the political calculations when it comes to their demand."

Hemmati then called for a decision immediately made by the IMF's executive board regarding Iran's request.

Under the condition when coronavirus pandemic has brought many countries to their knees all around the world,



IMF and World Bank have expressed readiness for offering financial aids to the countries in need.

Iran is not the only country asking for such aids, but its request from IMF has become a political issue over the past month, something seriously criticized by the Iranian officials stressing that the Fund should act apolitically as it is an independent international body.

## TSE posts highest-ever weekly growth of index



**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) experienced the highest-ever weekly growth of its main index (TEDPIX) in the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday), Tasnim news agency reported.

TEDPIX gained 96,160 points to 741,923 in the past week, as 37.236 billion securities worth 398.185 trillion rials (about \$9.4 billion) were traded through 5.696 deals at TSE.

The first market's index rose 71,903 points to 524,912 and the second market's index climbed 187,984 points to 1.574 million in the previous week.

Posting a new record high, TEDPIX surpassed 700,000 points on Monday.

The index gained 18,448 points to 708,484 during the Monday trades.

The TSE's index also registered its highest-ever jump on April 18, when it gained 23,219 points in a single day to stand at 668,981, as over 5.775 billion securities worth 61.55 trillion rials (about

\$1.465 billion) were traded through 830,000 deals.

Meanwhile, TSE held its largest-ever IPO on April 15, when Social Security Investment Company (SSIC, also known by its Persian acronym Shasta), Iran's major state-owned investment company, offered eight billion shares, which account for 10 percent of its stakes, for sales at the Tehran Stock Exchange.

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

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

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

## 'Iran, Oman to launch new shipping line in coming days'



**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) says a third shipping line is going to be launched between Iran's southern Jask Island and ports in Oman in the coming days, IRIB reported on Thursday.

"To develop and expand the level of trade relations between Iran and Oman, the third shipping line between Jask port and some Omani ports will be launched within the next few days," Hamid Zadboum said.

Referring to the increase in trade volume between the two countries, he noted that last month the two countries launched a container shipping line to transit cargoes between the southern Iranian port city of Bandar Abbas and Port Sultan Qaboos in Oman.

"The line is used to transit container cargoes, mainly fruits, and vegetables, between the two countries," the official said.

Iran and Oman had signed a maritime cooperation agreement in December 2019 for boosting maritime transportation be-

tween the two countries.

Based on the agreement, Iranian traders and businessmen would be able to interact constructively with their Omani counterparts, and regular shipping lines were to be established between the two countries, while the two sides also pledged to provide facilities for using each other's ports.

Even before the container line, the two neighbors had already launched four direct shipping lines between their ports.

The first shipping route between the two countries was put into operation in March 2015 between Iran's Bandar Abbas and Oman's Sohar.

Later in December 2016, the two neighbors inaugurated direct shipping routes from two Omani ports to the Iranian port of Shahid Bahonar.

In December 2017, they launched another shipping line to connect Iran's port city of Khorramshahr to the Omani port of Sohar.

## Iran exports goods to 128 countries despite U.S. sanctions

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Head of Islamic Republic of Iran Custom Administration (IRICA) said despite the U.S. sanctions Iran managed to export commodities to 128 countries in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19) while importing from 112 trade partners, IRNA reported.

According to Mehdi Mir-Ashrafi, Asian countries account for over 70 percent of Iran's foreign trade and Europe is the Islamic Republic's second-biggest trade partner.

As reported, Iran exported non-oil commodities to 40 European countries, 21 Asian countries, 28 African countries, and 12 American countries, while importing from 41 European countries, 31 Asian countries, 12 American countries, and 11 countries in Africa.

The IRICA has put the country's total foreign trade in the past year at \$85.107 billion, noting that of the mentioned total figure the share of Iran's exports was \$41.37 billion while the imports stood at \$43.737 billion.

The total weight of the country's foreign trade was reported to be 169.302 million tons.

### ■ Trade with Asia

According to Mir-Ashrafi, Iran's exports to Asia were more than \$30 billion while the imports from Asian trade partners exceeded \$27.73 billion.

China was Iran's top export destination with \$9.46 billion



of imports from Iran followed by Iraq with \$8.99 billion, as well as the United Arab Emirates with \$4.5 billion of imports.

In terms of imports, Iran's first three partners in Asia were China with more than \$11.2 million, followed by the UAE and India with \$8.9 billion and over \$3.46 billion, respectively.

### ■ Trade with Europe

Based on the IRICA data, in the mentioned period, Iran exported \$9 billion worth of commodities to the green continent while the imports stood at \$15 billion.

Among European countries, Turkey is the main export destination of Iranian goods with more than \$5.46 billion, followed by Russia with \$457.63 million and Azerbaijan with \$429.78 million.

Meanwhile, among its European trade partners, Iran has the highest level of imports from Turkey with \$4.99 billion, followed by Germany with \$2.1 billion and Russia with \$1.7 billion.

### ■ Trade with America

In America, the country has the highest exports to Brazil with \$105.72 million, followed by Canada with about \$19 million and Venezuela with more than \$1.184 million worth of exports.

Also, among the American countries, the highest imports were from Brazil with \$555.57 million, followed by Argentina with \$555.57 million, and finally Canada with more than \$52.1 million.

### ■ Trade with Africa

Referring to Iran's economic partners in Africa, Mir-Ashrafi noted that in the previous year, Iran exported \$72.59 million worth of commodities to Mozambique, over \$62.917 million to Sudan and \$52.26 million to Kenya.

It also imported over \$6.36 million from Kenya, \$5.412 million from Ethiopia, and more than \$4.66 million from Tunisia.



# Iran, Nakhchivan explore avenues of energy co-op

**ENERGY** **TEHRAN** — Iran and Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic explored avenues of cooperation in the energy sector in a meeting between Iran's Consul General in Nakhchivan Seyed Ahmad Hosseini and head of Nakhchivan Oil and Gas Supply Institute on Wednesday.

In the meeting, the two sides stressed the significant role of energy in the economic relations between the countries in the region and called for expansion of such relation between the two countries.

In this regard, Hosseini underlined Iran's great capacities and capability for meeting the energy needs of its neighboring countries.



The head of Nakhchivan Oil and Gas Supply Institute for his part, referred to the recent fluctuations in the energy market as an important event in the energy sector and noted that the recent events are going to have a tremendous impact on many countries and will challenge the economies of energy-rich communities as well.

The two sides also expressed hope that the two countries would expand all-out relations in the post-coronavirus pandemic era.

*Photo: Iran's consul general in Nakhchivan (L) and head of Nakhchivan Oil and Gas Supply Institute discuss energy cooperation in Nakhchivan on Wednesday.*

## Iran helps Venezuela to restart dormant refinery unit

**ENERGY** **TEHRAN** — Iran has sent Venezuela refining materials to help the country resume operation at the catalytic cracking unit at the 310,000 barrels-per-day Cardon refinery, Reuters reported, quoting a senior official with Venezuela's Oil Ministry.

As reported, Erling Rojas, vice minister for refining and petrochemicals in Venezuela's Oil Ministry, announced the arrival of the material on his social media on Wednesday.

"Thanks to the support of our allies in the Islamic Republic of Iran," Rojas tweeted.

The official did not provide any details about the time of the refinery's production resumption.

Venezuela is also taking measures to restart the catalyst cracker at the 146,000-barrels-per-day El Palito refinery in central Venezuela.

The cooperation between the two OPEC members is significant since both nations are facing unjust U.S. sanctions. The mentioned unit of the refinery is essential for the refinery's gasoline production, the report said.

Venezuela is suffering from an acute shortage of motor fuel due to the near total collapse of its 1.3-million-barrels-per-day refining network after years of underinvestment and lack of maintenance, as well as the U.S. sanctions that have complicated crude-for-gasoline swaps.



## Oil on course for steep slide in week of historic turmoil

Oil prices fell on Friday and headed for their third weekly loss running as production shutdowns failed to keep pace with sliding demand due to the coronavirus crisis.

Brent crude was down 73 cents, or 3.42 percent, at \$20.60 by 0838 GMT, after hitting a session high of \$22.70/bl earlier and jumping 5 percent on Thursday. U.S. oil fell by 84 cents, or 5.09 percent, to \$15.66 a barrel, having surged 20 percent in the previous session.

Prices are heading for their eighth weekly loss in the last nine with Brent on course for a 27 percent loss this week and U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) set for a fall of around 14 percent.

WTI fell into negative territory, to minus \$37.63 a barrel on Monday, while Brent dropped to a two-decade low.

"After the price crash earlier this week, which seems to have made every person on the planet aware of the problems in the oil market, several relevant announcements of active crude production shut-ins have made the rounds," JBC Energy said.

Continental Resources Inc, the largest oil producer in North Dakota has halted most of its production in the U.S. state and notified some customers it would not supply crude, people familiar with the matter said.

State officials say overall production has already dropped by about 300,000 barrels per day (bpd), and coming into this year Continental produced nearly 150,000 bpd in the Bakken.

Under a deal agreed between the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Coun-

ties (OPEC) and other producers including Russia and Azerbaijan, a grouping known as OPEC+, output cuts of 9.7 million barrels per day (bpd) are due to kick in from May.

Kuwait's state news agency KUNA said on Thursday the OPEC producer will begin cutting supplies to international markets without waiting for the official start of the deal.

Azerbaijan's Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oil project will also have to cut output sharply from May onwards to fulfil the country's commitments under the deal, four sources told Reuters.

But with global storage space filling up fast and oil demand slumping by around 30 percent, those shut-ins are so far proving too little to rebalance the market.

"Unless more production shuts down, the extracted oil will literally have nowhere else to be stored, which implies a forced shutdown across several locations," Head of Oil Markets at Rystad Energy Bjornar Tonhaugen said.

demand side, in China where the coronavirus outbreak started late last year, analysts said fuel sales should pick up in the second quarter as the government eases curbs to contain the pandemic. Meanwhile, U.S. legislators approved a nearly \$500 billion bill for relief from the pandemic, providing support to small businesses and hospitals. The package raises U.S. spending to combat the crisis to nearly \$3 trillion.

Still, the global economy may see a record contraction this year, according to a Reuters poll.

(Source: Reuters)

## Repair, abandon, burn: Russia explores options for historic oil cut

In just a week, Russia has to find ways to cut a fifth of its oil output under a deal to tackle the market glut and is looking at all options, including putting wells on repair and maintenance to abandoning them entirely and even burning oil, four oil industry sources said.

Russia, along with other members of the global oil alliance between the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and non-OPEC members, agreed to jointly remove nearly 10 million barrels per day (bpd) from world markets, a tenth of total supply, starting from May 1.

Last week, the Russian energy ministry told oil companies to cut their production by a fifth to 8.5 million barrels per day to meet the OPEC+ deal.

Sources told Reuters earlier this month that the companies are targeting mainly mature fields where production is falling anyway.

Lukoil, with oil output at 1.65 million bpd, plans to shut down a number of fields in the northern region of Komi at its Ukhtaneftegaz production facility, a source familiar with the plan told Reuters.

Asked about Ukhtaneftegaz, Lukoil said that it did not plan to shut down its production units but was looking at options with "as limited as possible impact on (its) economic performance". It did not elaborate further.

Slavneft, a joint venture between Rosneft and Gazprom Neft, is considering shutting down a number of fields at its Megion-neftegaz unit in Khanty-Mansyisk region

(Source: Reuters)



in western Siberia, another source said.

Two other oil industry sources said that inefficient wells and wells with low productivity were main targets for shut downs but the main method for cutting output would be to shut wells temporarily for repairs, not to shut them down indefinitely. New drilling will be suspended, too.

Repairing wells will allow companies to improve productivity - something they want to achieve post-cuts and as they do not want to lose a big portion of output indefinitely.

