

**Ayatollah Amini passes away at 95** **2****Shahr-e Kord plans to promote wool felt products globally** **8****Sardar Azmoun has no shortage of suitors after a superb season** **11****Motamedi releases songs from album "Monajan" to observe Ramadan** **12****EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW**  
See page 9**Maximo Torero, assistant director general for the Economic and Social Development Department at FAO**

## FAO, Iran cooperate to support capacity building

## Exclusive: IWF acting president Papandrea lauds Iranians

**By Masoud Hossein**

**TEHRAN** — International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) acting president Ursula Papandrea says the Iranian women lifters have risen faster than even expected and she is very happy for them.

Papandrea was elected the first-ever female vice president for the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) in May 2017. Now, she is the IWF acting president

after Tamas Ajan was forced to step down from active duty.

This resignation comes amid the ongoing investigation of allegations of financial corruption, false drug testing, and subsequent cover-up made against Ajan and the IWF.

The IWF's Oversight and Integrity Commission, which is chaired by Papandrea, has also been mandated to continue its work until June 19. **→11**

## Jiroft, a magnificent cradle of civilization

**TEHRAN** — The discovery of the magnificent Jiroft site came by accident in the very early 21st century when rounds of heavy flood along the Halil River swept the topsoil off thousands of previously unknown tombs and led to discovery of many artifacts believed by archeologists to belong to the early

Bronze Age (late 3rd millennium BC).

Early reports said, "An old object was seen floating on the surface of the water." Realizing it was precious, the following day, villagers impoverished by two years of drought, swarmed the river banks in search of 5,000-year-old antiquities. **→8**

## Iran says France and Britain have given in to U.S. bullying

**TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on Friday that France and Britain's stance on Iran's launch of a military satellite shows that Paris and London have given in to the United States' bullying.

"The European countries' lack of action against the United States while it violated the United Nations Security Council's Resolution 2231 by quitting the JCPOA [the 2015 nuclear deal] shows their double

standards and also giving in to the United States' bullying," Mousavi pointed out.

He strongly dismissed France and Britain's biased interpretation of the UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

"Iran's nuclear program is just for peaceful purposes based on fatwa issued by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei] which has been approved by reports of the International Atomic Energy Agency. **→2**



## ARTICLE

**Mohammad Jafari**  
Tehran Times journalist

## Tel Aviv must adhere to Geneva Conventions, render medical services to Palestinians amid COVID-19 pandemic

According to Article 56 of the 4th Geneva Convention, the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring and maintaining, with the co-operation of national and local authorities, the medical and hospital establishments and services to the occupied country's people.

Head of the Mental Health Unit at the Palestine Ministry of Health Samah Jabr, in her report published by the Middle East Monitor, criticized Tel Aviv for ignoring its commitments to the Geneva Conventions and leaving the Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza widely underserved during coronavirus spread.

The Geneva Conventions are a body of international law designed to establish acceptable and humanitarian conduct under conditions of war and occupation. There are four Geneva Conventions, established in 1949, and two additional "Protocols" adopted in 1977. Israel signed the Geneva Conventions on Dec. 8, 1949, and ratified them on Jul. 6, 1951.

On Dec. 5, 2001, 114 of the "High Contracting Parties" (i.e. the sponsors) of the Fourth Geneva Convention unanimously "reaffirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.." In addition, they "reaffirmed the illegality of the settlements in the said territories and the extension thereof." This specifically counters Israeli arguments that the Fourth Geneva Convention doesn't apply to Jewish colonies in the Occupied Territories.

"I write this on a day that saw the confirmation of a sudden and delayed rise of Covid-19 cases among Palestinians in the small neighborhood of Silwan, East Jerusalem. On this very day, I had been denied access to my workplace in Ramallah by Israeli soldiers at the Qalandia Checkpoint, in spite of having shown them my card as an official emergency officer from the Palestinian Ministry of Health—a document which was dismissed by the soldiers with the statement, "We don't recognize such a card," she went on to say. **→7**

## Iran monitoring U.S. moves, but will never start a war: Rouhani

**TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Saturday that Iran is monitoring the United States' moves in the region, however, it will never start a war in the region.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran monitors the United States' moves activity and accurately, however, it will never start a conflict and tension in the region," he told Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in a phone conversation.

The Qatari Emir highlighted the need that all countries make efforts to prevent tension in the region.

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.

"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 a proper response to any threat or 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 April 22 that he had told the Navy to "shoot down and destroy" Iranian gunboats that "harass" U.S. ships.

Making such open military threats as the world,

including the U.S. and Iran, are caught in the struggle against the coronavirus pandemic is surprising.

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."

Foreign Minister Zarif also reacted to Trump's military threats, suggesting that it is better that Trump pay attention to the needs of U.S. military personnel that over 5000 of them are suffering from the Covid-19 rather than "engage in threats cheered on by Saddam's terrorists".

Writing on his Twitter account, Zarif also said, "U.S. forces have no business 7,000 miles away from home, provoking our sailors off our OWN Persian Gulf shores."

## Iran's monthly crude steel output up 14% yr/yr: WSA

**TEHRAN** — Production of crude steel in Iran has risen 14.1 percent in March 2020 from March 2019, Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) announced citing the data indicated in the World Steel Association (WSA)'s latest report.

The WSA's report, which is on steel production by 64 countries, put Iran's steel output at over 2.8 million tons in March, IRNA reported.

The report also says that crude steel production by the 64 producers has fallen 1.3 percent during the first quarter of this year from the same time span in the past year.

Production by China, the world's large-

est steel producer, dropped 1.7 percent in March, while rising 1.2 percent in the first quarter on an annual basis, the same report confirmed.

Meanwhile, production by India, Japan, and South Korea fell 13.9 percent, 9.7 percent and 7.9 percent, respectively, during the first month of the current year compared to the same month in the previous year.

Iran's monthly performance was reported as being prominent in the region, as its rival Turkey could achieve a growth of just 4.1 percent in March.

WSA has previously announced that Iran's crude steel production climbed 30 percent in

2019 while the average global growth in this sector stood at 3.5 percent.

According to the global organization, Iran produced 31.9 million tons of crude steel in 2019, while the figure was 24 million tons in 2018.

The data and reports released by Iranian organizations also show that the country's steel sector is still experiencing growth in output and export despite the U.S. sanctions.

In early May 2019, Washington imposed new sanctions on Iran's metals and minerals sectors in an attempt to [as the U.S. president Trump put it] "choke off the country's largest non-petroleum related sources of export revenue".



## Rosewater festivals go virtual amid virus pandemic

**TEHRAN** — Every year, by late April, tens of festivals of rose and rosewater starts to take the center stage in the central Iranian city of Kashan along with other nearby townships and villages.

This year, however, as the country is battling coronavirus outbreak, the festivals are available to visitors on social media.

The distillation ceremonies, which are commonly known as "Golab-giri", usually attract thousands of people from different parts of the country and abroad to witness the iconic tradition of the region. **→8**

## World leaders launch plan to speed COVID-19 drugs, vaccine; U.S. stays away

World leaders pledged to accelerate work on tests, drugs and vaccines against COVID-19 and to share them around the globe, but the United States did not take part in the launch of the World Health Organization (WHO) initiative.

French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa were among those who joined a video conference to launch what the WHO billed as a "landmark collaboration" to fight the pandemic, Reuters reported.

The aim is to speed development of safe and effective drugs, tests and vaccines to prevent, diagnose and treat COVID-19, the lung disease caused by the novel coronavirus - and ensure equal access to treatments for rich and poor.

### ■ "Common fight"

Leaders from Asia, the Middle East and the Americas also joined the video-conference, but several big countries did not participate, including China, India and Russia.

A spokesman for the U.S. mission in Geneva had earlier told Reuters that the United States would not be involved.

"Although the United States was not in attendance at the meeting in question, there should be no doubt about our continuing determination to lead on global health matters, including the current COVID crisis," he said by email.

"We remain deeply concerned about the WHO's effectiveness, given that its gross failures helped fuel the current pandemic," he later said.

U.S. President Donald Trump has lambasted the WHO as being slow to react to the outbreak and being "China-centric" and announced a suspension of funding.

Tedros has steadfastly defended the WHO's handling of the pandemic and repeatedly committed to conducting a post-pandemic evaluation, as the agency does with all crises.

Macron, Merkel, Ramaphosa, and Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez were among those voicing strong support to WHO.

Macron urged all G7 and G20 countries to get behind the initiative, adding: "And I hope we'll manage to reconcile around this joint initiative both China and the U.S., because this is about saying 'the fight against COVID-19 is a common human good and there should be no division in order to win this battle'."



## Sanctions on Iran has revealed U.S. 'inhuman' image: analyst

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — The United States' sanction on Iran while the country is fighting the coronavirus pandemic has revealed Washington's "inhuman" image, says an American political analyst.

In an interview with IRNA published on Saturday, Caleb Maupin said that the U.S. sanctions violate international law.



Maupin said that the U.S. sanctions have impeded Iran's access to medicine and medical equipment.

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."

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.

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."

Chris Murphy, the U.S. senator from Connecticut, warned on April 13 that the Trump administration could be partially responsible for "the death of innocent people" if it continues its current policies towards Iran amidst the epidemic.

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

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

Murphy had penned a March 26 letter, signed by ten other Democratic senators, asking the Trump administration to ensure that Iran and Venezuela can import medical supplies and other humanitarian goods to deal with the coronavirus outbreak.

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

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

## Iraqi PM-designate vows to form committee to probe Soleimani assassination

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Iraq's Kata'ib Hezbollah resistance group has said Iraqi Prime Minister-designate Mustafa al-Kadhimi has agreed to form a committee to probe assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

In a statement on Thursday, the group said the decision was taken after al-Kadhimi, currently the director of Iraq's National Intelligence Service, requested to have a meeting with the group to explain his position on the assassination, Press TV reported on Friday.



The formation of the committee was decided during the meeting, the statement said, adding that "we requested that the work of the committee be done with complete transparency".

Also in its statement on Thursday, Kata'ib Hezbollah said the group has documents about certain sides implicated in the assassination.

"We cannot overlook the necessity of requesting an investigation into this crime and having legal proceedings and revenge for those implicated in it," the statement added.

It also stressed that Washington bears responsibility for any "consequences of this horrible crime".

In a drone strike on January 3, the U.S. military martyred General Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), in Baghdad's international airport.

The terrorist attack took place upon direct order by President Donald Trump.

Soleimani was recognized internationally as a legendary commander in the war against terrorist groups, especially Daesh (ISIS). Daesh celebrated his assassination.

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

Following the assassination, the Iraqi Parliament voted on January 5 to expel the U.S. troops from Iraq.

# EU's Borrell chides U.S. for blocking Iran loan from IMF



Josep Borrell, the EU's foreign policy chief, on Wednesday criticized the U.S. for blocking an Iranian request for a loan from the International Monetary Fund, Politico reported on April 22

"I regret that ... the United States are opposing the International Monetary Fund to take this decision," he said during a virtual press conference at the end of a video meeting of EU foreign affairs ministers. "From the humanitarian point of view, this decision, this request should have been accepted."

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif wrote on Twitter at the beginning of March that IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva "has stated that countries affected by #COVID19 will be supported via Rapid Financial Instrument. Our Central Bank requested access to this facility immediately."

And Iranian Central Bank chief Abdolnaser Hemmati wrote on his Instagram page a message in Farsi which, according to Reuters, said "in a letter addressed to the head of IMF, I have requested five billion U.S. dollars from the RFI emergency fund to help our fight against the coronavirus."

Iran has called the illegal U.S. sanctions "economic and medical terrorism" amidst the coronavirus pandemic.

According to data from the Health Ministry, Iran has had more than 5,600 deaths from the virus, one of the highest in the world. But senior officials in the Donald Trump administration said Iran's government has billion-dollar accounts at its disposal and blocked the request, according to press reports.