"It's true that demand is low but this is not a reason to put a lock on the fields: sometimes it is better to pump and (even) burn," the fourth source said. "Remember how oil production nearly halved in the USSR? It took a decade to restore it back."

Rosneft, Gazprom Neft, Tatneft, Slavneft did not immediately reply to Reuters requests for comments.

(Source: Reuters)

Orbiting hundreds of miles above the Earth, the Sentinel-1 satellites are the eyes in the sky that show why U.S. oil prices dropped below zero and why much of the world is likely to follow.

The satellite bounces radar signals off the massive metal tanks that store oil and that data is used to calculate how much crude is inside. It's coming back with an alarming message: oil storage is running out.

It's something that's never happened before, and the market is only beginning to guess at what it'll mean. Experts say it could be a matter of weeks before there's no more room to store crude, an event called in industry parlance the "tank tops." The result would be oil prices near zero in many parts of the world, and in some cases they could go negative.

"We are on a path to global tank tops in late May or early June," said Florian Thaler at Oilx, a research firm which uses the satellite data.

### Global surge

Note: Orbital uses optical and radar satellite observations to estimate crude in floating roof tanks, which it estimates covers approximately 70 percent of total on-land storage.

The chaos in the American oil market on Monday could foreshadow what happens globally, if other tanks start to fill up. It also shows the market will likely anticipate peak storage, rather than wait to plunge when the limit is breached. Some oil producers have now re-drafted their contracts to stop their prices from going negative.

On Tuesday, the selling frenzy continued. Brent futures for June delivery lost 15 percent to trade near \$16 a barrel, the lowest in almost 21 years. Key European and African crude streams, which trade at a discount to the Brent benchmark, will sell under \$10 and even below \$5 in some cases.

"We have clearly gone to a full-scale, day-to-day market management crisis," said Paul Sankey, a veteran oil analyst at Mizuho Bank who correctly warned of negative crude prices in March. He went a step further on Tuesday, saying: "Will we hit negative \$100 a barrel next month? Quite possibly."

The world of negative prices doesn't have a floor, and



after this week, anything is possible. One certainty is that the latest satellite data shows a massive glut. There are 50 million barrels of crude are going into storage every week, enough to fuel Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and the U.K. combined.

In India, refiners have filled 95 percent of fuel storage capacity, according to officials at three state-owned processors. Nigeria will cut production because it has no place to keep crude, Mele Kyari, the chief of state oil company NNPC told a local newspaper.

Oil refiners aren't buying crude because there's no demand for gasoline. Some producers are cutting output, but others have kept on pumping. Even a few dollars is better than none for indebted companies. The oil has nowhere to go but into storage.

The satellite data might even be overestimating how much room is actually available. A lot of empty space has already been rented out by traders.

"We can have negative prices, and very negative prices," said Pierre Andurand, the founder of the eponymous oil hedge fund, adding that oil is a "dangerous market to trade in right now."

From high up, the oil market looks like a global, highly interconnected system. But the reality is that the market is

a collection of small and big islands, all connected via thin links. What matters is not when the world's total storage is full, but when each of those islands, or regional hubs, reaches capacity -- or threatens to.

### Pipeline crossroads

For the American market, it all comes down to Cushing, Oklahoma, the delivery point of the WTI oil futures contract. The town, which calls itself the "pipeline crossroads of the world," hosts a dozen tank farms, big enough to hold nearly 80 million barrels.

When the WTI contract expires, traders who are long receive oil in Cushing and have to find a place to store the barrels or ship them out. Being short the contract means you have to deliver the oil.

Oil prices crashed on Monday as traders who owned the May WTI contract rushed to get out of the contract before expiry because they didn't have tanks to store the oil. At the worst moment, someone paid \$40.32 a barrel to avoid taking delivery of oil.

### Negative spiral

In the physical oil market, traders bid barrels at even larger negative prices. Plains All American Pipelines LP, one of the main oil shippers in the U.S., asked producers of a crude stream called Eastern Kansas Common to pay it \$55.05 a barrel if they wanted to sell.

"Onshore storage is very limited," said Ben Luckock, co-head of oil trading at Trafigura Group, a major commodity merchant.

Storage locations that could soon fill up include Rotterdam, a refining hub for Western Europe, several islands in the Caribbean and Singapore. While traders are also turning oil tankers into temporary floating storage facilities, they offer limited relief.

In the world of storage, Rotterdam-based Royal Vopak NV is the biggest. Its executives say there's a global hunt already underway to secure more tanks. According to Chief Financial Officer Gerard Paulides, "the available capacity on the oil side is almost completely sold out."

(Source: Reuters)

## Bankruptcy looms over U.S. energy industry, from oil fields to pipelines

U.S. shale producers, refiners and pipeline companies are scrambling for cash and face likely restructuring as they struggle under heavy debt loads while engulfed in the worst crisis the oil industry has faced.

Fuel demand has tumbled roughly 30 percent worldwide as the coronavirus pandemic destroys demand for transport, provoking a massive glut of oil that has hammered global prices and left energy companies with no choice but to pump hundreds of millions of barrels into storage.

Just as demand plummeted, Saudi Arabia and Russia started an oil price war, and Riyadh flooded the market with even more crude. That left the oil industry facing the prospect of a long period with prices below their production costs.

Shale producers came into the crisis with already high debt levels, namely from big investments to increase production across the United States in a bet on higher prices.

But in turning the United States into the world's largest oil producer, the companies became the victims of their own success when the quick rise in supply meant returns were thin. Investors lost patience, tightened credit and pushed shale producers to stop expanding and pay them back.

Enter coronavirus. Oil prices have crashed 75 percent this year, and on Monday, closed at about minus-\$38 per barrel. Most U.S. producers have announced one, if not two, rounds of spending and output cuts. But the crash sent prices to levels well below what companies and advisors had modeled in worst-case scenarios, according to energy lawyers.

About half of the top 60 independent U.S. oil producers are in danger of restructuring and will need to find ways to boost their cash pile, according to energy lawyers at Haynes and Boone.

"The reverberations from this price collapse will be felt throughout the industry and by everyone who provides services to the industry," said Buddy Clark, an Houston-based partner at the firm.

Companies that used debt to fund acquisitions before prices crashed, such as oil giant Occidental Petroleum Corp, are focusing on placating shareholders and preserving cash.

Numerous midstream companies backed by private equity are in danger of bankruptcy, according to some of the more than a dozen industry and financial sources Reuters spoke to for this article, while large banks are preparing to become owners of oil and gas fields as they seize energy assets.

One midstream company, Salt Creek Midstream, which operates in the Delaware basin in Texas, had already hired Jefferies Financial Group and law firm Kirkland & Ellis for debt advice before the week's events, according to three sources aware of the matter, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss non-public information.

Salt Creek and its advisers declined to comment, as did private equity investors Ares Management Corp and ARM Energy.

More shale producers are expected to seek bankruptcy protection in coming weeks, industry and banking sources say, following Whiting Petroleum, which announced such steps earlier this month. Many small and mid-sized producers, including Chesapeake Energy Corp, have retained debt advisers.

The forecast loan default rate for 2020 among energy companies is 18 percent, according to Fitch Ratings, while nearly 20 percent of all energy corporate bonds are trading below 70 cents on the dollar, indicating distress, according to data from MarketAxess.

Occidental hoped asset sales would help reduce its debt pile, which stood at nearly \$39 billion at the end of 2019 after its massive acquisition of Anadarko Petroleum last year. It has since cut costs twice and slashed its prized dividend.

Some oil trading merchants, who are responsible for a large part of the global crude trade, have stopped paying in advance for oil and fuels to companies with low credit ratings because they're concerned about getting that cash back, according to two credit managers at two commodities merchants.

"Pretty much most refineries and producers are on watch lists. It's a long list now," said one of the credit managers.

### Producers and pipelines

Privately held pipeline operators are considered the most vulnerable among midstream companies, bankers said. As shale producers hit bankruptcy, they're expected to try to use court proceedings to exit pipeline contracts which charge transport fees based on oil and gas prices well above current levels, according to Buddy Clark and Charles Beckham, another Haynes and Boone partner.

Privately owned Glass Mountain LLC earlier this month sued troubled producer Chesapeake Energy for allegedly defaulting on an oil transportation contract, according to court documents.

Midstream companies are also threatened by a slow fall in production, as wells are being plugged due to poor market conditions. Based on company estimates, at least 600,000 barrels per day (bpd) of U.S. production cuts have been announced, and that cuts off transportation fees earned by pipeline companies.

A number of these midstream operators borrowed heavily to finance pipeline systems, built to support producers developing new, costlier shale plays when oil prices were higher, but are no longer profitable.

Debt belonging to private midstream operators is trading at distressed levels, with many between 40 and 50 cents on the dollar, such as Brazos Midstream, a Delaware Basin operator whose long-term debt was downgraded to CCC+ by Fitch Ratings last week, a rating described as implying substantial risks.

### Refining

Oil refiner PBF Energy built up a network of six U.S. refineries over a decade, including this year's nearly \$1 billion purchase of a San Francisco-area plant. With the market's slide, the entire company is currently worth less by capitalization than that purchase.

PBF last month said it would sell hydrogen gas plants for \$530 million to raise cash. That sale "solves some short-term problems for them," said one person familiar with the transaction, but cautioned that this alone will not stabilize the company unless fuel demand begins to recover. The person declined to be identified because the matter was not public.

The company declined to comment.

Demand, however, is down by roughly 25 percent in the United States, and oversupply is expected to linger for months.

An April survey of energy producers by the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City found nearly 40 percent would be insolvent within a year if oil prices remained around \$30 a barrel. U.S. crude prices closed under \$14 a barrel on Wednesday.

"The restructuring guys are extremely busy. I don't think they'll be busy for just this year - I think it's a multi-year process," James West at investment bank Evercore ISI told investors on Wednesday.

(Source: Reuters)



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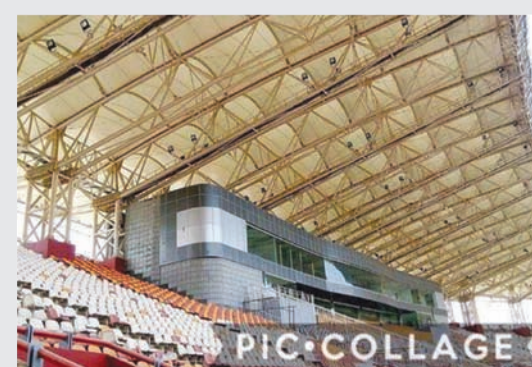


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# Widespread media coverage of IRGC's satellite launch

The latest achievement of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has been reflected in international media outlets and received widespread media coverage.

The elite force of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has successfully launched the Noor-1 Satellite by the domestically-built launcher Qassed (messenger) on Wednesday morning and placed it into the orbit at an altitude of 425km. The launch of Noor-1 which is the Islamic Republic's first military satellite was carried out on the anniversary of the establishment of the IRGC.

The IRGC's satellite launch which is called by IRGC Chief Commander Major General Hossein Salami as a great achievement for the elite force to monitor Earth from space has received mixed reactions from international media on Wednesday.

Most of the Arab media in the region selected the news as their first headline. These media's analysis of Iran's new successes and achievements have not been different from their previous ones of Iran's past developments and achievements. The new achievement is too great to be ignored or discredited even by dependent Arab media.

Although some Saudi-affiliated media outlets tried to downplay this achievement, they preferred to remain silent. Some others tried to link the launch of the satellite to what has been called tensions between Iran and the United States. But in the meantime, the Palestinian media widely published images of the satellite on the front page, calling it a sign of Iran's capability.

"IRGC on its official website said the satellite successfully reached an orbit of 425 kilometers (264 miles) above the Earth's surface," wrote Alarabiya, adding, "The launch comes amid tensions between Tehran and Washington over its collapsing nuclear deal and after a U.S. drone strike killed IRGC commander Qassem Soleimani in January."