"If the decision is taken of refusing this request from Iran I really, deeply regret [it] for humanitarian reasons," said Borrell who

stressed that "we support the idea that in these times sanctions cannot affect the humanitarian trade, the humanitarian supplies."

Yet "the problem is the capacity of Iran to have the capital ... to buy, to pay for the resources they need in order to fight against the coronavirus and ... they have needs they cannot fulfill due to the fact that they don't have the capital required," he said.

The former Spanish foreign minister said the U.S. has insisted that in its sanctions "there's nothing that can affect this [humanitarian] help."

For these reasons "we supported first to soften the sanctions and second the request

of Iran to the International Monetary Fund for getting financial help."

In an interview with Bloomberg published on April 19, Iran's central banker 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."

Hemmati added, "The United States is a member of the IMF as all 190 or so other countries. The last time I checked, the United States is not running the IMF, but it's management and the Board of Governors

who oversee the work and ensure that the IMF delivers on its mandate. But I would like to repeat that all UN organizations, say the IMF or WHO, should stay away from politics and deliver on their institutional mandates."

The central banker also said, "I believe we were among the first countries who requested support through a Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI) on March 6, 2020, more than 40 days ago. Remember, we were among the first five countries who were hit hard by the coronavirus and when the managing director of the IMF announced that the IMF is ready to help countries using the RFI, we, as one of the member countries, submitted our request to access this facility."

In a tweet on March 26, Zarif said, "Even the world's largest economy (the U.S.) needs others to help it fight the pandemic, yet refuses to halt its Economic Terrorism against Iran." Zarif said the Covid-19 is ravaging the world and sparing no nation.

"Does the U.S. want a 'forever pandemic'?" Zarif asked.

The chief diplomat said it is "moral imperative to stop observing the bully's sanctions".

Speaking to reporters on April 22, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said his country is not against the payment of a \$5 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan to Iran to battle coronavirus.

On April 12, in a letter to President Donald Trump, U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein urged him not to block Iran's access to the IMF loan. "Providing these funds to Iran would help it respond more effectively to the disease and mitigate the risk of further destabilization in the region," she said in her letter.

## Iran says France and Britain have given in to U.S. bullying

**1 →** So, Iran's space program is for defensive objectives and has not been designed for other purposes," he said.

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps successfully launched Iran's first military satellite into the orbit on Wednesday, April 22.

U.S. 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.

Britain also claimed on Friday that Iran's launch of the military satellite is inconsistent with a UN Security Council resolution.

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 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 Resolution 2231 and Europe has obeyed Washington instead of abiding by 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.

Zarif said, "Iran neither has nukes nor missiles 'DESIGNED

to be capable of carrying' such horrific arms."

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.

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.

## U.S. violating peremptory norms by blocking IMF loan to Iran: Shamkhani

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), said on Saturday that the United States' attempts to block Iran's efforts to get a loan from the International Monetary Fund violate peremptory norms of general international law.

"U.S. opposition to Iran's request from the International Monetary Fund is a violation of peremptory norms of the right to health," Shamkhani tweeted.

He said that third countries have two commitments in this respect: one is to stop cooperation with the violating government and another is to take action to settle the

issue.

The top security official also criticized Europe's stance on the issue.

Iran applied for emergency IMF funding in March to help it fight the coronavirus outbreak. Washington has indicated it will block IMF funding for Iran.

Donald Trump's administration is not only refusing to remove its illegal sanctions on Iran, it is also blocking Tehran's efforts to get an emergency loan from the IMF to cope with the coronavirus crisis.

European Union foreign policy chief Joseph Borrell on Wednesday criticized the U.S. for blocking Iran's request for loan from the IMF.

"I regret that ... the United States are opposing the International Monetary Fund to take this decision," he said during a virtual press conference at the end of a video meeting of EU foreign affairs ministers, Politico reported

"From the humanitarian point of view, this decision, this request should have been accepted."

Iran's central banker, Abdolnaser Hemmati, has said the IMF should put politics aside and do its professional duties.

"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," Hemmati said in

an interview with Bloomberg published on April 19.

Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein in a letter has urged Trump not to block Iran's access to a \$5 billion loan from the IMF to help fight the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis.

"I am disappointed to see reports that your administration intends to block Iran from receiving \$5 billion in humanitarian aid from the IMF to combat the coronavirus pandemic," Feinstein wrote in her letter to Trump.

"Providing these funds to Iran would help it respond more effectively to the disease and mitigate the risk of further destabilization in the region," she added.

## U.S. fears Iran as natural hegemon of region: analyst

**(Press TV)** — The reason behind the United States' recent move to step up its anti-Iran threats is to prevent the Islamic Republic from asserting itself as the natural hegemon of the West Asia and Persian Gulf region, says a political analyst.

Sam Mahdi Torabi, director of the Risalat Strategic Studies Institute from the Iranian city of Qom, made the remarks during a Thursday edition of Press TV's The Debate program while commenting on U.S. President Donald Trump's warning about the consequences of "harassing" U.S. warships patrolling in the Persian Gulf.

Trump wrote on his twitter account on Wednesday that he has instructed the U.S. Navy "to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea."

"The Americans have decided and have found that in order to be the global hegemon, they need to control West Asia and the Persian Gulf; so, they define controlling the Persian Gulf as vital to their national interests and to their ability to be the global hegemon. What's interesting is that we are witnessing in the last 10 years that Iran is assuming its position as the natural hegemon of the region and thereby replacing the U.S. as the hegemon in the region," Torabi told Press TV on Thursday.

"Their main goal is to prevent Iran from being the natural hegemon of the region," he added. "The reality is that Iran is the natural hegemon. It will assert that position in the coming years and the U.S. has to come to the point where it can accept that it will no longer be the hegemon of the region."

Trump posted the tweet as a reaction to a recent con-



frontation between U.S. warships and Iranian boats in the Persian Gulf.

Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps released a video on Sunday that shows the IRGC Navy warning off a flotilla of U.S. warships in the Persian Gulf as they try to approach the Iranian territorial waters.

In the video, a member of the IRGC Navy warns the vessels to stop inspecting and detaining Iranian fishing or commercial ships in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman. He also warns them that they would face consequences according to the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran if they ignore this notice.

In a statement released on Sunday, the IRGC refuted the claims by the U.S. that Iranian forces behaved in a dangerous manner when faced with U.S. Navy vessels. The IRGC further blamed Washington as the main source of insecurity in the

in West Asia region and called for the full withdrawal of all American forces.

Moreover, the chief commander of the IRGC downplayed on Thursday the recent U.S.' anti-Iran rhetoric, warning that the Islamic Republic would target American vessels if they were to threaten the safety of the country's vessels or warships.

Michael Lane, founder of American Institute for Foreign Policy from Washington DC, was the other panelist invited to The Debate program, who described the Persian Gulf region as important to the U.S.'s strategic national interests.

"The Persian Gulf has been defined by the United States as important to its strategic national interests; so, we are there looking after our national interests to ensure that everything is fine... We are there with a significant number of military assets to ensure that we have the opportunity to react appropriately in case hostilities are imminent or even broke out," Lane said.

Asked whether the Persian Gulf region was headed for a war, Lane said, "I don't think we are heading for a conflict. The United States military assets in the region are so overwhelming in terms of sophistication, power and the ability to deliver things and target. I think Iran understands that it's not in their interest at this point to have any sort of armed conflict."

Trump's threat comes as his administration is under unprecedented pressure over its highly criticized response to the coronavirus pandemic, prompting suggestions that his anti-Iran statement is probably meant to divert attention from his poor handling of the crisis.



# We're all in the same boat regarding coronavirus, says Zarif

**POLITICAL DESK** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has wished a healthy and blessed Ramadan to All Muslims, advising the world to unite in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

"#Ramadan is for Muslims a special time for prayer & reflection," Zarif said via Twitter.

"This year, the #COVID19 pandemic has shown that we need to reflect more on how ALL of us in the human community are in same boat, and on the same journey," he said.

"Wishing all Muslims a healthy, safe, and blessed Ramadan," he added.

It comes as Muslims are gearing up for a very different Ramadan due to the spread of the COVID-19.

Lockdowns prevail across Europe and everyone is trying to find ways to reach out to one another while practicing physical distancing.

The office of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei declared Saturday as the first day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

In a statement on Friday, the Leader's office announced that the new crescent moon of Ramadan could not be sighted on Thursday night in Iran, according to Press TV.

Therefore, the statement said, the new lunar month of Ramadan will begin on Saturday, when Muslim people start fasting.



While Iran, Iraq and Oman, among others, have declared Saturday as the first day

of Ramadan, countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the UAE, Malaysia, Egypt, Singapore, the Philippines, and Indonesia

have announced Friday the first day of the holy month of Ramadan.

This year, Muslims around the world are starting to mark Ramadan under the coronavirus lockdown with unprecedented bans on family gatherings and mass prayers.

The holy daytime fasting month will be a somber affair for many across Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. Widespread rules have been imposed banning praying in mosques or meeting relatives and friends for large «iftar» meals at dusk.

Iran was initially among the countries hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic. But Western countries soon overtook Iran due to the virus's exponential growth in the West, as opposed to its linear growth in Iran.

However, the United States' illegal sanctions — which were put in place after Trump withdrew the U.S. from the Iran nuclear deal — have been described as one of the greatest obstacles impeding Iran's full containment of the deadly disease.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on April 13 that Iran has made significant progress in fighting the coronavirus outbreak in spite of the United States' sanctions.

"#Covid19 was opportunity for US to kick its addiction to sanctions. Instead, it will now live in infamy in the memory of our people," he added.

## Satellite launch proves Iran stronger than before, says U.S. senator



**POLITICAL DESK** **TEHRAN** — Iran's recent satellite launch proved that the policies adopted by President Donald Trump have strengthened Iran and weakened America in West Asia compared with four years ago, says a U.S. senator.

In a series of tweets, Chris Murphy referred to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s successful launch of Iran's first military satellite, describing it as "more proof that Trump's Iran policy just strengthens Iran."

"Today we learned Iran has launched its first military satellite - more proof that Trump's Iran policy just strengthens Iran and causes them to act more aggressively," the senator wrote on Friday.

"In virtually every way, Iran is stronger today in the Middle East [West Asia], and America is weaker, than 4 years ago," he said.

The IRGC successfully placed the Islamic Republic's first ever military satellite in its designated orbit on April 22, using a rocket which is also the country's first three-stage launch vehicle to successfully deliver its load.

The IRGC fired the Noor-1 aboard Qased (messenger) satellite carrier during an operation that was staged in Dasht-e Kavir, Iran's sprawling central desert, which was placed into the orbit 425 kilometers above Earth's surface.

Referring to the Trump-ordered assassination of Iran's top general Qassem Soleimani, Murphy remarked that although "Trump told us that the Soleimani killing would deter Iran, attacks on U.S. forces have increased, not decreased, since the Soleimani strike."

"Trump blew up the nuclear deal and promised to build a new system of international pressure to force the Iranians into a new, better deal," Murphy said, adding, "Obviously, that failed miserably. Nobody signed up for the new sanctions & Iran restarted their nuclear program. And no new, better deal."

On May 8, 2018, Trump withdrew the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which Iran struck with six countries including the U.S., the UK, France, Russia, China and Germany.

Under the JCPOA, Iran had agreed to limit parts of its peaceful nuclear program in exchange for the removal of all economic and financial sanctions.

"Trump's policy of diplomatic withdrawal, unilateral economic sanctions, and blind, non-strategic military escalation has done nothing but play into Iran's hands," said the senator.

"They are stronger, We are weaker. And the launch of this satellite is just more proof," he concluded.