Aljazeera also covered the successful launch of a missile by IRGC, writing, "Iran has announced it successfully launched the country's first military reconnaissance satellite after months of failures, a program the United States alleges is a cover for missile development."

"As the world grapples with the coronavirus pandemic and historically low oil prices, the missile launch may signal a new willingness to take risks by Iran," it claimed.

The Arab Weekly in this regard reported, "Iran's announcement of satellite launch raises concerns about the ballistic program."

"Launch marks the 41st anniversary of the IRGC," it added, saying, "The launch raised concerns among experts as to whether the technology could help Iran develop inter-continental ballistic missiles."



Almanar also reflected the news, writing, "Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has successfully put its first military satellite into the orbit."

Referring to IRGC's satellite launch, Albalad Press wrote, "It launched a military satellite into orbit amid wider tensions with the U.S., a successful launch after months of failures."

UAE's The National reported this successful launch as a claim of Iran, writing, "Iran claims launch of a first military satellite."

The three Zionist media, Times of Israel, Israel Hayom, and the Jerusalem Post reported the news of satellite launch by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps on Wednesday.

"Iran's paramilitary Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said on Wednesday that it launched a military satellite into orbit amid wider tensions with the United States, describing it as a successful launch after months of failures," Times of Israel wrote, referring that "There was no immediate independent confirmation of the launch of the satellite, which the Guard called 'Noor,' or light."

In this regard, Israel Hayom reported, "Iran claims successful satellite launch," adding, "IRGC says the two-stage satellite launch took off from Iran's Central Desert, without elaborating or saying when exactly the launch took place."

Referring to IRGC's military capabilities, The Jerusalem Post wrote, "Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps say they successfully launched the country's first 'military satellite' into an orbit around earth. This comes

after Iran announced new anti-ship missiles with a range of 700km and drones that have a range of 1,500km and may be armed with anti-tank missiles. Iran is on steroids in its attempt to show off its military capabilities at sea, in the air, and in space."

"Iran has an advanced rocket program with a large variety of ballistic missiles. Combining those with its desire to be a space power has helped it achieve success," it added.

The Successful launch of a satellite by IRGC has been also reflected in some Turkish media outlets.

Anadolu News Agency in this regard wrote, "Over the past years, the [Persian] Gulf country tried sending satellites to space but failed. The last experiment was in February when it launched a communication satellite named Zafar 1, which didn't achieve the required speed to reach its orbit," adding, "The IRGC considers the launch a 'major achievement' for Iran's missile capability."

"Iran's Revolutionary Guard says it has launched a satellite into orbit," said TRT WORLD, adding, "The Revolutionary Guard Corps hailed the surprise satellite launch a great success."

"The U.S. alleges Iran's satellite program is a cover for its development of missiles, while the Islamic republic has previously insisted its aerospace activities comply with its international obligations," TRT continued.

The other Turkish news agency, En Son Haber also covered the news of Iran's satellite launch, saying, "Iran's Revolutionary Guards announced they had successfully launched the country's first military satellite on Wednesday,

at a time of fresh tensions with U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf."

BERNAMA mentioned to this launch, writing, "The IRGC, in a statement, said that the satellite had reached its orbit, 425 kilometers above the earth's surface."

Some Chinese media, including Xinhua Net and China Daily, reported the news of Iran's new successes and achievements.

"Iran 'successfully' puts 1st military satellite into orbit," China Daily wrote, adding, "The country's aerospace program was expected to gather pace following the launch by deploying its military space activities towards taking care of its relevant telecommunication purposes, including the promotion of reconnaissance and safe communication capabilities."

"According to a statement by the IRGC website, the launch of the country's first military satellite would be a great achievement and would open a new era for Iran's space sector," Xinhua Net reported.

The launch of the Noor-1 Satellite by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has received reactions from some Russian media outlets.

"Called Qassed, the two-stage rocket blasted off on Wednesday from an undisclosed location in 'the central desert,' with the Noor 1 satellite on board," said Russia Today, adding, "The IRGC's Aerospace Forces have an array of long-range missiles and satellite launch vehicles developed by Iran's rocket industry."

Sputnik also wrote, "The launch, which was conducted by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), comes after Iranian Defence Minister Amir Hatami in February rejected allegations issued by the U.S. that the satellite carriers could be turned into military missiles and that the recent unsuccessful launch of a Zafar satellite was part of Iran's missile programme."

Citing Iranian source, the Armenian NEWS.am wrote, "An Iranian satellite called Noor-1 was launched on Wednesday morning by a Qassed launch vehicle and placed it into the orbit at an altitude of 425km."

Pakistan's Global Village Space also reflected the IRGC's achievement, saying "What can be described as a major space breakthrough & the first of its kind in the country; the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps has launched a military satellite on Wednesday. The Guard Corps is one of Iran's specialized military groups that overlook the country's strategic matters."

"Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) launched its first-ever military satellite called Nour into orbit," Azerbaijan Republic's Trend reported citing the official website of IRGC.

## Political standoff coupled with COVID-19 outbreak to exacerbate insecurity across Afghanistan

By Mohammad Jafari

**TEHRAN** — The current political standoff in Kabul has caused the Afghan officials not to pay required attention to the lethal coronavirus outbreak which on one hand will hit the defenseless people hard and on the other hand will deteriorate the country's insecurity and instability.

Mohammad Amir Rana, a security analyst, wrote in his article published by the Dawn that even Covid-19 has failed to take attention away from the ongoing political stand-off in Afghanistan. The intensity of the Afghan political crisis is so great that the power stakeholders in the conflict have been unable to prioritize the coronavirus health emergency and appear more concerned about their political future.

Since the US and the Afghan Taliban signed a peace deal on Feb 29, the political transition in Afghanistan has witnessed surprising developments. For instance, the Taliban have been showing flexibility in their position on the prisoners' issue. Dr Abdullah Abdullah, the self-proclaimed 'winner' of the last election, has also changed his political strategy and sent clear signals of reconciliation to President Ashraf Ghani. However, President Ghani is in an aggressive mood and appears all set to start his second term by coming down hard on his political opponents. He was never happy with the deal and is now getting more assertive even with the US, which could result in further reduction of US financial aid to Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is among the countries with the least testing facilities, but the virus appears to be spreading. As of April 16, the public health ministry confirmed 840 confirmed cases, with at least 30 associated deaths. A failure to control the spread of the virus can also expedite the withdrawal process of the US and NATO forces. Former US ambassador Richard Olson recently predicted that if the coronavirus hit Afghanistan hard, it could accelerate the exit of US troops. Such a situation will increase US dependence on the Taliban to reduce the violence and prevent foreign terrorists from operating from their soil, as per the insurgents' commitment. However, both commitments will test the Taliban, which still have a significant operational capacity and are, at least ideologically and politically, in line with groups like Al Qaeda.

So far, the Taliban have shown restraint in targeting foreign forces in Afghanistan. However, they are still resorting to violence against the Afghan security forces, apparently to keep their political advantage intact. Their attacks increased considerably a week or so after they signed the deal. According to an Afghan media outlet, the Taliban carried out 2,162 attacks against government forces following the end of their reduction-in-violence week, which started on

Feb 22. During the week mentioned, the number of attacks plummeted from an average of 70 to 15 per day; however, since Feb 29, the Taliban have conducted 31 to 96 attacks on Afghan forces per day. At the same time, the Taliban are complaining to the US negotiation team about the operational strikes against Taliban fighters in their homes, which they believe violate the provisions of the agreement.

The prisoners' swap is still complicated even though the government has released a few hundred Taliban detainees, and, in return, the Taliban have freed dozens of Afghan security personnel. For Kabul, the prisoners' issue is meant to keep its leverage over the Taliban intact. For the Taliban, this is a test of America's ability to fulfill its promises; it is also a condition for initiating a broader dialogue with Kabul. The US does not want to break the deal, which is why on the one hand it is pushing Kabul hard, and on the other, expecting Pakistan to use its influence over the Taliban. The US believes that Pakistan is a crucial partner and can still do more by influencing the Taliban to cooperate in a US exit, which is expected to be completed in 14 months, and become part of the intra-Afghan reconciliation process. Recently, American envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and Gen Austin Miller who commands the US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, visited Islamabad and held talks with army chief Gen Qamar Bajwa, and renewed their commitment to a political solution to the conflict.

Afghan officials and media adopted a harsh tone against Pakistan after the attack on a Sikh gurdwara in Kabul by the militant Islamic State group. Afghan intelligence arrested IS commander Aslam Farooqi. Afghanistan vice president and former intelligence chief Amrullah Saleh accused Pakistan of supporting the IS, and tweeted that the capture of the IS leader would prove to be a 'treasure of intelligence' on Pakistan. All this irritated Pakistan, which demanded that Farooqi, who belongs to Orakzai district, be handed over. It was also reported that Aslam Farooqi was not arrested but he himself surrendered to Afghan intelligence. Since Afghanistan declared victory against the IS last November, the Afghan media has been continuously reporting surrenders of IS fighters, including those from Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Central Asian states. It is to be ascertained as to what extent IS has been weakened but the Taliban captured their areas of influence in Kunar province recently, which they used as proof of their commitment to the US to prevent foreign terrorist groups from using Afghan soil. It appears that both the Taliban and Kabul are targeting the IS to please the US, but blaming Pakistan will only complicate the situation.

In a fast-changing political scenario, with President Ghani in aggressive mode, Dr Abdullah is consolidating

his political capital by adopting a reconciliatory posture. After President Ghani's refusal to offer him the slot of chief executive, Dr Abdullah has floated a new proposal, which includes a 50 percent share in the cabinet, and appointing governors in the provinces where he has won a higher number of votes. However, most importantly, he is demanding a considerable role in the peace process. A prominent position in the peace process will bring him closer to the US, NATO, Pakistan and all other concerned regional actors. Much depends on President Ghani's response. The failure to reconcile will increase frustration in Washington which has already threatened to withhold \$1 billion in aid to Afghanistan this year.

The UN has warned that the spread of the pandemic could cause a global humanitarian disaster and has appealed for a global ceasefire in all conflict zones. Ironically, internal and external power stakeholders in Afghanistan are not ready to shift their priorities. This is not a season of optimism.

According to the National Interest, Afghanistan has imposed lockdowns of varying effectiveness in most of its provinces. But lockdowns also have negative economic and public health externalities. Ordinary Afghans, like the poor worldwide, face a choice between dying by the coronavirus or dying by poverty. The lockdown alone will push more Afghans below the poverty line, even with interventions by the Afghan government and world community, including the immediate debt relief recently announced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Afghanistan's political leaders and insurgents should have the good sense to end their conflicts as the coronavirus ravages the world. Sadly, the election dispute between Abdullah and Ghani continues. There are conflicting indications as to whether a deal between the two men is near. Some reports suggest that another unity government will be formed. At the same time, Ghani has unilaterally made political appointments, largely of ethnic Pashtuns, bringing in people like Hanif Atmar into his fold and weakening the hand of Abdullah.

Even if Abdullah and Ghani come to an agreement, it is unlikely to endure for long. Ghani is likely to use a cessation of hostilities—a ceasefire by the Taliban or Abdullah's recognition of his presidency—to his advantage. The centralization of power will push non-Pashtun leaders left in the cold further to the periphery. Eventually, their games of political brinkmanship will take a deadly turn. That turn will hasten should the coronavirus result in large-scale deaths in Herat, a Tajik stronghold. The public as well as political leaders there could blame the central government, resulting in an intensification of the growing ethnic divide.

## COVID-19 enforcer of decade old tendencies: Rusnák

**1 →** Handling the economic and social consequences will be with us for many years and will become a new normal.

Although the outbreak of the virus has put the realism and self-help approaches in the center of the focus, it also has revealed deficiencies of the realism which is based on state security and looks at the security issue just militarily. The outbreak of the virus also showed that militaristic economies also are not able to maintain the security of nations and governments in the post-corona era. What do you think of this?