## Ayatollah Amini passes away at 95



**POLITICAL DESK** **TEHRAN** — Ayatollah Ebrahim Amini, a member of the Assembly of Experts, passed away on Friday at the age of 95. Ayatollah Amini died while in a hospital in the city of Qom after suffering a long period of illness.

The Assembly of Experts is a high-ranking body of religious experts which elects and oversees the activities of the leader of the Islamic Revolution.

Ayatollah Amini was born in 1925 in Najafabad, Isfahan Province.

Finishing his primary studies in Najafabad, he joined the Islamic Seminary of Isfahan in 1942. After completing his religious studies in Isfahan, he joined the Islamic Seminary of Qom in 1947, where he studied jurisprudence and principles under the tutorship of most eminent religious scholars of that period.

Because of his special attitude and inclination towards sciences of psychology, child psychology, education and training, family-rights, family-ethics and the narrations of Prophet Muhammad and the Infallible Imams, he pursued advanced studies and research in those fields.

He also wrote many articles on various issues, including ideological, political, social, ethical and educational topics for presentation at

national and international seminars and conferences.

Ayatollah Amini was also the secretary-general of the office of the Educational Research Centre of the Assembly of Experts; a member of the Academic Council of the Islamic Seminary of Qom and the chief of Cultural Affairs; a member of the board of trustees of the World Centre for Islamic Sciences; a member of the board of trustees of Imam al-Sadiq University in Tehran; and a member of the Supreme Council of the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution expressed his condolences over the demise of Ayatollah Amini.

In a message on Saturday, Ayatollah Khamenei praised Ayatollah Amini's services to the Islamic Revolution in different fields, noting that the prominent scholar had always pursued acquiring and offering Islamic knowledge.

Other top Iranian authorities including President Hassan Rouhani, Chairman of the Assembly of Experts Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani, and Chief of Staff of Iran's Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Bagheri issued separate messages expressing condolences over demise of the ayatollah.

## Moscow says concerned by U.S. military threats against Iran

**POLITICAL DESK** **TEHRAN** — The Kremlin is concerned about Washington's threats to destroy Iranian vessels in the Persian Gulf and calls on both sides to exercise restraint, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov told Sputnik on Saturday.



On April 15, the U.S. Central Command claimed that 11 vessels of the Iranian Revolution Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) forces had conducted "dangerous and harassing" maneuvers around U.S. warships in the Persian Gulf.

On April 22, U.S. President Donald Trump said that he had directed the U.S. navy to attack and destroy any Iranian gunboats that approach and intimidate U.S. warships at sea. The Iranian military responded by saying that it would destroy U.S. warships in the Persian Gulf if they threaten Tehran's security, while Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted that the U.S. military had "no business" in the Persian Gulf which is "7,000 miles away from" from America.

"We call for restraint, and we, of course, note that the conflict potential in this region, which is extremely important for global security, has not disappeared, it is significant," Ryabkov said.

The senior diplomat stressed that Moscow "thoroughly studied what officials in Washington said in recent days on this subject."

"We note with concern that senior representatives of the U.S. administration deliberately blur the line between the legal right to self-defense and the threats of the use of force in situations where there are no grounds for using the right to self-defense," Ryabkov added.

"This is one of the methods that create uncertainty in the international community, this is a deliberate desire to sow discord among members of the international community, given that different countries interpret the relevant provisions of international law differently. This is one of the elements of U.S. policy aimed at continuing to play on the nerves," the diplomat stated.

On Thursday, Iran summoned the Swiss ambassador, whose country represents the U.S. interests in Iran, to protest Trump's military threats against Iran.

The military threats against Iran as the world is working hard to contain the deadly coronavirus pandemic is surprising.

Zarif has said it is better that Trump care about the condition of over 5000 U.S. servicemen who are infected with the Covid-19 rather than "engage in threats cheered on by Saddam's terrorists".

Zarif added, "U.S forces have no business 7,000 miles away from home, provoking our sailors off our OWN Persian Gulf shores."

## Rouhani admires IRGC for satellite launch

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — President Hassan Rouhani has praised the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) for the successful launch of a homegrown satellite into space.

In a telephone conversation with IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami on Friday, Rouhani hailed the launch of Noor (light) satellite as a "valuable national success", asking the general to convey his gratitude to the IRGC Aerospace Force personnel and experts.

The president also lauded the IRGC forces for their leading role in the fight against the novel coronavirus, such as by providing medical services in the national screening scheme and treating coronavirus patients.

He further deplored the provocative measures from the foreign forces in the region and stressed the need for vigilance in dealing with such activities, adding, "The defensive power, capability and preparedness of the country's Armed Forces, particularly the IRGC, has always been within the framework of protection of stability and security and the fight against terrorism in the region."

For his part, the IRGC chief expressed hope that Iran will mark more achievements and successes in the military sphere in future.

Major General Salami further briefed the president on the IRGC's nationwide activities in the battle with COVID-19, underlining that his forces are fully prepared to stand against the enemy's excessive demands, fight against terrorism, and ensure sustainable stability and security in the region.

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps on Wednesday successfully put Noor satellite into orbit. The homegrown satellite was launched with a three-stage satellite carrier, dubbed Qased (messenger), from a launch pad in Dasht-e Kavir, a large desert in central Iran.

The satellite has been placed into an orbit 425 kilometers above the Earth.

## Ramadan an opportunity to renew solidarity: ambassador

**POLITICAL DESK** **TEHRAN** — Iran's ambassador to France has congratulated Muslims on the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan, saying Ramadan is an opportunity to renew friendship and solidarity.

"On the occasion of the beginning of Ramadan, I offer my congratulations to all French Muslims," Qassemi wrote on the official Twitter account of the Iranian mission in France.

He stated that in the light of its spiritual teachings,

the month of Ramadan, represents the opportunity to renew friendship, solidarity and empathy.

"During these difficult days when the world faces the pandemic COVID19 pandemic, I wish peace, tranquility, security and health for you and for all the peoples in the world," Qassemi added.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, and a time when Muslims across the world fast during the hours of daylight.

Muslims' holy book, the Quran, was first revealed to

the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) during this month.

Ramadan traditionally begins with the sighting of the crescent moon, which means the start of the holy month cannot be predicted precisely.

The Islamic calendar is based on the lunar cycle, and the dates of Ramadan, therefore, change each year, subject to the sighting of the moon.

In a statement on Friday, the Leader's office announced that the new crescent moon of Ramadan could not be sighted on Thursday night in Iran, according to Press TV.

## VP felicitates Ramadan, asks anti-coronavirus cooperation by Islamic states

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — Iranian First Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri in separate messages to his counterparts in the Islamic countries felicitated them on the start of the holy month of Ramadan, stressing the need for collective efforts to fight against coronavirus.

In his messages, Jahangiri expressed the hope that bonds among the Islamic states would further strengthen.

He also underlined the need for cooperation among the Muslim countries to accelerate

fight against the ominous and destructive coronavirus, hoping for uprooting COVID-19 virus by the end of the holy month.

The office of Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei declared Saturday, April 25, as the first day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan in Iran.

In a statement on Friday, the Leader's office announced that the new crescent moon of Ramadan could not be sighted on Thursday night in Iran.

Therefore, the statement said, the new lunar month of Ramadan will begin on Saturday, when Muslim people start fasting.

While Iran, Iraq and Oman, among others, have declared Saturday as the first day of Ramadan, countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the UAE, Malaysia, Egypt, Singapore, the Philippines, and Indonesia have announced Friday the first day of the holy month of Ramadan.

This year, Muslims around the world

are starting to mark Ramadan under the coronavirus lockdown with unprecedented bans on family gatherings and mass prayers.

The holy daytime fasting month will be a somber affair for many across Asia, the Middle East and North Africa.

Widespread rules have been imposed banning praying in mosques or meeting relatives and friends for large «iftar» meals at dusk.



## U.S. deficit could quadruple to \$3.7 trillion in coronavirus crisis: CBO

A nationwide business shutdown and surge in U.S. government spending will nearly quadruple the federal deficit to a record \$3.7 trillion this fiscal year as the country combats the coronavirus pandemic, according to the congressional forecasters.

U.S. gross domestic product will plunge by nearly 40% on an annualized basis in the second quarter, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. But the CBO forecast an economic resurgence in the second half of the year, and said unemployment would crest at 16% but remain in double digits throughout 2021.

The CBO report illustrated the fiscal pressures lawmakers in Congress face as they prepare to craft new legislation to respond to the pandemic. Congress has already passed \$3 trillion in spending on healthcare, small businesses and other measures to combat the outbreak and its economic effects.

"If the laws currently in place governing spending and revenues generally remained unchanged and no significant additional emergency funding was provided, the federal deficit would be roughly \$3.7 trillion in fiscal year 2020 and \$2.1 trillion next year," the CBO said. In March, the CBO projected deficits of just over \$1 trillion in each of those years.

The federal debt would equal 101% of GDP by Sept. 30, when the 2020 federal fiscal year ends, and would grow to 108% by the end of fiscal 2021, CBO said.

The agency predicted real GDP will decline 5.6% in 2020 and then grow 2.8% in 2021. But economic activity for 2021 would still be 6.7% below a projection the CBO issued in late January.

The CBO's Jan. 28 forecast, before coronavirus roared through the United States, saw the economy remaining vibrant through this presidential election year, partially due to strong consumer spending.

Now, some experts see an even more dire landscape than the CBO. William Hoagland, senior vice president at the Bipartisan Policy Center, a Washington think-tank focused on fiscal policy and other issues, said he thought the economy will recover slower in the second half of 2020 than the CBO's outlook.

Hoagland added that the 2020 budget deficit could exceed \$4 trillion when taking into consideration possible additional economic stimulus legislation.

Indeed, House of Representatives Democrats already are crafting a new coronavirus aid bill. Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Friday warned it will be "expensive."

Further ahead, Hoagland said in an email the next fiscal challenge facing policymakers will be how they "unwind the level of debt and deficits post-crisis without significant inflationary pressures." (Source: Reuters)

## 'China puts global economic recovery into radically different terrain'

Lessons learned from the Great Recession suggest that China's ability to stimulate its way out of the the coronavirus pandemic will be limited, according to Former Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd. Speaking to Yahoo Finance, Rudd, the current President of the Asia Society Policy Institute, said that Beijing faces significant constraints on the financial and monetary levers it can pull because of the debt the country has accumulated since 2008.

"China's stimulus in 2009, 2010 assisted pulling the Asia-Pacific, and the global economy indirectly, into an earlier phase of recovery," Rudd said. "But China being first hit by this one and not deploying anything like the 10% to 15% of GDP stimulus that they did in '09-10, then we're into a radically different terrain in terms of the global economic recovery."

China is attempting to revive its economy, after the coronavirus outbreak placed much of the country in lockdown in for months. Its economic output fell by 6.8% in the first quarter, marking the first contraction since official records began.

While manufacturing activity has largely returned, albeit with social distancing restrictions, the rebound has not trickled down to the services sector yet. Overall retail sales declined by 15.8% in March, year on year, while hotel occupancy ratios remain less than half of normal levels, dragged down by existing travel restrictions.



The IMF has projected a 1.2% growth rate for the year, but Rudd said he expects it to be "closer to zero growth."

Despite the economic pain, China has failed to deliver on hopes of a massive stimulus package on the scale deployed by the U.S. and Europe so far. While Beijing has opted for special bond issuances, subsidies, and reduced employers' social insurance contributions, those measures have amounted to just over 2% of GDP, according to Reuters analysis.

Rudd said China's measured approach so far points to three key constraints: debate about the efficacy of Beijing's approach during the financial crisis, piling debt, and timing.