The current pandemic is showing that there is no one size fit all solution to handle it. While there is a mounting body of evidence that some basic non-medical recommendations and actions (like maintaining basic hygiene, wearing the face masks and limiting social interaction of people) significantly reduces the speed of spreading the illness they do not provide with lasting solutions. Certainly, military hardware is of little use to combat the pandemic, and containing a large number of personnel in closed areas like ships or military bases is more a recipe for problems than a part of a solution. Certainly, as the COVID19 is a global threat that will last long, you cannot beat it with self-help isolated efforts. Now the race for vaccines from multiple research teams and producers together with internationally coordinated vaccination effort is our best bet for the future.

■ If we accept that the post-corona world order will be different from the existing one, will the changes be structural and fundamental ones? Which meanings will experience fundamental changes?

I wish the post corona world order will address the underlying causes of global tensions and challenges. Inequalities in a broad sense of this word should be addressed, as should be the challenge of climate change. I believe that we should keep in mind that the economy and the military power are very important indeed, however the people's health and wellbeing is a way more complex issue. COVID19 outbreak showed the fragility of our world as we knew it until last December, regardless of the prevailing economic, religion, or social structure. It is a wakeup call for Humanity, to change our behavior and form a more cooperative and respectful one.

Dr. Urban Rusnák is secretary General of the Energy Charter Secretariat. He worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovak Republic and was the Leader of the Project for Slovakia's External Energy Security. He was Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Slovak Republic to Ukraine (2005-2009), Head of the MFA Political Analysis Division (2003-2005), Deputy Head of Mission at the Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Turkey (1994-1998) and MFA Desk Officer for South Caucasus, Central Asia, CIS, and southeast Europe. He also held the position of Executive Director of the International Visegrad Fund in Bratislava (2000-2003) and Director of the Slovak Institute for International Studies (1999-2000).

## France, the sixth economic power worldwide, unable to protect people from coronavirus impacts

The current and previous French governments, whose wrong economic policies left people alone in face of the lethal COVID-19 pandemic, should be held accountable, a senior journalist underscored.

"Austerity-focused neoliberal policies left France defenseless against public health threats such as pandemics," Rokhaya Diallo wrote in an article published by Al Jazeera.

At the end of March, radios in France aired a public appeal for donations to help fund hospitals that are struggling to care for the increasing number of COVID-19 patients in the country. The appeal stated that all such donations would be "tax deductible", but did not explain why the French state, the sixth largest economic power in the world, is in need of the generosity of private citizens to adequately fund the country's healthcare system during a pandemic.

Soon after this appeal, we have been informed that our hospitals are in desperate need of not only money but also protective equipment, including the most basic items such as masks and gloves. We have seen shocking images of nurses trying to treat patients while wearing garbage bags and swimming goggles for protection. The shortage was so severe that some hospitals felt the need to directly appeal to members of the public to send any protective equipment they may have.

The situation was even worse in French overseas departments such as Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana, where the government was forced to accept the help of Cuban doctors in the fight against coronavirus in these territories. For Reunion Island, the best the French state could do was to deliver a bunch of mouldy masks.

Many were shocked to see France, a country once famed for its strong social security system, fail to respond to this public health emergency efficiently. However, the French healthcare system was struggling long before the start of this pandemic. Last December, for example, 22 babies infected by bronchiolitis in Paris had to be transferred to Rouen, Amiens, Caen or Reims, because emergency pediatric services in the capital were too overwhelmed to take care of them.

So, how exactly did a country which was praised by American documentary maker Michael Moore as a "healthcare paradise" in the 2007 film Sicko end up in this situation?

In 2019, France experienced one of the longest and most widespread strikes in its recent history in response to the changes President Emmanuel Macron proposed to make to the pensions system. Hospital workers also attended these protests, not only to protect their pensions but also to demand better working conditions and funding. During these protests some even carried banners that read "the state count the money, we will count the dead", but the government chose to ignore their plight.

A year earlier, when President Macron visited the University Hospital of Rouen to promote his government's autism plan, a caregiver told him in front of tv cameras that the number of available hospital beds and services in the country are decreasing daily and that the healthcare system urgently needs more money and more staff. Macron swiftly ended the conversation by claiming that "there is no magic money" to give to the hospitals.

Within the same year, a collective of researchers met with the president and begged for five million euros to maintain 50 jobs in the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). Macron chose not to give this relatively small funding to the body that would lead the research efforts for cures and vaccines in the face of major epidemics, such as the ongoing coronavirus outbreak.



## Iran's UNESCO World Heritage sites available online during Ramadan

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — Iran's UNESCO World Heritage sites can be visited on virtual tours during the holy month of Ramadan, Mohammad-Hassan Talebian, deputy tourism minister announced on Thursday, IRNA reported.

As the country's tourism has gone into lockdown over the coronavirus pandemic, the ministry has decided to arrange virtual tours on the country's 24 World Heritage sites in collaboration with the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), he added.



© Arg-e Bam (Bam Citadel)

Referring to the success of the virtual tours and online visits of the museums and some other tourist attractions during the Persian New Year holiday (Noruz), he expressed his hope that such projects would continue after the end of Ramadan.

"Arg-e Bam" (Bam Citadel) that represents an outstanding example of an ancient fortified settlement, "Bisotun" in western Kermanshah province, which is notable for its Achaemenid-era inscription carved on a limestone cliff, lavish "Golestan Palace" in downtown Tehran which is a masterpiece of the Qajar era (1789 to 1925), and millennium-old "Gonbad-e Qabus" which is a mudbrick tomb tower for Qabus ibn Wushmagir, are among the UNESCO-designated sites in Iran.

## Ancient relics of Iran: Axe inscribed with royal name

**(Louvre museum)** — This hatchet, which is being kept at the Louver in Paris, inscribed with the name of Untash-Napirisha is dedicated to the goddesses Ishnikarab and Kiririsha.

The object was found in Tchoga Zanbil, in the temple of Ishnikarab near the great ziggurat consecrated by the king to Inshushinak and Napirisha. This type of weapon, with the axe blade emerging from the mouth of an animal - usually a lion - is in keeping with the tradition in the early 2nd millennium BC. An electrum figurine of a wild boar decorates the side of the hatchet.



### ■ A hatchet inscribed with the name of Untash-Napirisha

This axe found in the temple of Kiririsha in Tchoga Zanbil was an offering made by the king to thank both Kiririsha, consort to the god Napirisha, and Ishnikarab. Famous for his victorious campaigns against Babylon, King Untash-Napirisha dedicated many weapons in stone and precious metals to Elamite divinities, the principal ones being Inshushinak, Napirisha, and Kiririsha. Ishnikarab is associated with these three divinities. Although the feminine character of Ishnikarab has been questioned, she would appear to have been the wife of Inshushinak. In making his gift, the king placed himself under the protection of the two goddesses, Ishnikarab and Kiririsha. At the time, the unification of the upper and lower regions was uncertain, and the unity of the Elamite empire fragile. The inscription of the sovereign's name on this object in Elamite was an assertion of the linguistic identity of the kingdom, which formed one of its underlying foundations. These offerings suggest the warrior nature of Kiririsha.

### ■ A new capital to celebrate the Elamite gods

King Untash-Napirisha founded a new religious capital, Al-Untash Napirisha (present-day Tchoga Zanbil), on the road linking the two principal centers of the kingdom, Anshan and Susa. In the middle of this "holy city" was a small temple dedicated to the goddess Ishnikarab. Untash-Napirisha built a temple next to it dedicated to Kiririsha, as well as one to Inshushinak. Later, he changed his mind and turned the latter into a large ziggurat dominating this site where the country's guardian deities - Napirisha, the god of the upper regions, and Inshushinak, the god of the Susian plain - were worshipped. Kiririsha was the "Great Goddess," the "Great Wife," and the "Mother of Gods." She was also the "Protector of Kings."

### ■ A tradition from Eastern Iran dating from the 3rd millennium BC

The weapon belongs to a tradition introduced in the late 3rd millennium BC: namely, votive axes with blades emerging from the mouth of a wild animal, decorated with an animal on the collar. A reclining boar - an image commonly found in the region - is here featured on the heel of the blade, which appears to be "spewed forth" from the mouth of a lion. Other weapons such as daggers and swords have been found in graves in Luristan. These arms were often inscribed with the name of a monarch, as is the case in the Foroughi Collection. Often made of precious metals, these were not made for battle, but were insignia of dignity presented to high-ranking officials.

# Archaeological survey aims to spotlight cultural sequence in northwestern Iran

**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** — A fresh archaeological season is scheduled to start today in Germi county, northwestern Ardebil province, in a bid to turn the spotlight on the long cultural sequence in the region.

"A 45-day archaeological research will start on Saturday [April 25] across a five hectare area of land near Ahad Beyglu village of Germi county to explore cultural sequence of the region, which is situated in the north of Ardebil province," Germi tourism director Ali Hosseinzadeh said on Thursday, CHTN reported.

The term culture sequence explores which cultures or assemblages from different cultures follow one another. In successive levels of a stratified site, the oldest is usually at the lowest level.

"[These] archaeological excavations are aimed to provide experts with an opportunity to study history of the region and its existing cultural heritage," the official said.

In November 2018, Iranian researchers discovered an Iron Age tomb in Germi, dating back to a time between 2500 to 3000 years ago, belonging to a child who was between 5 and 7 years old. It was unearthed in a survey aimed to probe the history of settlements in Yel Suyi, a ruined site majority of which is associated with the early Islamic era.

In December of the same year, a number of relics, dating back to Seljuk (1037-1194) and Il-Khanid (1256-1335/1353) eras, were unearthed in the vicinity of Alajouq fortress in Germi county.

Ardebil province is believed to be as old as the Achaemenid era (ca. 550-330 BC). Sources say that due to its proximity to the Caucasus, Ardabil was always vulnerable to invasions and attacks by the mountain peoples of the Caucasus as well as by the steppe dwellers of South Russia past the mountains.

During the Islamic conquest of Iran, Ardabil was the largest city in north-western Iran, ahead of Derbent, and remained so until the Mongol invasion period.



## First VP voices support for corona-hit eco-lodge businesses

**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** — First Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri has said that eco-lodge units that have been damaged by the coronavirus outbreak in the country will be supported.

He made the remarks in a Tehran meeting on Wednesday, emphasizing on the government's role in assisting rural and nomadic jobs, ILNA reported.

He also noted that the eco-lodge businesses in rural areas were well activated, but they have been hit by coronavirus pandemic and have stagnated during the quarantine time.

Earlier this month, the Iranian government announced it will bail out those which are grappling with fiscal problems by offering loans with a 12-percent interest rate. The Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tour-



ism and Handicrafts also suggested a rescue package for tourism businesses.

The government has also allocated a 750-trillion-rial (about \$18 billion) package to help low-income households and small- and medium-sized enterprises suffered by the coronavirus concerns.

Optimistic forecasts, however, expect Iran to achieve a tourism boom after coronavirus contained, believing its impact would be temporary and short-lived for a country that ranked the third fastest-growing tourism destination in 2019.

Latest available data show eight million tourists visited the Islamic Republic during the first ten months of the past Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2019).

## Police seize Iron-Age relics in northern Iran

**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** — Iranian authorities have recently confiscated tens of relics from a gang of illegal diggers and smugglers in northern Iran. The objects are estimated to date from the Iron Age to the Parthian era, CHTN reported on Wednesday.

"A total of 107 historical objects, which include bronze rings, clay vessels, and tone beads ..., were recovered in Kelardasht county [of the northern Mazandaran province]," said Amir Rahmatollahi, a senior police official in charge of protecting cultural heritage.

"Based on assessments performed by provincial cultural heritage experts, the objects are of 'historical values' and date



from the Iron Age and early Parthian era."