"It's internally concluded that a lot was wasted (between 2009-2010), that it created asset price bubbles, which created downstream financial crises within the system, particularly in 2015. And therefore, it creates a political overhang, which is 'I, Xi Jinping am not going to repeat Hu Jintao's and Wen Jiabao's mistakes,'" Rudd said. "The debt to GDP ratio hanging around 320% of GDP, as you know, is not modest. That's big by any global standard. Therefore, the central monetary authorities in China will be saying, 'Whoa, let's be very careful before we start adding another huge slice of public debt.'"

Rudd added that China may be opting to take a more pragmatic approach this time, given the nature of the economic shutdown, saying "throwing a whole bunch of stimulus at economies right now until you have a full return to work doesn't actually have commensurate effect for the simple reason as consumers are not behaving normally."

Global backlash against the Chinese government may also complicate the economic recovery. While Beijing has publicly engaged in medical diplomacy by airlifting critical supplies to international cities hardest hit by the virus, countries have increasingly grown skeptical of its intentions, with reports of price gouging and faulty equipment and accusations the government attempted to cover up the severity of the outbreak in the initial days. The inability for countries to independently produce personal protective equipment within their borders has also prompted calls to decouple from China and move manufacturing closer to home.

(Source: Yahoo Finance)

# Commodities worth nearly \$600m traded at IME in a week

**ECONOMY TEHRAN** — Over 513,000 tons of commodities valued at over \$595 million were traded at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) during the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday).

As reported by IME's International Affairs and Public Relations Department, last week, on the domestic and export metal and mineral trading floor of IME, 146,888 tons of various products worth close to \$261 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 134,888 tons of steel, 4,730 tons of copper, 5,980 tons of aluminum, 150 tons of molybdenum concentrates, 1,000 tons of coke, 140 tons of zinc ingot as well as 16 kg of gold bullion were traded by customers.

The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of IME, 351,499 tons of different commodities with the total value of \$345 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 75,026 tons of bitumen, 97,600 tons of VB feed stock, 84,385 tons of polymer products, 50,000 tons of



lube cut oil, 22,497 tons of chemical products, 3,587 tons of base oil, 3,000 tons of slaps waxes, 734 tons of insulation, as well as 14,670 tons of sulfur were traded.

Furthermore, the side market of IME experienced trading of 15,000 tons of various

commodities.

As reported on Wednesday, over 1.812 million tons of commodities valued at 76 trillion rials (about \$1.809 billion) were traded at Iran Mercantile Exchange in the past Iranian calendar month of Farvardin

## New SPM to be installed to load condensate from SP phase 19



**ECONOMY TEHRAN** — Deputy Operator of South Pars phase 19 development project says a single point mooring (SPM) has been shipped to be anchored near the phase for loading its gas condensate to vessels.

As reported by Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), which is in charge of developing the giant gas field in the Persian Gulf, the SPM arrived at Pars port on Saturday morning.

According to Seyed Hossein Azimi, the installation operations of the mentioned system, which can load 7000 cubic meters of gas per hour, will be completed by the end of the first half of the current Iranian calendar year (September 21).

Noting that using SPM is one of the most common ways to transport gas condensate to tankers, the official said this floating buoy is restrained by chains and anchors that are hammered into the seabed, making the tankers able to load gas condensate without needing to come to shore.

Installing this SPM is going to increase

the loading capacity of vessels at the Pars 2 export terminal and it also increases the operational flexibility for the terminal and makes it possible to perform periodic repairs of facilities.

The official said that currently the gas condensate of the phases 19 and the Pars 2 zone are loaded through the SPM of phase 12, noting that the gas condensate produced in these phases is loaded through a common mitering through a sea pipeline to the phase 12 SPM.

A Single buoy mooring, also known as single-point mooring or SPM, is a loading buoy anchored offshore, that serves as a mooring point and interconnect for tankers loading or offloading gas or liquid products.

SPMs are the link between geostatic subsea manifold connections and the tankers. They are capable of handling any tonnage ship, even very large crude carriers (VLC) where no alternative facility is available.

## Production by companies listed on stock market up 7% in 11 months



**ECONOMY TEHRAN** — Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejpasand said the production by the companies listed on the country's stock market increased by 7.1 percent during the 11-month period from March 21, 2019 to February 19, 2020, IRIB reported.

Speaking in a meeting with the country's businessmen and directors active in the stock market, Dejpasand noted that this figure is an indication that "we should move toward new strategies to design [economic] mechanisms so that public resources and funds are directed into the capital market."

The economy minister said that the capital market is not exposed to the negative impacts of other markets, adding that this market has a special role in the economy and can quickly fill one of the missing links of the financing of projects in the country.

The official underlined the need for

(March 20-February 19).

The oil and petrochemicals floor of IME witnessed the trade of 1.316 million tons of commodities worth 40.99 trillion rials (about \$975.5 million), while 485,411 tons of goods valued at 35.561 trillion rials (about \$846.6 million) were traded at the industrial products and minerals floor of the IME during Farvardin (the first month of the Iranian calendar year).

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

On Tuesday, IME Managing Director Hamed Soltani-Nejad unveiled the market's new outlook plan, which depicts IME's development roadmap until the Iranian calendar year of 1404 (March 2020-March 2026). Materializing the slogan of this Iranian year, which is "Surge in Production" is seriously considered in the mentioned plan and it is, in fact, the strategic approach of the outlook plan.

establishing a trust for the country's big companies and organizations to come forward and offer their shares in the stock exchange.

He further noted that the first offering of the shares of state-owned enterprises in the stock exchange was announced today and the worth of offering is 165 trillion rials (about \$3.9 billion), and two more offerings will be held in near future.

"Along with such government-owned companies, we also saw non-governmental organizations such as Shasta, whose initial public offering took place [on April 15], and the rest have announced both their readiness and their plans," he added.

Earlier on April 15, Social Security Investment Company (SSIC, also known by its Persian acronym Shasta) offered eight billion shares, which account for 10 percent of its stakes, for sales at the Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Iran's major stock market.

## WTO, IMF ask nations to stop imposing export restrictions

The World Trade Organization and International Monetary Fund asked nations to stop imposing or intensifying export and other trade restrictions and to lift those put in place because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Export restrictions can be dangerously counterproductive," the institutions said in a joint statement Friday. "Such measures disrupt supply chains, depress production, and misdirect scarce, critical products

and workers away from where they are most needed."

The bodies reiterated a call to remove barriers made earlier this month as protectionism amid shortages increases. (Source: Bloomberg)



## Europe is preparing a trillion-euro fund to rebuild its economy

EU leaders have agreed to create a fund that could raise at least 1 trillion euros (\$1.1 trillion) to rebuild regional economies ravaged by the coronavirus pandemic.

"This fund shall be of a sufficient magnitude, targeted towards the sectors and geographical parts of Europe most affected, and be dedicated to dealing with this unprecedented crisis," leaders of the 27 EU countries said in a statement after they met via video conference on Thursday.

The heads of the EU governments asked officials at the European Commission to come up with detailed proposals "urgently" that will include how the recovery fund will relate to the bloc's budget for 2021-2027, they added.

The EU is planning to expand its budget from about 1.2% of GDP to 2% of GDP and then use those additional funds as a guarantee to borrow at low rates from financial markets.

Asked by reporters how much could be raised, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said: "This has to be looked at thoroughly ... but we are not talking about billion[s], we are talking about trillion[s]."

The EU leaders also signed off on an immediate package of rescue measures worth at least €500 billion (\$538 billion) drawn up earlier this month by finance ministers. That package includes up to €100 billion (\$110 billion) in wage subsidies aimed at preventing mass layoffs, as well as hundreds of billions in loans to businesses and credit for EU governments.



"There are reasons for some optimism that, even if we don't get as joined-up a response as we'd like overall, the European fiscal response to this crisis may yet end up being sizeable," commented Societe Generale strategist Kit Juckes in a research note on Friday.

The EU response, together with stimulus efforts worth several hundred billion euros already agreed at national level, amounts to a huge effort to prevent the region's deep recession turning into a 1930s-style depression.

The International Monetary Fund expects EU GDP to fall by 7% this year, and recent data suggests economic activity in March and April may have crashed by between 20% and 30%.

Speaking after the video conference, French President Emmanuel Macron said there was consensus among EU

states on the need for a "strong, coordinated response [worth] around 5 to 10 [percentage] points of GDP."

Differences remain over how the fund should operate, in particular whether it should provide loans or grants to the hardest-hit countries such as Italy and Spain. Grants, or direct money transfers, would imply a degree of debt sharing that states such as the Netherlands, Austria and Germany have long resisted.

Still, EU leaders tried to put on a show of unity.

"The common market today benefits certain states or regions that are the most productive in Europe because they produce goods that they can sell in other regions. If we abandon these regions, if we abandon part of Europe, all of Europe will fall," Macron said.

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, who had criticized the EU's response to the pandemic, expressed his satisfaction with Thursday's virtual summit.

"It's important because this is a necessary and urgent tool. It is absolutely necessary Italy is the first in line to ask for this," he said in a short video statement.

A week ago, Macron warned that the EU was facing a "moment of truth" and that lack of financial solidarity between member states could pose an existential threat to the bloc by fueling populist anger in southern Europe.

"If we can't do this today, I tell you the populists will win... today, tomorrow, the day after, in Italy, in Spain, perhaps in France and elsewhere," he told the Financial Times.

(Source: CNN Business)



# ‘PGSR starts new Iranian year with strong presence in IRENEX’

ENERGY desk

**TEHRAN** – Managing director of Iran’s Persian Gulf Star Refinery (PGSR) said the refinery has kicked off the new Iranian calendar year (began on March 20), which has been named the year of “Surge in Production” by Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, with a strong presence in Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX), Shana reported on Saturday.

“In [the Iranian calendar month of] Fardardin this year (March 20-April 19), we had six successful offerings at the energy exchange, after which 17 stock exchange

contracts were signed,” Mohammad-Ali Dadvar said.

As a result of these 17 contracts, 605,000 tons of products, including heavy end products, light naphtha and medium naphtha, have been delivered to the buyers, he said.

According to Dadvar, the Persian Gulf Star Oil Company’s light naphtha offering in the previous month was a huge success and a historical record in the country’s energy exchange.

Offerings in the form of packages with three different products was an innovative move by PGSR which paid off well and we hope



that it will continue in the coming months.

Mentioned the Leader’s decision on calling the current year “Surge in Production” the official noted that PGSR is going to utilize all its capacities to realize the surge in production.

## Industry sector’s annual electricity consumption rises to 34.7%



ENERGY desk

**TEHRAN** – Iranian industry sector’s electricity consumption during the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19) increased by 0.7 percent to reach 34.7 percent of the country’s total annual power consumption, IRNA reported.

According to the data released by Iran’s Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution Management Company, known as Tavanir, the industrial electricity consumption in the previous year also increased by 0.5 percent in comparison to the average consumption of the past 10 years.

The share of household consumption has not increased in the past 10 years and shows zero growth, the data

indicated.

Electricity consumption in other areas also increased by 0.1 percent, to reach 7.4 percent, while continuing growth of 0.1 percent, on average, in the last 10 years.

Tavanir data also show that the share of the agricultural sector’s electricity consumption has decreased by 0.5 percent, which shows a fall compared to the 0.2 percent average consumption growth in this sector in the past 10 years.

Back in August 2019 (end of the last summer), Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said by applying consumption management programs the ministry has managed to reduce the summer peak electricity consumption by 3300 megawatts (MW).

## Coronavirus cases increasing at Russian oil, gas projects

A series of coronavirus outbreaks at Russian oil and gas assets is forcing companies to introduce quarantines and changes to shift patterns, raising the risk that the outbreaks could hit production.

So far, local authorities and companies have not reported any changes to output plans. They are combating risks by introducing mandatory self-isolation, changing shift patterns and reducing the number of employees on site to a minimum.