"Four illegal diggers were detained in this regard and surrendered to the

judicial system for further investigation," the police official noted.

The Iron Age is an archaeological era,

referring to a period in the prehistory and protohistory of the Old World (Afro-Eurasia) when the dominant toolmaking material was iron.

Establishing a primary residence at Ctesiphon, on the Tigris River in southern Mesopotamia, Parthian kings ruled for nearly half a millennium and influenced politics from Asia Minor to northern India, until they were overthrown by Sasanian armies from southwest Iran in the early third century CE. Parthian wealth obtained through lucrative trade networks resulted in substantial patronage of the arts, in particular, relief sculpture, statuary (large and small scale), architectural sculpture, metalwork, jewelry, and ceramics.

## Permanent handicrafts exhibit to open in Yasuj



**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — A permanent handicrafts exhibit will be established in Yasuj, the capital of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province, southwest Iran, in the near future, a provincial tourism official has said.

The marketplace aims at supporting craftspeople in the province as well as promoting their handmade products both in domestic and foreign markets, said Majid Safai, CHTN reported on Thursday.

The exhibit can also be a source of income, employment and development

in this field for the province, he added.

Iran's handicrafts exports include traditional ceramics, pottery vessels, handwoven textiles, glasswork, woodwork, metalwork, embroideries, personal ornamentations and precious and semi-precious gemstones.

Dozens of Iranian handicrafts have gained the UNESCO Seal of Excellence during the past couple of years. Some 75 percent of Iranian handicrafts are produced by females, Masoumeh Ebtekar, vice president for women's and family affairs, said in April 2018.

## Tourist village to come on stream by autumn



**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — A new tourist village will be inaugurated by autumn in Tijerd, Abarkuh county, central Yazd province, said provincial tourism chief Hamid Moshtaqian, CHTN reported on Friday.

The tourist village is being constructed by the private sector near a Qajar-era (1789-1925) castle, which is inscribed on Iran's National Heritage List.

The village will cover 150 ha in area,

including two historical castles, two museums, a restaurant, playgrounds, gardens and a helipad as well as 20 nomadic tents.

A 4000-year-old cypress in Abarkuh is a must-see attraction while visiting the central Iranian city. Located some 140 kilometers west of Yazd, the evergreen tree is inscribed on the National Heritage List. Scientists estimated that the tree dates back to 4000 years ago which is known as the oldest living being in the country.



# Iran 'honored' to cut corona deaths to a third amid sanctions

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — The daily death toll and positive cases of coronavirus in Iran have dropped respectively to one third and 40 percent over the course of three weeks, which is a source of honor for the country amid the tough sanctions, Health Minister Saeed Namaki has said.

The Iranian health ministry on Friday announced

that the total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus has reached 88,194 of whom 5,574 equaling 66,596 percent, have recovered.

According to IRIB news agency, Namaki said in a video conference on the sidelines of a joint meeting with the World Health Organization on Thursday that "Iran is one of the leading countries in West Asia for dealing with the pandemic."



As a representative of the Eastern Mediterranean region, Iran has good experience in the fight against coronavirus to transfer to other countries.

"The number of hospital beds in Iran is 1.6 per 1,000 people, while in European countries it is 5 to 6 times more, and the number of nurses in European countries is 2 to 3 times higher than Iran per bed," he concluded.

## Guterres thanks Muslims who 'live by their faith' as Ramadan approaches



**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — The United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres in a message appreciated Muslims who 'live by their faith' as activities during the holy month of Ramadan are affected by measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I extend my warmest wishes as millions of Muslims around the world begin observing the holy month of Ramadan.

This will, of course, be a very different Ramadan. Many community activities will naturally be affected by measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, many people in conflict zones will once again be tragically marking this

month with war and insecurity all around.

I recently called for an immediate global ceasefire to focus on our common enemy — the virus. I repeat that appeal today, recalling the words of the Holy Qur'an, "and if they incline to peace, then incline to it".

Ramadan is also about supporting the most vulnerable. I thank Governments and people throughout the Muslim world who live by their faith, supporting those fleeing conflict in the best Islamic tradition of hospitality and generosity — a remarkable lesson in this world where so many doors have been closed to those in need of protection, even before COVID-19.

## Qatar delivers new packages of aid to Iran for coronavirus battle



**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — A plane containing 15 tons of goods and medical supplies from the government of Qatar landed in Tehran on Friday to help the country combat the coronavirus pandemic.

Qatar had previously sent two shipments of health and medical supplies to Iran in the past month and a half, IRNA news agency reported.

On April 22, Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in a telephone conversation with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, referred to the spread of the coronavirus while wishing good

health to the government and people of Iran and all Muslims around the world, saying, "We must work together to prevent the spread of the disease."

Referring to the need to expand trade and economic cooperation between Iran and Qatar, he stressed the efforts of officials of the two countries in this regard.

Pointing to the cruelty of U.S. sanctions against Iran, he noted that "Today, the world is in a special condition and we believe that in this situation, the United States must lift the sanctions and all countries must move in line with the new conditions."

## National scheme launched to support the deprived during Ramadan

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — A national scheme called "Faithful Aid" was launched across the country on Thursday with the aim of supporting vulnerable groups during the holy month of Ramadan and helping low-income families amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Under the scheme, about 7 million food packages will be distributed among people in deprived areas by the end of Ramadan.

Families affected by coronavirus lockdowns who need help and are not covered or supported by organizations have been identified and people's aid will be sent to them.

Gholamreza Soleimani, head of the Basij organization which has organized the plan, said that since the outbreak of the coronavirus, people have stood by the officials and once again shown their altruism and empathy.

"The pandemic was a test for all governments and na-



tions. The efficiency and cooperation of the Iranian nation in controlling the virus is exemplary," he highlighted.

Iranian benefactors and charity organizations have contributed 3.5 trillion rials (around \$83 million at an official rate of 42,000 rials) since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak until March 29, Zahra Abedini, Social Security Organization's deputy director announced on Wednesday.

The Iranian Red Crescent Society has so far collected non-cash public donations worth 376 billion rials (nearly \$9 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) to counter COVID-19 pandemic in the country, IRCS head Karim Hemmati has announced.

Also, 220 billion rials (about \$5.2 million) have been paid in cash by the philanthropists to the IRCS to prevent the spread of the disease, he stated, IRNA reported.

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → C

## Camera traps picture Asiatic cheetah, Persian leopards in Semnan

An Asiatic cheetah and three Persian leopards have been observed through camera traps in Shahrood county in north central Semnan province, Amir Abdous, the provincial department of environment chief, has announced.

"Cameras have recently captured photos of an Asiatic cheetah and three Persian leopards around watering troughs," he said.

## تصویر برداری همزمان از سه پلنگ و یک یوزپلنگ در شاهرود

مدیرکل حفاظت محیط زیست استان سمنان از تصویربرداری سه پلنگ ایرانی و یک یوزپلنگ آسیایی در پارک ملی توران شاهرود خبر داد.

امیر عبدوس در گفتگو با خبرنگار مهر، تاکید کرد: تصاویر ضبط شده از سه قلاذه پلنگ توسط دوربین تله‌ای در کنار یکی از آبشخورهای این پارک ملی تهیه شده است، تصاویر شاهد سلامت و وضعیت جسمی مناسب این گونه دارد.

## PREFIX/SUFFIX

### "-ish"

■ **Meaning:** sort of or similar to

■ **For example:** One of the twins is athletic while the other is more **bookish**.

## PHRASAL VERB

### Pick somebody/something out

■ **Meaning:** to choose or recognize someone or something from a group

■ **For example:** She was able to pick out her father at the other side of the room.

## IDIOM

### Dab hand at something

■ **Explanation:** If you're a dab hand at something, you're very good at doing it

■ **For example:** Why don't you call Suzy? She's a dab hand at planning parties.

## Ayatollah Khamenei issues decree on fasting in Ramadan during Corona

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has issued a decree on fasting in the month of Ramadan during the coronavirus pandemic.

Fasting, which is a religious obligation, is in fact God's special blessing upon His servants and is a foundation for perfection and spiritual uplift for humanity. It was obligatory for previous nations as well, according to khamenei.ir website.

Some of the effects of fasting include gaining a state of spirituality and inner purity, increasing individual and social piety, and the strengthening of one's willpower and resistance when faced with hardships. The role it plays in people's health is evident, and God has placed a great reward for those who fast.

Fasting is a religious obligation and a pillar in Islamic Law. Therefore, not fasting during the auspicious month of Ramadan is not allowable unless an individual has a reason to believe that fasting will:

1. Cause an illness
2. Intensify an illness
3. Prolong an illness, or delay one's recuperation.

In such cases, one should not fast, but it will be necessary to make up for the missed fasts at a later time.

Obviously, it is enough if this conviction is obtained based on the opinion of a religious physician.

Therefore, if a person has a reasonable fear of being subject to any of the above-mentioned difficulties, they should not fast, but it will be necessary to make up for these missed fasts at a later time.

## Iran is ready to help Americans escape the helplessness of their government amid pandemic

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — Iran is ready to help people of the United States who are entangled with the coronavirus predicament to escape the helplessness of their government, Health Minister Saeed Namaki has said.



"Today, the U.S. secretary of health announced at the World Health Organization meeting that he is ready to help Iran deal with coronavirus," Namaki wrote on his Twitter account on Thursday.

"We are ready to help the people of the United States to escape the helplessness of their government to get out of the current dire situation," Namaki said in response to remarks by Alex Azar, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services.

"As we stated at the G20 Health Ministerial meeting, in the face of this absurd claim, today Iran, with the help of God and the cooperation of the people and officials, and sincere inter-sectoral cooperation could control the outbreak."

## WORDS IN THE NEWS

### Asia: species loss

(July 25, 2003)

Deforestation could lead to the disappearance of up to a fifth of South East Asia's plant and animal life within the next century. According to new research rapid and large scale loss of natural habitats has already affected biodiversity in the area and urgent conservation efforts are now needed. This report from Ania Lichtarowicz.

The humid tropics of South East Asia are one of the Earth's **major reservoirs** of animal and plant species. But this rich **biodiversity** is under threat because of continuing habitat-loss. Vast areas are being cleared through **deforestation** either for agriculture or **urban development** and if habitats continue to disappear **at their present rate**, then between thirteen and forty two per cent of wildlife will **become extinct**.

These predictions have been calculated by scientists from Singapore, Australia and Japan, who looked at species loss in Singapore over the last one hundred and eighty years. Here habitats of **terrestrial and freshwater species** have shrunk by ninety five per cent, and forest reserves - which cover only a quarter of a per cent of Singapore's land area, now **harbor** more than fifty per cent of **flora and fauna**. By comparing this data to the rest of the region the scientists calculated these huge losses. The authors say that **major conservation efforts** need to be put in place otherwise many species will be lost forever.

### Words

**major reservoirs:** biggest sources

**biodiversity:** wide variety of plants and animals

**deforestation:** cutting down trees

**urban development:** building towns or cities

**at their present rate:** at the speed it is happening now

**become extinct:** die out so no more of a species is left

**terrestrial and freshwater species:** plants and animals that live on land or in freshwater (rivers and lakes)

**harbour:** give protection to

**flora and fauna:** animal and plant life

**major conservation efforts:** big projects which protect the environment

(Source: BBC)



## Experts react with horror to Trump coronavirus disinfectant idea

→ 1 He first moved on whether light could be brought inside the body before moving onto the subject of disinfectant.

If it could “knock out the virus in a minute, one minute” Trump pondered, “Is there a way we can do something like that by injection, inside, or almost a cleaning? It would be interesting to check that.”

Trump has previously touted unproven treatments as cures for COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, despite caution among health officials.

A man in Arizona died in late March after taking chloroquine phosphate - a substance used to clean fish tanks - after Trump repeatedly talked about hydroxychloroquine. The man's wife told TV network NBC News he had been watching the president's daily briefings.

Earlier in the briefing, William Bryan, acting head of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Directorate said government researchers had determined that the virus survives best indoors and in dry conditions and loses potency when temperatures and humidity rise - especially when it is exposed to sunlight.

### Heat, humidity

“The virus dies quickest in the presence of direct sunlight,” he told the briefing in findings that raised hopes the coronavirus would mimic the behaviour of other respiratory diseases such as influenza, which are typically less contagious in warm weather.

But the coronavirus has also proven lethal in warm, humid countries such as Singapore, raising broader questions about the effect of environmental factors.

On non-porous surfaces like stainless steel, the new coronavirus takes 18 hours to lose half its strength in a dark, low-humidity environment, Bryan said.

In a high-humidity environment, that weakened organism strength dropped to six hours and when the virus was exposed to high humidity and sunlight, it dropped to two minutes, he said.

Researchers found a similar effect with the coronavirus that was suspended in the air - simulating the coughing or sneezing that often spreads the disease. In a dark room, the virus maintained half its strength for an hour. But when exposed to sunlight, it lost half its strength in 90 seconds, Bryan said.

## Biden predicts Trump will try to postpone U.S. election

Presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden has predicted that U.S. President Donald Trump will try to postpone the country's November election in an attempt to win.

“Mark my words, I think he is gonna try to kick back the election somehow, come up with some rationale why it can't be held,” Biden said during an online fundraiser Thursday.

The 77-year-old former vice president said it is “the only way he thinks he can possibly win.”

Six months before U.S. voters head to the polls, Trump's mind is already in election mode.



But with a pandemic raging and job losses climbing to 26.4 million Thursday, Trump's path to victory may be harder than he anticipated.

Biden, highlighting Trump's recent threat to veto emergency funding for the U.S. Post Office, claimed it was an example of the president's intention to “do all he can to make it very hard for people to vote.”

While mail-in voting and absentee ballots remain methods many say could help limit voters spreading coronavirus, Trump maintains they create the potential for fraud.

Meanwhile, dozens of U.S. states have postponed their primary races, which will officially determine who will be the presidential nominee.

The 73-year-old Trump has been criticized for turning his daily White House coronavirus briefings into campaign events - rallying his base and taking swipes at his detractors such as Biden, who is sheltering at home.

“We have a sleepy guy in a basement of a house that the press is giving a free pass to, who doesn't want to do debates because of COVID,” Trump said during the Thursday briefing.

(Source: AFP)

## Trump thinks report was incorrect on illness of Kim Jong Un

U.S. President Donald Trump threw more cold water on reports that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was gravely ill, but declined to say if he had been in touch with officials there.

“I think the report was incorrect,” Trump said at a daily White House briefing, adding that he had heard it was based on “old documents.”

Trump had said on Tuesday that he might contact North Korean officials to inquire about Kim but gave no indication on Thursday he had done so. The two leaders have had regular communications over the past couple of years, Reuters reported.

“We have a good relationship with North Korea, I have a good relationship with Kim Jong Un and I hope he's okay,” Trump said.

Daily NK, a Seoul-based website, reported on Monday that Kim, who is believed to be about 36, was recovering after undergoing a cardiovascular procedure on April 12. It cited one unnamed source in North Korea. The state-controlled media in North Korea has been silent on Kim's whereabouts.

# New York survey suggests nearly 2.7 million in state may have coronavirus



surveyed were more likely to test positive for antibodies than someone isolated at home, Cuomo said.

Even after discounting those factors, Cuomo said the preliminary data added to his understanding of the virus and would inform his plans to reopen the state, with social distancing measures possibly relaxed more quickly in less infected regions.

Cuomo said the state would keep adding to the sample size in the coming weeks

and would test more in African-American and Hispanic communities, which made up disproportionately high percentages of positive tests in the survey so far. Whites have registered a disproportionately lower infection rate.

“I want to see snapshots of what is happening with that rate – is it going up, is it flat, is it going down,” Cuomo told a daily briefing. “It can really give us data to make decisions.”

The infection rate implied by the New

A preliminary survey of New York state residents found that nearly 14% of those tested had antibodies against the novel coronavirus, suggesting that some 2.7 million may already have been infected, Governor Andrew Cuomo said.

While noting the small sample size of 3,000 people and other limitations of the survey, Cuomo said the implied fatality rate of 0.5% of those infected was lower than some experts feared, Reuters reported.

“If the infection rate is 13.9 percent, then it changes the theories of what the death rate is if you get infected,” Cuomo told a daily briefing.

The implied fatality rate of 0.5% was calculated by dividing the official statewide death count to date of about 15,500 by the estimated number of infected - 14% of New York's 19 million residents, or 2.7 million people.

As of Thursday, New York had 263,460 confirmed cases and a death toll of 15,740, according to the state's official count, or nearly 6% of those who tested positive for the coronavirus.

Among other limitations, Cuomo said the official death count was surely an undercount because it only included people who had died in hospitals or nursing homes and not those who expired at home without a diagnosis of COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the virus.

The survey targeted people who were out shopping, but not working, meaning they were probably not essential workers like grocery clerks or bus drivers. Those

## Syria denounces UN failure to enforce resolutions on Israeli occupation

Syria's UN ambassador says the Security Council has failed the Arab world by not enforcing its resolutions on the Israeli occupation due to pressure from certain permanent members of the council.

“The UN, due to pressure by some permanent members of the Security Council, has so far failed to enforce resolutions calling for an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab lands, particularly Resolutions 242, 338 and 497,” Bashar al-Ja'afari said at a UN Security Council session on the situation in the Middle East via video link on Thursday.

Ja'afari also described the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights as an integral part of his country's territories, stating that the return of the strategic area is among the high priorities of the Syrian government, Press TV reported.

He added the UN inaction has emboldened some countries to try to wriggle out of their legal commitment and change the facts, such as the provocative U.S. rec-



ognition of Jerusalem al-Quds as the “capital” of Israel in December 2017, and later recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights in March 2019.

Ja'afari then noted that Syria, along with the majority of other countries, condemns such unilateral moves by a party, which is devoid of any political, moral or legal

capacity to seal world nations' fate and to hand over lands which belong to Syria and Palestine.

He also criticized the Israeli regime for using Lebanon's airspace to launch missile attacks on Syria, emphasizing that such strikes are against UN resolutions and meant to boost the morale of the last remnants of foreign-backed Takfiri terrorist groups.

On March 25, 2019, U.S. President Donald Trump signed a proclamation, formally recognizing Israel's sovereignty over Golan Heights. The announcement came as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited the White House at the time.

Israel seized the Golan Heights from Syria after the 1967 Six-Day War and later occupied it in a move that has never been recognized by the international community. The regime has built dozens of settlements in the area ever since and has used the region to carry out a number of military operations against the Syrian government.

## U.S. tries to use nuclear power as geopolitical instrument: China

The United States tries to use international cooperation in nuclear power as its geopolitical instrument, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Geng Shuang commented on Friday on the U.S. Department of Energy's strategy, which mentions the need for ousting Russia and China from international nuclear power markets.

“We've taken note of this report. It argues that in contrast to the United States China and Russia fail to observe non-proliferation requirements, which is absolutely not true. The United States uses a variety of pretexts for upsetting normal cooperation between other countries in nuclear power,” Geng said.

“U.S. officials have been saying in public that they will use cooperation in

nuclear power as a geopolitical instrument,” he added.

“China officially dismisses such politicization [of cooperation in nuclear power] and it will never agree with such accusations. Aware of its responsibility China will be developing nuclear power and also contributing to stable international cooperation in this field,” Geng concluded.

Earlier the U.S. Department of Energy published a strategy in which it proclaimed as one of its main tasks the ousting of Russia and China from the international markets of nuclear power and technologies. Also, it voiced the intention to impede cooperation by Moscow and Beijing with East European and African countries in this field.

### U.S. halting WHO funding

The U.S. violates its own international obligations by suspending contributions to the World Health Organization (WHO), undermining global cooperation, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Friday, commenting on the statement by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo regarding further suspension of WHO funding.

“Attacks on the WHO and attempts to discredit it by the United States are baseless,” the diplomat said. “The U.S. is paying its dues to the WHO as a legal entity, and it must adhere to its obligations as a member state of the organization. The suspension of funding by Washington is a violation of its fundamental obligations, namely before other members of the organization. Such

actions undermine global cooperation and may lead to serious consequences,” the spokesman stressed.

“Supporting the WHO can save many lives and stop the spread of the pandemic,” Geng Shuang concluded.

On Wednesday, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Fox News that the U.S. might suspend its funding of the WHO indefinitely.

On April 14, Trump announced that Washington had halted funding of the World Health Organization. He declared that the United States was suspending its WHO membership dues and accused the organization of wrong judgements and recommendations, which allegedly resulted in a 20-fold increase in COVID-19 cases worldwide.

## Turkey brings additional military reinforcement to Syria's Hasakah

The Turkish army has brought additional military reinforcements to Syria's easternmost Hasakah province as part of Ankara's unauthorized cross-border offensive into the Arab country, says a report by Syria's official news agency.

Syria's official news agency, SANA, citing unnamed local sources, said on Thursday that the Turkish military convoy, consisted of four military vehicles equipped with machine-guns, arrived in the villages of Dawodyah and Anyq al-Hawa in Abu Rasin district in the northern parts of the province.

Most of the military reinforcements, which include weapons, ammunition, military vehicles and equipment, have been distributed among Ankara-backed militants in order for them to continue their “criminal practices” against the locals in the occupied areas, and to “attack” neighboring regions.

The presence of US-supported militants from the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which regarded by Turkey as a terrorist organization, in the northern and northeastern parts of Syria has prompted Ankara to conduct a cross-border offensive into the Arab country to purportedly eliminate the Kurdish militants, occupying a long narrow border area in Syria's north.

Ankara-backed militants were deployed to northeastern Syria last October after Turkish military forces launched the



long-threatened invasion.

Meanwhile, a number of Turkey-backed militants were either killed or wounded Thursday after some landmines went off on their way in al-Ahras village in Ras al-Ayn area in northwestern parts of Hasakah.

According to SANA, quoting local sources, several landmines went off as a group of Turkey-backed militants were passing in al-Ahras village in Ras al-Ayn area of Hasakah province, killing and injuring a number of them.

Apart from the recent offensive, Turkey has launched two other cross-border

operations in northern Syria, namely “Euphrates Shield” in August 2016 and “Olive Branch” in January 2018 with the declared aim of eradicating the presence of YPG militants and Daesh terrorists near Turkey's borders.

Damascus has time and again firmly rejected the Turkish-led operations as a blatant violation of its sovereignty and has vowed to liberate the whole country from foreign-led occupation.

Hasakah has also witnessed the arrival of a number of U.S. military convoys during the past months. Just recently, SANA,

citing local sources, reported that a U.S. convoy, consisting of 35 vehicles carrying cement blocks and logistic supplies, entered the Arab country via the Walid border crossing.

At the time that the convoy was heading from the Yaroubiya countryside northeast of Hasakah toward American bases near Qamishli, according to the report.

Earlier this month, another convoy of military reinforcement consisting of 25 military vehicles and trucks with ammunition had reportedly entered the U.S. base in the city of Shaddadi, south of Hasakah.

According to Press TV, Washington has long been supplying the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militant group with arms and training, calling the group a key partner in Washington's purported fight against the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group, which has already been defeated and almost eliminated in the Arab country. The YPG is considered as the backbone of the SDF.

Many observers, however, see the support in the context of Washington's scheme to carve out a foothold in Syria.

Turmoil, taken advantage of by Washington and many of its Western and regional allies, erupted in Syria in 2011. Militants and Takfiri terrorists overran parts of Syria's territory before government forces retook almost all of them with help from Damascus' allies, including Russia.