“My view is that Russian companies, and the government, will try to do everything in their power to maintain production at expected levels, even at the cost of increasing the number of shifts, bearing full medical expenses on behalf of those infected, offering extra pay due to heightened hazard,” George Voloshin, head of the Paris branch of Aperio Intelligence, said Thursday.

The energy ministry set up committees mid-March to limit the spread of the virus as well as monitor the situation and minimize

the impact on energy companies.

However, the number of cases reported at upstream projects, many of which are at isolated locations across the country, continues to increase.

### Uvat outbreak

Earlier this week, consumer safety watchdog Rospotrebnadzor said that 14 workers at an oil field in the Uvat area of the Tyumen region in West Siberia tested positive for the virus.

A subsidiary of Russia’s largest crude producer Rosneft confirmed that contract employees had tested positive for the virus at the West Epasskoye field, but said this has not affected operations.

“All production processes at RN-Uvat-neftegaz are being carried out as normal,” the subsidiary said in a statement.

Quarantine was introduced at local villages, buildings disinfected, and all workers have undergone medical examinations.

As a result of the outbreak, Rospotrebnadzor ordered oil companies operating in the

region to limit the number of workers to only those necessary for operations to continue, and introduce temporary leave for employees over 65, as well as self-isolation for workers for 14 days before shifts begin.

Similar measures have been introduced at production projects across the country.

Other oil assets affected by outbreaks includes Gazprom Neft’s Ety-Purovskoye field, in the Yamalo-Nenets autonomous region in West Siberia, where there have been 40 cases.

Local authorities have reported cases at the Priobskoye field in the Khanty-Mansiisk region of West Siberia. Gazprom Neft is developing the Southern part of the field, and Rosneft the Northern part.

Some other Russian oil producers have also reported cases and the introduction of quarantine. Russia’s second largest crude producer Lukoil has reported 27 cases across the company in Russia and abroad. Tatneft has introduced quarantine at some sites in Russia.

### Gas impact

Russian gas giant Gazprom has also reported several cases of coronavirus among workers at its projects.

It introduced quarantine at its Bovanenkovo field after 20 employees came into contact with a patient with coronavirus. They have also suspended shift changes until at least mid-May. Several cases were also confirmed in the village of Pangody, close to its Medvezhye field.

The company also reported 23 cases and introduced quarantine at its Chayandinskoye oil and gas condensate field, which provides feedstock for the Power of Siberia pipeline to China.

The virus has also hit some oil- and gas-related construction in Russia. Velesstroy, a contractor building platforms for Novatek’s Arctic LNG 2 project, has partially suspended operations to disinfect production areas, after 290 cases of coronavirus were reported there.

(Source: Platts)

## Oil market inferno claims victims of all sizes

This week’s inferno in the oil market looks like a depressingly familiar story. Scores of dumb retail investors hoping for a bounce in the price of crude were immolated while savvy institutional players supplied petrol and matches. The reality is less straightforward.

It’s true that plenty of unsophisticated investors watched their money go up in smoke when the price of U.S. crude for delivery in May fell to minus \$37 per barrel on Monday. Normally, speculators offload their contracts to buyers willing and able to take physical delivery of the oil in Cushing, Oklahoma. But with storage space at a premium, financial investors ended up in the unprecedented position of having to pay others to hold the black stuff.

One Chinese student lost nearly \$10,000 investing in a Bank of China, futures product linked to the West Texas Intermediate May contract, part of a group of customers that collectively lost \$85 million. Interactive Brokers said on Tuesday it was setting aside \$88 million for losses after some of its clients had to close their positions. Most notably, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission stepped in to restrict the growth of United States Oil, a \$4 billion exchange-traded product whose already battered share price fell 11 percent on Monday. In the previous week, investors hoping to profit from a post-coronavirus oil price rebound had pumped \$1.6 billion to the product.

The conflagration has exposed the flawed way in which financial vehicles like USO have invested in the oil market. Covid-19 has caused demand to collapse, leading to a supply glut. This has pushed the price of oil for near-term delivery below the price for later dates. As USO largely held one-



month oil futures contracts which it sold when they were close to expiry in order to buy contracts due the following month, that meant it would consistently lose money. To make matters worse, falling oil prices tend to suck in investors betting on a rebound.

Yet it’s far from certain that retail punters were alone in sparking Monday’s firestorm. What enabled it, according to a person familiar with the situation, was a shrewd set of market moves by big oil trading houses. Having worked out that the supply glut was going to overwhelm storage capacity, they snapped up remaining space in Cushing. On Monday, the day before the WTI May contract expired, those traders were able to name their price. In the end, some were paid \$37 per barrel to take delivery of oil. Given that WTI contracts

for delivery in, say, December 2020 were trading at nearly \$30 a barrel earlier this week, the traders made a tidy profit.

Who were these unfortunate sellers, though? Some investors lost money on Bank of China products called “bao” – which ironically means “treasure” in Chinese – because they were still holding them on Monday. USO, however, may have escaped with less severe burns. It does own 25 percent of the WTI June contract, a person familiar with the situation told Breakingviews, and that dived in price this week before partially recovering. But USO’s chief executive said it had already sold out of the May contract before Monday.

An alternative theory, provided by Energy Intelligence, is that the forced sellers of the May contract price were hedge funds, including two as-yet unnamed institutions.

The true victims of this week’s oil blaze may never be all properly identified. Yet the easy assumption that smart institutional investors are taking advantage of dumb retail money was already suspect. Singapore-based Hin Leong Trading, run by veteran market player O.K. Lim, this week admitted to losing \$800 million on oil futures. According to Bloomberg, it had bet on a quicker post-virus recovery.

Commodities trading is risky even for big trading houses with knowledge of physical oil flows, access to storage and billions of dollars in bank credit lines. The shuttering of USO and the BoC product to new money implies regulators have belatedly woken up to the risks of offering retail investors access to markets that were previously off limits. Even so, this week’s events suggest that even supposedly smart money managers can suffer first-degree burns.

(Source: Reuters)

## Falling oil and gas prices and Covid-19 hit Australia’s flourishing LNG sector, says GlobalData

Australia began to develop its liquefied natural gas (LNG) sector a little over a decade ago and quickly became one of the world’s largest exporters of the commodity.

The fall in oil and gas prices, weak economic outlook, lowering LNG demand and supply glut have hit hard on the country’s LNG sector, says data and analytics company GlobalData.

“The unparalleled price crash had prompted LNG companies to reduce capex and defer financial investment decisions (FID) on their respective projects,” said Haseeb Ahmed, Oil and Gas Analyst at GlobalData.

“Woodside is contemplating to defer FID for its Pluto Train 2 by a year to 2021, which is likely to push the start year to 2025 from the previously expected 2024.”

Santos, a major Australian LNG exporter, has decided to reduce its spending by about \$550m in 2020 due to the recent fall in oil prices and the resulting uncertainty in global economy.



The company is likely to delay FID of its Barossa gas project in Australia, which initially was expected to receive this year.

This may affect the expansion plans of Darwin LNG terminal, as Barossa project has been identified to provide gas to the terminal once it stops receiving gas from the Bayu-Undan field.

Also, due to COVID-19-induced LNG demand uncertainty, Western Gas Corporation is likely to delay its Equus Floating project.

Ahmed concluded, “Despite the landmark OPEC+ deal, oil prices are unlikely to exhibit immediate recovery, given the scale of demand destruction across the globe.”

“This effectively translates to the likelihood of LNG operators delaying discretionary expenditure, while having a unidirectional focus on improving operational efficiencies, which can further delay LNG projects.”

(Source: www.gasworld.com)

## U.S. natural gas to be world’s priciest amid virus upheaval

For the first time in more than a decade, U.S. natural gas is set to be the world’s most expensive as Covid-19 lockdowns wallop demand in other regions.

Gas futures in the U.S. have rallied about 10 percent this month as traders bet that a historic crash in oil prices will drive American shale companies to halt more drilling and curb output of gas, which is extracted as a byproduct. In Europe and Asia, meanwhile, prices are sliding to fresh lows due to a supply glut and languishing consumption amid the pandemic.

U.S. gas had consistently been the cheapest since the shale revolution, which flooded the country with fuel and turned it into the world’s biggest producer. Giant export terminals were financed and built by attracting customers through contracts linked to cheap American gas prices.

That edge is eroding as prices in Asia and Europe confront the twin forces of rising supply and plunging demand. A shipment of liquefied natural gas for delivery to North Asia was sold this week in the high-\$1 per million British thermal units range, likely to be the cheapest spot cargo ever transacted in the region.

Asia’s benchmark LNG price, the Japan/Korea Marker, fell to \$1.94 per million Btu on Thursday, according to S&P Global Platts. U.S. gas futures ended the day at \$1.815 while U.K. prices were at \$1.71.

The move is significant as it shifts the premium that gas in Asia and Europe has historically commanded over U.S. prices and adds a hurdle to American LNG exporters looking to boost sales to those regions. Buyers of U.S. fuel have canceled at least 12 cargoes for June loading, and traders estimate that more than 20 shipments could have been canceled for the month.

“The relative richness of Henry Hub clearly puts additional cancellations as a very real threat,” said Nina Fahy, head of North American natural gas for Energy Aspects Ltd.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## Bank of China ‘deeply disturbed’ about investors’ loss on oil products

Bank of China (BoC) said on Friday it was deeply disturbed by the losses of investors who had invested in its crude oil futures trading product and would work to protect their interests.

Investors were crying foul over the bank’s decision to settle the trades at historic negative prices, claiming it should have done more to protect them.



BoC said in a statement late on Friday that it had sent several messages via various channels, including SMS and phone calls, since April 6 to remind investors of the risks regarding the recent fluctuation in oil prices.

“Under the circumstances of the global (coronavirus) epidemic, and volatile fluctuations in the crude oil market, Bank of China is deeply disturbed by the losses of investors in the crude oil ‘bao’,” it said.

BoC’s crude oil “bao”, or treasure, is a structured product marketed to retail investors that is directly linked to domestic and foreign crude oil futures contracts, including WTI and Brent.

U.S. WTI futures fell below \$0 per barrel on Monday for the first time, ending at a stunning minus \$37.63 per barrel as traders paid to get rid of oil.

“We will do our best to protect the interests of clients and will relay the latest developments to them in due course,” BoC said in the statement.

It added that it would continue to actively communicate with related institutions regarding the unusual price movements in the crude oil market on April 20.

Global oil prices have plunged this year due to the widening economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, a price war triggered by major producers Saudi Arabia and Russia, and a shortage of storage for excess oil.

When WTI futures ended in negative territory on Monday, many crude oil-linked products racked up major losses, including the “bao”.

BoC said about 46 percent of its customers actively settled their contract positions and exited the market, with about 54 percent rolling over their positions or settling on the due date, which was also on Monday.

The BoC’s “bao” allows investors to roll over their own positions into coming months, or automatically settles them on the final trading day of an expiring contract. The collapse in WTI futures occurred on the May contract’s last trading day.

(Source: Reuters)

## Russian oil producers keep April output flat ahead of OPEC+ cuts

Russia’s crude oil and condensate production has held steady so far in April as the nation gets ready to deliver its largest ever output cuts in tandem with other global suppliers.

The country’s producers pumped 35,422 million tons of oil from April 1 to April 23, according to data from the Energy Ministry’s CDU-TEK unit seen by Bloomberg. That’s equal to 11.289 million barrels a day, based on a 7.33 barrel-per-ton conversion ratio. The nation pumped just over 11.29 million barrels a day in March.

Russia, which has been free to pump at will since April 1 after the collapse of the previous OPEC+ deal, sees no sense in raising output given the global oil glut, Energy Minister Alexander Novak said earlier this month.