# Dragan Skocic giving Iran fresh impetus

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran national football team head coach Dragan Skocic says he knows how strong Iran are but he will inject fresh impetus into the current team.

The Croatian coach, who replaced Marc Wilmots in early February, has a difficult task ahead. After back-to-back appearances in 2014 and 2018, the aim now is to secure a third consecutive participation for the first time.

Iran have reached the World Cup on five occasions.

"Since the competitions were postponed due to coronavirus, I have been in touch with Iran players. I also met some players in person," Skocic said.

"I've watched the last 40 matches of Iran national team and I also review 100 Iran league matches in the time I should be in Croatia. I will analyze the matches and there will be some changes in our team with the aim of strengthening the team," the Croat stated.

"We want to bring the winning mentality into the team because we have a big chance of qualifying for the next stage. The winning spirit will help us to make it happen," Skocic went on to say.

Skocic opens door for all players who have Iranian passport to play in their national team.

"Every player has an equal chance of playing in the national team. There is no difference between the players who play abroad and those who are in Iran. We will invite the best players regardless of where they play," the former Sanat Naft coach added.



He praised the Iranian players, saying they tend to play attacking football.

"Football is in Iranian players' blood and we will play attacking football in the future. It was like watching a drama movie when Wilmots's team were playing but I like action

movies," Skocic said.

Skocic said two more coaches will be added to the coaching staff.

"Vahid Hashemian was under contract with Iran and we also wanted Karim Bagheri to join us. Now, two more coaches will be

added to the team. Goalkeeping coach Mladen Zganjer and Anton Usnik will be the team's new assistants," he said.

Iran sit third in Group C, five points behind Iraq in FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 qualification.

## Corruption in football more terrible than coronavirus: analyst

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Amir Haj Rezaei, one of the country's most respected football analysts, believes that the coronavirus crisis has taught people a lot of lessons about life.

In an exclusive interview with Tehran Times, Haj Rezaei said: "I prefer to talk about myself rather than other people or the world. Throughout my life, my hobbies have been football, book, and movie. These quarantine days has given me a unique opportunity to entertain myself with two sides of this triangle, and I miss the third side, which is football."

"One thing is for certain: we all miss something or someone. Covid-19 has taught us that we may suddenly lose our normal life and become isolated. Coronavirus pandemic reminded me that football is deeply intertwined with my life, and with its absence, I have somehow become ill. It is a fact, and all over the world, those who have lived their lives with football are suffering from lack of their favorite sport," he added.

Haj Rezaei (born 4 September 1946) is an Iranian football manager, expert, commentator, and former professional player. He started his career in Kian of Tehran and played in teams such as Rah Ahan, Bargh Tehran and, Machine Sazi Tabriz.

Asked about the prospect of the Iranian football in



the forthcoming month, after coronavirus crisis, Haj Rezaei said that the prospects are quite dim: "the amount of money the Iranian clubs are wasting, is worse than coronavirus."

"I always don't care about the news. There is a lot of talk about this football, especially about financial issues. Corruption in football is more terrible than coronavirus. Despite the increase in deaths and devastating economic losses, the virus will eventually be eliminated with medication and treatment, but the corruption, which has defiled our football, will be difficult to eradicate. To me, football is like the bitter medicine that a doctor

prescribes, and I have to use it for my health because I love football," he said.

Speaking about the Iranian Football Federation, he referred to the postponed elections of the federation: "When I read the list of people who were nominated for different positions in the federation, including the presidency, I have completely lost my hope. Football is a great sport and it needs great people. It does not mean that there should be ones with only higher education, but the people in football must have inherent qualities such as courage, as well as financial and moral health."

Referring to the public discussions about the continuation of the Iran Professional League (IPL), the former assistant coach of the Iranian national team said: "It's impossible to declare the champions with an incomplete league, and it's also impossible to end the season. Saying such things is both tragic and comic. In England, despite Liverpool's huge differences with other teams, they have agreed that the title must be determined on the pitch."

"My opinion is that with improvement and positive evolution in the situation related to coronavirus, competitions should be resumed with special strategies such as playing games behind the closed doors," he concluded.

## Mohammadian not worried about facing world-class rivals

**By Mohammad Ali Haqshenas**

**MNA** — Iranian freestyle wrestler Mohammadhossein Mohammadian says that he is not worried about facing famous foreign or Iranian wrestlers and is just thinking about the Olympics.

Mohammadian, 28, has experienced many ups and downs during his professional career in wrestling; four years of suspension by the United World Wrestling, gaining a gold in Italy, and now to stay home due to the pandemic are just part of what he has gone through. However, he has never abandoned the dream of competing in the Olympics.

"I went through four bitter unforgettable years; I was suspended from wrestling due to a mistake. Perhaps, if they were in my shoes, many wrestlers would have abandoned the sport but I stayed and focused on my aim and carried out constant training," Mohammadian told Mehr News Agency.

The four-year suspension came after Mohammadian tested positive for a pow-

erful anabolic steroid. Both him and Iranian wrestling federation officials stressed that they were not aware of the nature of the drug. The wrestler had broken his ankle nearly eight months earlier and sought treatment from a doctor that was not a party to the federation's medical committees. And the doctor purportedly prescribed a drug for the quick recovery of Mohammadian's bone tissue fracture, and the medicine contained substances subject to anti-doping regulations.

However, right after his suspension ended, he stunned the wrestling community in Matteo Pellicone, in January 2020. He downed all his rivals, including Olympics gold medalist USA's Kyle Snyder, to gain the gold medal of the event without even giving other opportunities to collect a point.

"Fortunately, my suspension ended last [Iranian calendar] year and after some time I managed to achieve good results in camps and in Italy," said the 2014 World Championships bronze medalist, noting that he is "Just thinking about the Olympics" and even

the cancelation of national team's camps has not halted his training and efforts.

Referring to the one-year postponement of the Tokyo Olympics, he said that "Overall, this is an advantage for me because I can train more and wrestle in more domestic and foreign events."

Asked about his mindset about rivals at 97kg category, the 2015 Asian Champion answered, "There are many fierce rivals in this weight category; of course, I have taken on some of them earlier and feel no worry about facing them once again ... I will never be influenced by the name of foreign wrestlers and will show whatever I know on the mat."

Iran freestyle team has so far secured three quotas to the Olympics in 57kg, 86kg, and 130kg. Mohammadian's category, 97kg, is among the three remaining categories that are still empty of Iranian wrestlers. He is also seeing serious rivals inside Iran. Alireza Karimi is one of them; he underwent successful knee surgery last week and will be



ready for action in a few months. Mojtaba Goleij, the two-time U23 world champion, is also another challenger at this weight.

Meanwhile, Mohammadian is benefiting from experiences of his father, Askari Mohammadian, who is one of the most notable Iranian wrestlers with two silver Olympics medals on his collection.

"I don't have any problem with the cancelation of camps as I'm training with my father, a renowned Iranian and world champion," he stressed.

sports and started to play competitively. Thanks to his results, he was already considered one of the best Para athletes of the world in the early 1970s.

Fejes played a key role in the foundation of the Olivér Halassy Sports Club for impaired athletes; the only association then where people with disabilities could play sports.

His professional activity mainly focused on identifying and reducing the complex psychological difficulties of people with disabilities and the challenge of their social integration.

In addition to his sport career, he was also involved in sports diplomacy and was a member of the Board of the International Federation of Persons with Physical Disability (FIMITIC) for 10 years.

Fejes has received several awards for his achievements in sports, scientific and public works. He was honoured with several distinctions in Hungary, including the Grand Cross of the Hungarian Order of Merit, which is one of the highest Hungarian state awards, in 2018.

(Source: Paralympic.org)



impairment face. His work and commitment to Para sport was a true testament to determination, passion and courage."

At the age of 17, Fejes had an accident and during his rehabilitation in Austria, he became acquainted with Para

## Hadi Rezaei congratulates international World Paravolley Day

ParaVolley Asia Oceania Secretary General Hadi Rezaei has congratulated International World Paravolley Day.

"On the occasion of the International World Paravolley (WPV) Day, I am pleased to send my warmest wishes and congratulations, and wish you all the best of health and parasport progress in these challenging times," Rezaei said.

"I believe WPV, during these years, under the excellent leadership, qualified and competent coaches and officials and especially the outstanding athletes, have successfully achieved our common goals, i.e. fairness, inspiration and inclusion," the Iranian top official added.

"We all have demonstrated that Para Volleyball is definitely the most popular sport in the world. Thank you for your great work! I appreciate your commitment to the growth of ParaVolley, and hope to overcome the COVID-19 soon, only we should stay together," he concluded.

(Source: Paralympic.ir)



## Iran sixth in world futsal ranking

**TASNIM** — The Iranian national futsal team remained unchanged in the latest Futsal World Ranking released on Friday.

Iran is the best Asian team and sixth in the world with 1603 points. Brazil and Spain are first and second with 1810 and 1801 points, respectively.

Argentina remains third with 1694 points.

Russia and Portugal are fourth and fifth with 1642 and 1639 points, respectively.

Iran national futsal team prepares for the 2020 AFC Futsal Championship in August, where the Team Melli has been drawn along with South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Thailand in Group D.

## Best XI outside top 5 leagues: Sardar Azmoun

Most of our club football conversations usually revolve around the happenings in the top 5 leagues. These leagues are graced by some of the best footballers in the world who have also won laurels for their respective national sides.

However, this does not mean that there aren't good players outside these top 5 leagues. But these players from the supposedly 'lesser' leagues often fly under the radar. On that note, let us have a look at players, in various positions, who do not play in Europe's top 5 leagues.

■ **Sardar Azmoun (Zenit St. Petersburg/Iran)**

On the left of our front three is Iranian forward Sardar Azmoun. He plays for Zenit St Petersburg in the Russian Premier Liga.

Azmoun has scored 10 goals, and provided 6 assists this season, which is second only to teammate Artem Dzyuba in terms of most goals and assists in the Russian league in 2019-20.

The 25-year-old is a prolific scorer in international football as well, netting an impressive 31 goals in 46 international games.

(Source: All Football)

## Esteghlal denies Stramaccioni talks

**TASNIM** — Iranian football club Esteghlal denied negotiation with Italian coach Andrea Stramaccioni.

The Italian coach had led the Iranian side to first place in the Persian Gulf Pro League this season but left Esteghlal in early December after the Blues failed to respect contractual obligations.

Now, Iranian media reports suggest that Esteghlal have negotiated with its former coach.

Esteghlal General Manager Ahmad Saadatmand has denied the speculations. "I strongly deny the speculations and Majidi will continue his work as Esteghlal coach," he said.

Esteghlal sits fourth in the Iran Professional League table, 11 points behind leader Persepolis.

## Bosnia junior swimming champion makes do with tiny pool in greenhouse

**DOBOJ, Bosnia (Reuters)** — Competitive swimmers around the world had their training plans scuppered when coronavirus lockdowns forced the closure of most pools. Not so in the case of Bosnian junior swimming champion Iman Avdic, whose father has come up with a home-made solution.

The 13-year-old Avdic is training in a 3x2-metre pool which sits in a greenhouse in her grandfather's garden. Clad in a wet-suit, she swims while tied to a bungee rope to hold her in place.

At first Avdic, who lives in Sarajevo but is staying with her grandparents in the northern town of Doboj, had maintained her form by hiking and running, but had to find an alternative when authorities barred minors from leaving their homes as part of their measures to contain the new coronavirus.

"It is all kind of odd for me but everything can be done like before but in a slightly different way. It's easy for me to adapt but I miss a real pool," Avdic said.

Her father and coach, Evelin Avdic, said that initially the metal-framed, plastic pool had stood in the open air. Finding that the water was too cold, he came up with the idea of placing the pool inside a greenhouse.

Avdic holds national records in 50-1,500 m freestyle, 100m, 200m, 400m mixed style, 200 m dolphin and 200 m backstroke and breaststroke. There have been more than 1,400 confirmed coronavirus cases and 54 deaths in Bosnia. Like elsewhere, stay-at-home orders to halt the spread of the disease have hit businesses and jobs.



INTERNATIONAL DAILY  
www.tehrantimes.com

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» Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603  
» www.eshtarak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.  
Tel: 88911433  
» Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com  
» Printed at: Jame Jam Barta Borna - 44197737



Tehrantimes79



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No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran  
P.O. Box: 14155-4843  
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## GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Beware, beware of sinfulness. By God, He has veiled His servants' guilt so much as if He has forgiven them.

Imam Ali (AS)

## Qom photojournalists reflect battle with COVID-19 in online exhibit

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — Photojournalists in Qom, where the first cases of the COVID-19 infection in two Iranian men were reported in February, have launched an online photo exhibition to highlight efforts made by doctors, medical staff, military organizations and people in fighting the new virus.



Photo: Volunteers in Qom fill bottles with disinfectant liquid to distribute among people in an attempt to fight COVID-19. (Fars/Mehdi Jafari)

A selection of 30 photos by the photographers from 14 Iranian news agencies and news websites, including IRNA, Mehr, Fars, Tasnim and ISNA, have been put on permanent exhibit on Qom Photo, a website for the photographers of the city.

Amir Hesami Nejad, Mehdi Marizad, Hamid Abedi, Ali Rohani, Mehdi Jafari, Mehdi Bakhshti, Abbas Monajjemi and Mohammad Vahdi are among the photojournalists whose works are on display on the online gallery.

## Munich Kammerspiele to stream "Timeloss"

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — A recording of "Timeloss", a production by the Mehr Theater Group from Iran, will be streamed online by the Munich Kammerspiele, a state-funded German-language theater company, on April 26. Amir-Reza Kuhestani is the director of the troupe, which has performed the play in numerous countries, including Iran, Chile, France, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, Italy and Taiwan.



A poster for Mehr Theater Group's play "Timeloss".

"Timeloss" is about two former lovers sitting in a room bickering in an argument they have had so many times and began so many years ago that they know it by heart.

The last time the play starring Hassan Majuni and Mahin Sadri was performed was in February 2019 at the Tehran Independent Theater.

## Banksy's "Girl with a Pierced Eardrum" gains a coronavirus face mask

**LONDON (Reuters)** — Banksy's "Girl with a Pierced Eardrum" has been updated for the coronavirus era with the addition of a blue surgical face mask.

The mural, a take on Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer's "Girl with a Pearl Earring" but with a security alarm replacing the pearl, was painted on a harborside building in the street artist's home city of Bristol in west England in 2014.

It is not known whether Banksy, whose identity is a closely guarded secret, or somebody else attached the fabric face mask to the painted girl.

The newly adorned mural did not appear on Banksy's Instagram page where he usually posts images of his work.

# Maestro Tjeknavorian releases composition on coronavirus in home quarantine

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — Maestro Loris Tjeknavorian has released a piece on coronavirus that he composed in three movements during the home quarantine.

"These days that the new virus has dominated the world, artists and musicians have reacted in different ways and for my part, I tried to show my feelings towards this world issue with a new composition," he told the Persian service of MNA on Friday.

The 12-minute composition named "Corona" is composed of three movements named "Assault", "Death", and "Life".

"I have been staying at home these days to protect myself and my other citizens from the new virus, and try to spend time in the best way possible," he said.

"The first step to fight the coronavirus is to observe all the health tips to get rid of this new disease soon, but as long as this situation continues we should try to do our best, if we are an artist or a musician, we need to work harder and if not we need to increase our personal information," he noted.

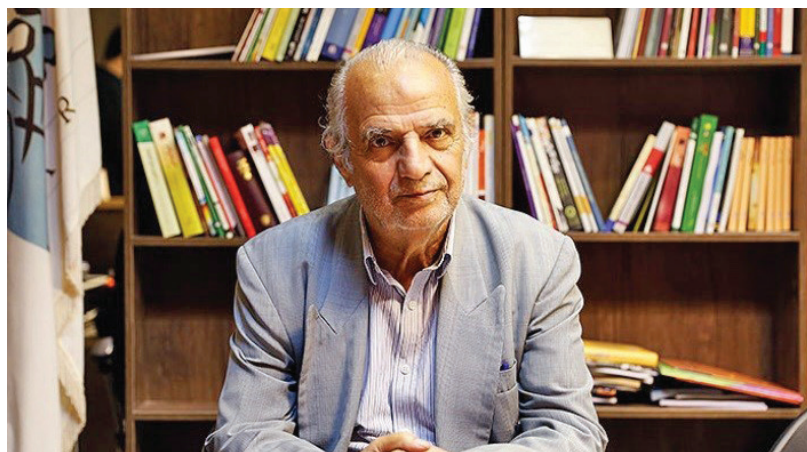
"I have been working more than before. I watch films and listen to music, because I believe music is one of the best ways to help people in confronting a crisis," he added.

The composition has been sampled by Ehsan Beiragdar and mixed by Omid Nikbin, while Yarta Yaran has collaborated as a photographer.



Maestro Loris Tjeknavorian acknowledges the audience after a performance by the National Orchestra at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on February 12, 2016. (Borna News Agency/Mohsen Vanai)

## Writer Mahmud Hakimi says leaning toward God will rise in post-corona world



Writer Mahmud Hakimi in an undated photo.

**CULTURE** **TEHRAN** — Mahmud Hakimi, an Iranian writer of religious stories for young adults, has said that godliness and people's leaning toward God will enjoy an increase in the post-coronavirus world.

"At first, we should pray that this disease may diminish; this virus has been disastrous both for us and the world, and I believe a wave of godliness will begin in the world after the disease is stamped out," he told the Persian service of ISNA on Thursday.

Hakimi said, "One of the honors of life is that I have been writing religious stories and articles for the magazine 'Lessons from the School of Islam' since 1968."

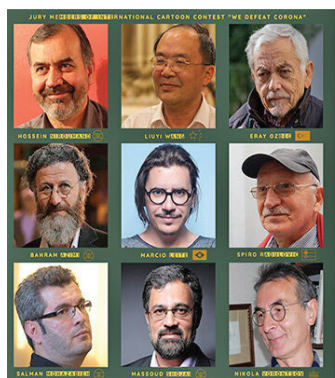
He also said that at present, children have more time to read books and asked parents to encourage their children to read.

"I wrote the 21-volume 'The Story of Civilization - The Life of Humanity' for young adults, which they like reading," he said.

"However, the adults didn't welcome the version I wrote for them. The adults do not like reading, but I hope the home quarantine will make them read books," he added.

Hakimi, 76, is currently working on the Nahj ul-Balagha, a collection of the sermons, letters and short sayings of Imam Ali (AS), to write a book for young adults.

He has so far published over 140 books, including "Personality Traits of Imam Mahdi (AS)", "An Approach to Contemporary World History - The Crisis of Our Time", and "The Basics of Literature for Children and Young Adults: Focus on Religious Literature".



This combination photo shows the national and international jury members of Iran's We Defeat Coronavirus International Cartoon Contest.



## Iran's We Defeat Coronavirus Intl. Cartoon Contest announces jury

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — The organizers of Iran's We Defeat Coronavirus International Cartoon Contest has announced the jury for both national and international sections.

Turkish cartoonist Eray Ozbek will preside over the international jury, which is composed of cartoonists Spiro Radulovic from Serbia, Nikola Vorontsov from Russia, Liuyi Wang from China and Marcio Leite from Brazil.

The jury for the national section consists of Mohammad-Hossein Nirumand, Bahram Azimi, Masud Shojaei-Tabatabai and Salman Mohazzabieh.

The contest is being organized by Iran's Art Bureau in collaboration with the Health Ministry.

## Art Bureau begins poll to pick Islamic Revolution Artist of the Year



A combination photo shows the nominees for the Islamic Revolution Artist of the Year title.

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — The Art Bureau of the Islamic

Ideology Dissemination Organization commenced its public poll on Friday to select the Islamic Revolution Artist of the Year.

People can vote for the 15 artists, who were announced as the nominees for the title.

Director Narges Abyar is the most renowned figure on the list of the nominees. She received the nomination for her latest acclaimed film "When the Moon Was Full" about a story about the Jundallah terrorist group in southeastern Iran and Pakistan, as well as for receiving the HUM Women Leaders Award in Pakistan.

Director Javad Afshar has received a nomination for his docudrama "Gando" about the spy case of Iranian-American journalist Jason Rezaian.

Filmmakers Saied Esmaeili, Vahid Chavosh and Amir Dasargar, producers Seyyed Mahmud Razavi and Morteza Sha'bani, painter

Hassan Ruholamin and singer Gholamreza Sanatgar are among the nominees.

Writers Vajih Samani, Behnaz Zarrabizadeh, Mohsen Kazemi and Zahra Kardani, animator Mohsen Enayati and graphic designer Mohammad-Saber Sheikhezai are other figures who have made the list.

Five figures will be selected from the nominees as finalists, and the winner will be announced the during 6th Islamic Revolution Art Week in June.

The week was scheduled to open on April 9, however, the Art Bureau postponed the event due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The art week is organized every year to commemorate the martyrdom anniversary of documentarian Morteza Avini who was killed by a landmine in 1993 during his last trip to the former Iran-Iraq war zone in southwestern Iran while making a documentary about soldiers who were still listed as missing in action.

## Spray it, don't say it: Kenya graffiti artists spread health message

**NAIROBI (Reuters)** — A six-foot image of a sad-eyed man, baseball cap askew and mask covering his nose and mouth is spray painted on a building in a Nairobi slum. Next to it are the words "Corona is real".

There are six other pieces of graffiti like it around Mathare, the Kenyan capital's second-largest slum. One urges people to wash their hands, another to use mobile money rather than germ-ridden cash.

All are public health messages to avoid the new coronavirus. As of Wednesday, Kenya had 303 confirmed cases of the disease and 14 deaths.

In a densely crowded settlement where social distancing and working from home are a pipe dream for most, the campaign is designed to teach people tangible ways in which they can protect themselves and their community from the coronavirus.

Unlike the stuffy government news conferences on television, the campaign uses the voices of the people who live there.

The graffiti campaign is the brainchild of Antony Mwelu, a 24-year-old content creator with Light Art Club and graffiti artist Brian Musasia Wanyande.

Mwelu, who was born and raised in Mathare, realized he needed to do something after visiting the neighborhood several weeks ago.

"I was sitting with the boys and I asked them 'Do you believe in corona?'. Most of them were like 'No we don't believe it'."

Wanyande had a similar experience. "There's a lot of misinformation going around," Wanyande said. "And some of the real information has been given out in difficult English words."

So, Wanyande said, he saw a need not only for catchy images but also accessible language to get the message across. Some of the graffiti is in Sheng, a local slang.

Mathare residents — who might number as many as half a million, according to the Mathare Foundation — have taken to the

new images.

As Wanyande painted the pieces urging people to use mobile money — which included a larger-than-life image of a grinning man leaning against his motorbike taxi and a woman in front of her street-side banana stall — a crowd gathered.

Dozens of residents ogled the art, with some squinting into their smartphones to take pictures.

The team includes and employs residents, too. Wanyande — who is well-known in Nairobi graffiti circles — has worked with up-and-coming Mathare artists on several pieces. Other people have been hired to help in other ways, including with security, Mwelu said. The cash they can earn is badly needed as other casual labor dries up.

For now, the project is self-funded. Mwelu's team is using money made on corporate campaigns.

"For the purpose and the people, rather than the profit," he said.



Children look on as Brian Musasia Wanyande, an artist from the Mathare Roots's youth group, paints an advocacy graffiti against the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), at the Mathare Valley slum, in Nairobi, Kenya April 19, 2020. (Reuters/Thomas Mukoya)