To fight the unprecedented demand drop amid the coronavirus outbreak, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, Russia and other producers have agreed to curtail collective output by 9.7 million barrels a day beginning in May. Russia’s share of the cuts will reach 2.5 million barrels of crude -- condensate is excluded -- over the next two months.

(Source: Bloomberg)

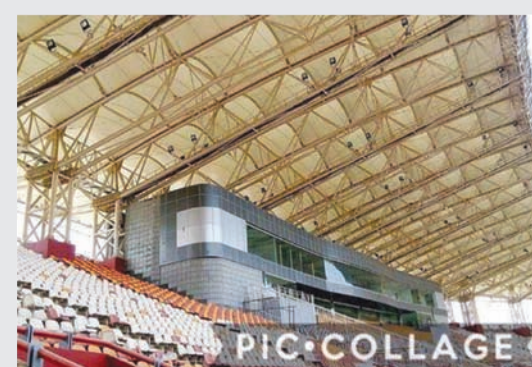


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# Expert warns of ending democracy, arising global nationalism in post-coronavirus world

The growing authoritarian tendencies of the White House's current leaders, who have vastly turned back on the globally-accepted agreements, will possibly bring an end to democracy and will pave the way for creation of a massive wave of nationalism across the globe in the post-coronavirus world.

Marwan Bishara, a senior political analyst wrote in his article published by at Al Jazeera, warned that since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, there has been a general feeling that the world is at an historical turning point, that nothing will ever be the same again.

The realists ponder and the (neo) liberals bemoan the comeback of the strong state, the rise of nationalism, the ascendance of China at the expense of America, as well as the failure of global governance, the retreat of globalization, and increasing divisions within "united Europe".

Indeed, as the coronavirus wreaks havoc across the world, national and local governments have taken a charge in directing the fight against a pandemic, which is by definition global and would necessitate global action - one would imagine.

People are rallying around their governments as they expand their authorities in every sphere of life, with little or no legislative oversight or prospect for giving them up once the outbreak is over.

The UN secretary-general has called the pandemic, "a global health crisis unlike any in the 75-year history of the United Nations", but its most powerful body - the Security Council - has been eerily silent on it.

But considering its makeup, its silence may be a blessing in disguise. Expecting the present UNSC to root for a united, healthier more peaceful world is like expecting the Arab League to root for democracy and human rights.

Other institutions of global governance, including the G7, G20 and the EU have also been sidelined, while instrumental international organizations like the IMF and the WHO have their utility and effectiveness questioned by their biggest donor, the United States, even when performing better than expected. Likewise the informal G2 special relationship which emerged between the U.S. and China has faltered.

Even globalization is deemed under threat in light of its accelerating effect on the spread of the pandemic, which prompted national governments to close borders, impose travel bans and declare curfews.

There is a global consensus that nothing will ever be the same again, but there seems to be no global agreement on a global response to the pandemic.

All of which begs the question, how will the world change or ought to change as a result of the pandemic?

Those who speak of the return of the state and the rise of nationalism as a novel byproduct of the coronavirus pandemic have not been paying attention.

In fact, in the post-Cold War era, the state has grown more resilient despite deepening globalization and expanding neoliberalism, supplemented by the spread of populist nationalism from Russia to Brazil to Hungary and India.

East Europeans have grown more nationalistic and Western Europeans have become more disillusioned with the EU project, with the Brits going as far as Brexit from the union. Meanwhile, the Americans have become increasingly isolationist, having voted in the populist nationalist Donald Trump.



In the Global South, the state has survived countless wars and upheavals and has emerged largely intact if not stronger, albeit with a few exceptions, while China and Russia have become enthusiastic defenders of state sovereignty against a Western-led liberal world order.

After the 9/11 attacks in the U.S., across the world, the "security state" has emerged ever more present amid the reign of a new global security environment. In parallel, the "market state" has expanded at the expense of the "social state", as neoliberal policies have taken root across the world.

And both trends have fed into rising economic and social inequality, which in turn has fuelled the rise of populist nationalism. The Trump presidency is both a by-product and an accelerating factor of the hyper-nationalist anti-globalist processes around the world.

In his 2018 UN speech, the "leader of the free world" warned member states against the threat of global governance to their national sovereignties and suggested they emulate his America First approach and embrace his narcissistic, hell-with-the-rest-of-the-world nationalism.

The U.S. has since abandoned much of its international responsibilities and commitments, walking away from international treaties and institutions, erecting walls, physical and metaphoric, and closing borders.

For decades only the United States was able to shape and lead a truly global worldwide effort whether on climate change or arms conventions.

The "America First" policies of the world's foremost superpower and the guardian of the world liberal order compromised global governance and undermined collective action against the corona pandemic.

It took France not the United States to summon a G7 meeting to discuss the pandemic, and it took Riyadh (need I say more), not Washington, to summon a G20 meeting, predictably both leading to nothing.

China's attempts to appear like a responsible global leader continue to fail simply because it continues to act irresponsibly. When it tries to step in to fill the vacuum left by the U.S., it does so solely to its own advantage, not the world's.

Beijing's suppression of information about the coronavirus at an early critical stage was a big blunder. And the country continues to put in just a meagre contribution to global organizations. Its funding for the WHO is a case in point - it is less than one-tenth of what the U.S. pays.

As former Swedish Prime Minister Carl

Bildt lamented, "This is the first great crisis of the post-American world. The UN Security Council is nowhere to be seen, G20 is in the hands of the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, and the White House has trumpeted America First and Everyone Alone for years. Only the virus is globalized."

As for the end or retreat of globalization, it sounds like no more than wishful thinking.

Globalization as the free movement of capital and goods and free flow of information is certainly alive and well. The world continues to trade, communicate and coordinate, despite the anti-COVID-19 measures taken by various governments.

Today's closed borders and travel bans are temporary measures which will be eased and eventually lifted soon after the pandemic starts declining.

Paradoxically, thanks to technology, people are far better connected today even in their physical isolation than ever before.

Likewise, the global standardization of health guidelines and solutions, and the collective scientific and medical efforts to find a cure and a vaccine are under way and remain indispensable for vanquishing the virus.

In sum, the push-and-pull between state and society and nations and globalization continues and will not stop with the pandemic.

The way I see it, the world is at a crossroad, and has a choice to make - to turn right or left. Continuing straight down the same path that led to the present disaster is not a realistic or attractive option.

Both turns involve more of the same state and global actors, but the real change will come from bottom-up popular movements and pressure not top-down political directives and machination.

As the war on coronavirus subsides and people begin to count the human and economic cost of the epidemic, they could embrace nationalism, isolationism and selfishness or they may opt for a more humane, open and compassionate we-are-in-this-together approach to our common destiny.

With a looming global economic crisis and the prospect of hundreds of millions of laborers losing their jobs and becoming even more impoverished, the potential for popular anger, racism, religious bigotry and outright neo-fascism taking over public sentiment should not be underestimated - especially, if the pandemic persists.

The push for such a turn has already been set in motion by the hyper populist, nationalist culture of the last two decades, which cynical populist leaders could readily exploit to solidify their power base.

In realistic terms, this all means less open,

less free, less prosperous state systems.

Indeed, new expressions of racism and bigotry from China to India, Europe and the US are already multiplying.

Exploiting peoples' fears, and their health and economic insecurities, is an old political trick, which many populists would not hesitate to resort to. This could lead to the expansion and reinforcement of the security, surveillance and police state.

The consolidation of power and/or re-election of populist nationalists like Trump, Vladimir Putin, Narendra Modi, Rodrigo Duterte, Jair Bolsonaro and Xi Jinping would have far-reaching ramifications on the world's future.

If you think a Trump second term will only be a repeat of the first, think again. Hard.

A vindicated triumphant Trump has already shown authoritarian tendencies and will likely end democracy, as we know it in the US and beyond.

But if history is any guide, people could also turn left.

The recognition that the virus affects the poor and disenfranchised more than the richer and more privileged and that any person regardless of their nationality, religion, class, gender, or race could contract and transmit the virus may push people to insist on greater human rights and solidarity.

This means reforming, democratizing and expanding the social "welfare state" at the expense of the increasingly privatized "market state", perhaps taking as a model the much-touted Scandinavian model, where everyone fares well at some basic level, without impeding private enterprise.

Once people conclude that the global health and the health of the globe are indivisible, and pandemics, like global warming and global security, are global issues requiring global solutions, they are likely to embrace greater international solidarity, universal approaches and collective strategies.

They may come to see isolationism as a needed but temporary tactic to stem the spread of the virus, but embrace global cooperation to mitigate the pain and provide long-term remedies.

Simply put, we need visions that take into account individual, community, state and international needs and find win-win strategies to implement them. These strategies must combine private and public capacities that generate local solutions to global problems and universal answers to human rights.

This means the change must be bottom-up, leading to less authoritarian, more transparent, accountable and democratic governments.

It also means more humane economy that focuses not only on statistical growth, but also on greener, fairer, more civilized enterprises that put citizens' needs above corporate greed.

It means policies that focus less on arms stockpiles and stock markets and more on human capital, rewarding nurses, teachers and scientists as much as brokers, footballers and actors.

Surely, no reasonable individual actually believes the world is better off with less connectivity, tourism or trade, but perhaps we should make these more qualitative than merely quantitative endeavors.

That is called sustainability. And it requires unity of purpose.

It may be a patronizing cliché to say "unity is strength", but clichés tend to be true. It is what it is. This too shall pass. It will be ok in the end.

## Tel Aviv must adhere to Geneva Conventions, render medical services to Palestinians amid COVID-19 pandemic

**I →** In Occupied Palestine, the Covid-19 pandemic has already hit the various fragmented Palestinian communities, each of which displays a fragile health system lacking integration into a national whole. At the same time, it is documented that Palestinian Jerusalemites and 1948 Palestinians, who are served by the Israeli health system, have long been suffering from inequalities in health provision. These inequities have already impacted chronic diseases, life expectancy, and mortality rates.

The response of the Israeli health system to Covid-19 has widened the gap between the 80 % Jewish majority and the 20 % Palestinian minority that are served by the same system. In spite of the fact that the Palestinian minority is overrepresented as health workers within the Israeli health system, their communities have been widely underserved during this pandemic. The provision of educational materials in the Arabic language was late in arriving, accessibility to Covid-19 stations in Arab towns has been difficult, there was an absence of Arab representation in the Emergency Health Committee, and there has been a huge gap in testing.

All of these factors contribute to the rise in cases we currently observe in the Arab communities. While mobilizing the Jewish majority to face the pandemic, Israeli Prime minister has been busy with discriminatory incitement against the Arab participation in the government and wrongly blamed the Palestinians for not abiding by the rules of the lockdown—perhaps to offer a preemptive rationalization for any expected rise in the number of cases among Palestinians.

In fact, however, Palestinian neighborhoods have been adhering more closely to pandemic regulations than the Jewish Orthodox neighborhoods, while they were being treated more harshly; police superintendent Yaniv Miller, assigned to assist patrols in Jewish areas that were not adhering to the lockdown, told army recruits, "I'm reminding you, guys, we're not in the (occupied) territories in the West Bank and not on the border. It takes a long time for a policeman to fire a bullet. A policeman shoots only as a last resort after he's been shot at," (quoted in Haaretz, April 3, 2020).

In another attempt to mask inequalities in health service provision, Israeli minister of culture Miri Regev managed to find two Arab citizens, Ahmad Balawneh, a nurse, and Yasmine Mazzawi, a paramedic to accept her invitation to light a torch during the Palestinian Nakba/ Israeli Independence Day ceremony to be held on April 29, a collective insult, that is disguised an honor!

The situation in the West Bank and Gaza reflects the different levels of political oppression faced by these two areas. I have described the measures taken by the Ministry of Health in the West Bank in an interview, explaining that the tough measures regarding closure with all its devastating economic impact is the best course of action that the Palestinian Authority could undertake, given our lack of resources at the level of tertiary health care and lack of sovereignty over our borders.

Gaza is even less prepared and at a greater disadvantage; the situation can be very dangerous in Gaza due to the debilitating siege and its devastating socio-economic conditions. Gaza's population survives in a density of 5,000 per square kilometer, with a high prevalence of anemia, malnutrition, and food insecurity.

Gazans suffer from an equally pervasive prevalence of chronic illnesses and mental health conditions; they are at the mercy of variant oppressive powers that decide whatever and whoever enters and escapes from its cage. The cutting off of American aid—a political punishment—has been detrimental to UNRWA, the Palestinian hospitals in Jerusalem, and multiple other aspects of the health system in Palestine.

Despite these realities, Israel has been bragging about its support, generosity, and help offered to the Palestinian Authority.

The United Nations has praised Israel for its "excellent" co-operation with the Palestinian Authority in fighting the Covid-19 through various steps: transferring \$25 million to the PA (from previously-withheld tax money!), sending medical equipment to the West Bank and Gaza—including 20 respirators to augment the 80 that are already there—as well as 300 testing kits and 50,000 masks; Israel has permitted equipment ordered by the WHO to arrive in the Palestinian territories and allowed Gaza to accept Qatari money.

Those who are impressed with Israel's kindness seem to ignore Article 56 of the 4th Geneva Convention which states, "To the fullest extent of the means available to it, the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring and maintaining, with the co-operation of national and local authorities, the medical and hospital establishments and services, public health and hygiene in the occupied territory, with particular reference to the adoption and application of the prophylactic and preventive measures necessary to combat the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics. Medical personnel of all categories shall be allowed to carry out their duties."

Those praising Israel also seem to ignore that the epidemic of Occupation continues as usual, with home demolitions while everyone is told "stay at home," with killing and detention, and planning for the annexation of the Jordan Valley. Unnoticed is the only specific consideration for the pandemic—that Israeli soldiers must wear personal protective equipment when entering Bethlehem to arrest people; unnoticed are the Israeli forces dumping Palestinian laborers at checkpoints in the West Bank whenever they suspected these workers of having the virus. Unnoticed is the attempt of the Israeli government to exchange Israeli prisoners for medical aid to Gaza! The truth is that Israel has been responsible for sickening the Palestinian and impairing their wellbeing, the effect of that will be carried in our epigenetic for generations to come.

Article 33, Fourth Geneva Convention: "No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited... Reprisals against protected persons and their property are prohibited."

Meanwhile, Palestinians are joining with all of those on earth who currently struggle against the pandemic. In so doing, we seem to be asserting our desire for sovereignty and we even feel better trained in dealing with confinement and uncertainty than many other populations currently competing to buy guns, or hoard goods at supermarkets, or pirate medical equipment. We in Palestine attempt to stand up to this challenge with a spirit of social collaboration and altruism. Our results are, "so far, so good," and we realize that this is not the most difficult station on our long struggle for self-determination and freedom.

The pandemic emergency indeed is helping to raise Palestinian confidence in our capacities for independence and we don't feel alone in this battle. Even beyond this, our hopes are rising to utilize the field of medicine as a form of diplomacy through building channels with other countries for partnerships and collaboration in times of crisis, countries that have left us alone in our national struggle.

The current crisis should not distract us from working for our long-term objectives. It is now more urgent than ever to end the siege of Gaza and the apartheid system that reduces Palestine to an unwilling incubator for medical and social epidemics.

## A glance at disunity among democrats in the U.S.

Regardless of attempts by the Democratic Party' leaders to showcase a happy united family providing full supports for Joe Biden for the November 3rd presidential election, one can simply realize the widening gap among various layers of one of the two major contemporary political parties in the United States.

J.T. Young, who served different positions under President George W. Bush, has scrutinized current disagreements among the Democratic Party' members in his article published by the Hill.

"Joe Biden would like to welcome America to Democrats' Potemkin Village of Unity. Heralded by countless press releases, endorsements and rallies it is described as a charming place. Unity's only problem is: it does not exist. It is a facade overlaying a growing five-year fissure that will erupt after November — win or lose," Young explained in his article.

"In the 1800s, minister Grigory Potemkin purportedly perpetrated a hoax on Russia's Empress Catherine II. Erecting model villages — then disassembling and reassembling them farther up her route — he conjured the impression of a prosperous countryside. He also created a shorthand description of a ruse intended to project the opposite of reality," he added.

Young went on to say, "That the story itself may be a myth only enhances its applicability to what Democrats are trying to erect before America's eyes. Their loudly proclaimed unity is also a myth of deliberate concoction. Theirs is a perfectly transparent attempt to project what they clearly are not: unified."

In a flurry of press releases of current officeholders and endorsements of former 2020 opponents, establishment Democrats are posing as one big happy family around their inevitable nominee — former Vice President Joe Biden. We are supposed to now forget that these former challengers frequently attacked him and had fundamentally different (or so they claimed) positions from him not months ago.

In doing so, Democrats are trying to make the non-news



news. That Democrat officeholders are supporting their nominee should hardly be surprising. Surprising would be the opposite — which is in fact the case.

Appropos establishment Democrats' show of unity is Shakespeare's line from Hamlet: "The lady doth protest too much, methinks." The issue is not who lives in Democrats' Potemkin Village, but who does not. Clearly absent are a large number of rank and file Democrats.

In Alaska's April 11 primary, despite having stopped running three days earlier, Sen. Bernie Sanders still got 45 percent of Democrats' votes. On April 10, Morning Consult released a poll of Democrats that showed 40 percent had an unfavorable view of Biden. In Zogby's April 8-9 poll, pitting Biden versus New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, Biden only garnered 61 percent support of likely Democrats — again meaning roughly four in 10 do not support him.

Democrat disunity is nothing new, which is why establishment Democrats are so exercised about exorcising it. The split between Democrats' establishment and its left has existed since at least 2016, when Sanders won 43 percent of total primary votes. The fissure has only deepened as the left has increased.

Following 2016, Democrats' left forced primary rule changes for establishment-dominated superdelegates. In 2018, the left powered Democrats' recapture of the House.

In 2020, the left filled the Democrat field — ultimately, to their own disadvantage. By splitting themselves, they nominated Biden.

Even though the left wound up dissipating their strength on a multiplicity of candidates, Biden barely hung on. Cumulatively, left candidates consistently were accounting for roughly 60 percent of Democrat primary voters. In the full field, Biden could never manage more than a plurality and was one contest away from a forced exit. Had 2020 been a two-person contest, as 2016 was, Biden would have lost handily.

Considering the circumstances of the last five years, it is unsurprising that Democrats have disunity now. It is also unsurprising that establishment Democrats would profess loudly that disunity has vanished. They are doing all they can to reboot 2018, when opposition to Trump papered over Party division.

After November, this disunity will erupt like never before. Either Democrats will split over the spoils of victory, or in recriminations arising from defeat. In victory, neither side will welcome the other in governing, each feeling the other received too large a share. In defeat, both sides will blame the other — just as occurred after 2016.

For this reason, they have hurriedly assembled the lovely Potemkin Village of Unity. Unity is a lovely place. Joe Biden is its mayor. Here, everyone supports one another. There are no problems in Unity. Everyone believes the same things and gets along.

Unity is Democrats' utopia. This is literally accurate, because utopia literally means "nowhere." Democrats are nowhere close to unity now; they will only get further from it after November. Between now and then, even if they fool no one else, they hope to fool themselves long enough to beat Trump.



## Shahr-e Kord plans to promote wool felt products globally

**TOURISM d e s k** **TEHRAN** – Wool felt products of Shahr-e Kord, the capital of Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari province, are projected to be introduced to the world as the symbol of the city, provincial tourism chief has said.



Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department plans to promote the city's wool felt products in both domestic and foreign markets, Mehrdad Javadi announced, CHTN reported on Saturday.

He also emphasized the need for supporting craftspeople in namad-mali field, which literally means felt beating and is a traditional craft being practiced in some Iranian cities to make a traditional rug out of woolen fabrics by rolling and pressing them.

The industrial art constitutes a majority of the province's exports of handicrafts to the U.S. and Sweden as its main importers.

Some 500 crafters in 265 workshops are producing handmade felt products using traditional and modern methods across the southwestern province.

Experts believe that Shahr-e Kord has a potential to be a world city of felt products.

## National heritage listing planned for historical mosque

**TOURISM d e s k** **TEHRAN** – The 150-year-old Ab-Anjirak mosque in eastern Tehran is planned to be inscribed on the national list of cultural heritage, provincial tourism chief Lida Hatami said on Saturday, CHTN reported.



The mosque, which was built in late Qajar era (1789–1925) and early Pahlavi period (1925-1979), is one of the 29 historical sites located in the county, she added.

She also noted that the national registration of this mosque and such historical sites can help tourism develop in the region.

## Tehran in four elements

By Edoardo Ferrari

(Part 1/3)

Recently returned from Tehran, after six weeks of stay, my first visit to this city returns to my mind. I remember one day in particular, while I was walking along Valiasr five years ago, a very fine road that crosses the metropolis from north to south.

During my first trip to Tehran I came across, walking among rows of trees that ran along the sides of the road towards the Tajrish market, in a building that struck me by its entrance portico and its long green gate. The entrance, set back from the road, led to the institute Dehkoda. The institute, which takes its name from its founder, is a center of maximum importance on the study of Persian language. On that occasion, without knowing the reason, I had the feeling that right there I would return one day, which unexpectedly came back five years later.

Going back to Iran to start learning Farsi creates a different perspective on the land in which you spend, or perhaps better, live, six weeks. Six weeks a Tehran they require innumerable car journeys between one area and another in the city, many hours in traffic, stationary or in motion. After a few days, no one wants it, it is like being sucked into the streets and their rhythm. Many of the memories of this trip are linked to these hours I spent sitting in the car, when I could not or did not want to chat with the drivers or other people who shared the ride with me. In brief moments of drowsiness, dreams appeared fading from which I woke up suddenly, interrupted by other visions with open eyes or new memories. And it is with some of these images that I would like to describe my journey to Tehran: four points, the four elements, as if they were the coordinates of an inner journey that is distilled into small, intense drops, which lead back to this city.

### ■ Land

Of a Tehran made of earth one can only imagine a distant memory of more than a century ago. It is moving between the steep streets north of the city that one can still see shreds of walls of raw earth covered with sheet metal. The asphalt has devoured almost every corner of the metropolis, torn in a few places, where the trees grow. Always in the north of the city you can try to hear the slow roar of the land that has become mountain.

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

# Jiroft, a magnificent cradle of civilization

➔ **1** Situated in the southeastern Kerman province, Jiroft is surrounded by mountains on three sides, rising some 4,000 meters high. Many Iranian and foreign experts see the findings in Jiroft as signs of a civilization as great as Sumer and ancient Mesopotamia.

Geological factors have led to it being overlooked for years by tourists and archeologists, who have generally been more interested in Mesopotamia some 1,000 km away.

In 2003, Iran invited Jean Perrot, the French archeologist who as the director of French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) had conducted excavations in Shush (or Susa, an ancient city of the Elamite empires in Khuzestan Province of Iran) area between 1969 and 1978.

Referring to the discovery of the Jiroft artifacts as an archeological revolution, Perrot stated: "An area we formerly regarded as resided only by nomads and their cattle, was in fact the heart of an incredibly advanced civilization. In this area people lived with social hierarchy. These people had an explicit view of the world which distinguishes them from the Sumerians. Henceforth, we must consider Jiroft as the origin of civilizations and refer to all other civilizations as pre or post Jiroft civilization."

Finally, under the leadership of Dr. Yousef Majidzadeh, a team of international archaeologists began excavations in 2003. Simultaneously an awareness program was initiated for the locals to lecture to them about the historical significance of Jiroft and the irreplaceable artifacts.

Madjidzadeh and his team of experts uncovered more than two square kilometers of remains from a city dating back to at least the late 3rd millennium B.C. The data demonstrates that Jiroft's heyday was from 2500 BC to 2200 BC. Astonishingly the chlorite vases found in Jiroft were not an unfamiliar object for the archeologists. Chlorite vessels similar to the stunning examples unearthed at Jiroft had been found from the Euphrates to the Indus, as far north as the Amu Darya and as far south as Tarut Island, on the Persian Gulf coast of Saudi Arabia.

Madjidzadeh, who is the author of a three-volume history of Mesopotamia and a leading Iranian authority on the third millennium BC, has long hypothesized that Jiroft is the legendary land of Aratta, a "lost" Bronze Age kingdom of renown. It's a quest that he began as a doctoral candidate at the University of Chicago, when in 1976 he published an article proposing that Aratta, which reputedly exported its magnificent crafts to Mesopotamia, was located somewhere in southeastern Iran.

Madjidzadeh says that Jiroft artifacts are a "missing link" in understanding the Bronze Age because they help explain why so many incised chlorite vessels, all with remarkably similar imagery, have turned up at widely separated ancient sites, from Mari in Syria to Nippur and Ur in Mesopotamia, Soch in Uzbekistan and the Saudi Arabian island of Tarut, north of Bahrain.

Until now, the principal center of production of these vessels was a mystery. Although some of them were probably manufactured locally, the sheer volume of artifacts at Jiroft argues that the most prolific chlorite workshops of all were there.

According to an article by Paris-based author Richard Covington, texts dating from around 2100 BC suggest that Aratta was a gaily decorated capital with a citadel whose battlements were fashioned of green lapis lazuli and its lofty towers of bright red brick. Aratta's artistic production was so highly regarded that about 2500 BC the



Vase excavated from the Jiroft region. A "two-horned" figure wrestling with serpents.

Sumerian king Enmerkar sent a message to the ruler of Aratta requesting that artisans and architects be dispatched to his capital, Uruk, to build a temple to honor Inanna, the goddess of fertility and war.

"When you start reconstructing actual geographical regions based on legend and mythology, you're always in deep water," says Abbas Alizadeh, an Iranian-born archeologist

at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. "Some scholars think Aratta is in Azerbaijan. Others say Baluchistan or the Persian Gulf. It's a murky business."

Yet even if Jiroft turns out not to be Aratta, it is nevertheless a pivotal clue to a better understanding of the era when writing first flourished and traders carried spices and grain, gold, lapis lazuli and ideas from the

**Astonishingly the chlorite vases found in Jiroft were not an unfamiliar object for the archeologists. Chlorite vessels similar to the stunning examples unearthed at Jiroft had been found from the Euphrates to the Indus, as far north as the Amu Darya and as far south as Tarut Island, on the Persian Gulf coast of Saudi Arabia.**

Nile to the Indus. Although not on a par with the more influential civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Indus Valley, "Jiroft is obviously a very important archeological complex," says Holly Pittman, an art historian at the University of Pennsylvania who is one of a growing number of non-Iranian scholars who are being allowed into the country.

"It's an independent, autochthonous Bronze Age civilization with huge numbers of settlements of all different sizes that we have only just begun to explore." By comparison to the research documenting other third-millennium civilizations, these are indeed very early days, she explains. "We don't yet have enough material to compare it to Mesopotamia. But you have to remember that 500 teams of archeologists have been digging in Mesopotamia for 100 years. In Jiroft, we've had two seasons with one team of fewer than 30 scientists."

Jiroft artisans fashioned pieces with what seems strange and enigmatic iconography. Some were encrusted with lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, carnelian from the Indus Valley, turquoise, agate and other semiprecious, imported stones. "The artists had such a naturalistic way of rendering images," says Madjidzadeh. "It is a style that was not seen anywhere else in that era."

"There must certainly have been a school of stonecarvers, because you see such an aesthetic unity of these objects throughout the kingdom. This high-level artistic quality did not suddenly appear from nowhere," he maintains. "The traditions must have taken 300 to 400 years to develop."

French geomorphologist Eric Fouache, the team's expert on reading the strata underlying the archeological sites, has discovered something else, however, which gave the Jiroft region a crucial advantage over Mesopotamia: water. A network of artesian wells supplied abundant water for irrigation and drinking even when the Halil River ran dry. With these sources of water, the inhabitants developed an agriculture based on calorie-rich date palms rather than the cereals of the Tigris and Euphrates delta, says Fouache. Palm groves also provided shade for extensive gardening.

The primary Jiroft site consists of two mounds a couple of kilometers apart, called Konar Sandal A and B and measuring 13 and 21 meters high, respectively. It was at Konar Sandal B that the archeologists dug out the seal impressions bearing writing. So far, the archeologists have excavated around nine vertical meters of Konar Sandal B, discovering vestiges of a monumental, two-story, windowed citadel whose base covers nearly 13.5 hectares (33 acres). Madjidzadeh speculates that this imposing edifice once housed the city's chief administrative center and perhaps a temple and a royal palace.

Finding the structure's façade was difficult enough, but locating an entrance took the team weeks of digging through clay packed hard by millennia of rain-wash. "The mud is like stone," Madjidzadeh complains. "You can hardly get a pick into it."

Archeological excavations in Jiroft led to the discovery of several objects belonging to the fourth millennium BC.

In 2019, a team of Iranian and German archaeologists discovered remnants of a prehistoric settlement during a survey in an ancient hill in Jiroft. Senior Iranian archaeologist Nader Alidad-Soleymani and German Professor Peter Pfalzner co-led a comprehensive survey, which aimed to record evidence about previously excavated sites in the counties of Jiroft, Kahnouj, Anbarabad, Faryab, Rudbar, Qalehganj and Manujan.

## Rosewater festivals go virtual amid virus pandemic

➔ **1** While Kashan and its neighboring villages are covered with pink roses and the scent of the flowers spreads over the area, visitors can have a unique experience watching the process of making rosewater from harvesting to steaming rose petals.

The festivals are usually running through mid-June in different areas of Kashan, such as Qamsar, Joshaqan Qali, Barzak and Niasar.

They are one of the main sources of income for workshop owners and rose garden owners as well as villagers, seasonal and local workers, and it seems they have a positive impact on the region's economy.

Unfortunately, this year, due to coronavirus pandemic, many people have been damaged economically, workshops have been closed and distillation is being done without the presence of any visitors.

Golab or rosewater is obtained from a particular kind of Rose, known as Mohammadi roses in Iran. Harvesting flowers seems to be the most important part of the process. They should be picked from dawn through morning very carefully. The petals are put into massive copper



pots and boiled, and then the extracted water is kept in special bottles. The longest the distillation is, the better will be the quality of the rosewater.

Golab is used nationwide in diverse

traditional dishes to flavor them or consumed as a religious perfume as well. The holy month of Ramadan, which started yesterday, is one of the bestselling months of the product.

However, Kashan's Golab products couldn't be distributed across the country properly as the government limited travel between Iranian cities until early last week in an effort to halt the spread of the coronavirus.

Narratives say that rose oil and rosewater have many therapeutic benefits. Rose oil soothes the mind and heals depression, grief, nervous stress and tension. It aids in problems with the digestive system, healing colds, and skin health.

Distillation of flowers and herbs has a deep history in Iran. Many believe traditionally-distilled rosewater is of higher quality than that produced in factories probably due to shorter time interval between the harvest and distillation practices.

Kashan embraces abundant scenic landscape, historical sites and monuments such as UNESCO-registered Fin Garden with its Safavid and Qajar era edifices, Tabatabaei House, Boroujerdi House, Ameri House, a traditional bazaar, and Jame Mosque of Kashan just to name a few.



# FAO has increased budget to support capacity building in Iran

By Faranak Bakhtiari

**TEHRAN** — Maximo Torero, chief economist and assistant director general for the Economic and Social Development Department at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), says the organization has just increased its allocation of funds to support capacity building for Iranian experts.

For example, FAO is leading a multi-year campaign to eradicate Peste des Petits Ruminants, a virus that causes huge economic damage to livestock farmers in Iran.

In an exclusive interview with the Tehran Times, he elaborated on the situation of food security and agriculture during the coronavirus outbreak and policies which have been adopted to deal with the problem.

Below is full text of the interview:

■ Does coronavirus affect food security? And how?

We should aim absolutely to make sure that the coronavirus does not worsen global food security. That said, the COVID-19 pandemic presents multiple risks in the battle against hunger. First, restrictions on movement may have a material impact on food production, processing and purchasing. That is already evident for example in fisheries.

Second, illness and fear of illness may reduce labour availability. Some very large meat-packing facilities in the United States of America have closed for this reason. In Europe, many farmers are worried about harvesting important crops such as asparagus and strawberries. That said, food security depends on multiple factors, such as availability, accessibility and affordability. There is enough food in the world to avoid a food crisis, so it is important to work on those channels with well-targeted interventions that allow food systems to operate and allow people, especially the most vulnerable, to acquire what they need.

■ Will the pandemic increase hunger throughout the world?

Many countries are finding ways to keep their food supply chains alive, which is what FAO has from the beginning insisted is crucial. That said, the pandemic will sadly probably increase hunger, mostly due to the severe global economic contraction it is causing. FAO has consistently noted that poor economic performance correlates to a rise in the number of food insecure people.



It's hard not to anticipate a significant increase, in the tens of millions globally, as a result of COVID-19 and the recession. This goes beyond food systems. Falling oil prices, for example, will disproportionately affect major oil producers. On top of that, it may become harder to sustain relief efforts for existing humanitarian programmes for food security. This shouldn't be allowed to happen.

■ How agriculture sector will bear the consequences? In particular, in Iran?

That's a very complex question. The importance of agricultural sectors is becoming more evident to all, and those who work in it are now recognized as essential. It's also a sector that, especially where smallholder farms are the norm, is labour intensive, making it especially vulnerable during the pandemic. Large grain farms are often highly mechanized and may not be impeded, but people need diverse foods.

Another issue is that declining incomes point to lower household budget for food and ultimately lower incomes for those who produce it. These people are very often already among the poorest parts of society.

Around 15 million people in Iran's rural areas rely on agriculture as a source of income. Many of these own small farms or no land at all, and many are close to the poverty line. Water is not abundantly available. Improving the prospect and performance of

Iran's smallholders -and all farmers – is a long-term national priority and efforts should be intensified now.

■ Does FAO intend to take measures in regard to post-coronavirus crisis, which might be hunger, damages to agriculture sector or rise in food prices?

FAO is working hard to make sure the world's food systems deliver amid the pandemic. International cooperation is key, and we have advocated for dismantling barriers to food trade of all kinds, at least for the duration of the crisis. The world has ample stocks in key commodity food staples such as rice, wheat, maize and vegetable oils, and harvest prospects are strong. That said those stocks are increasingly concentrated in fewer countries, which makes it even more important that global food trade be facilitated so that food can go where it is most needed.

■ Following the surge in production of hazardous waste, and improper waste disposal in some countries, soil and water are at risk of contamination, how it would affect food security? What are the ways to tackle the problem?

That question goes well beyond the pandemic. FAO is working a lot on water scarcity and water management issues, including in Iran. Soil health has become an increasing priority for FAO. There is still a lot to learn.

As with climate change, these issues present to agriculture the challenge of finding ways to do more with less.

Agricultural productivity is quite weak in some areas of the world, such as sub-Saharan Africa, and can doubtless be increased. Countries on the high-yield frontier are likely to take an increasingly holistic approach to assessing their natural resource limits, which include factors such as soil erosion, nitrate runoff and salination. As FAO Director-General QU Dongyu recently said, human beings wouldn't be here today if we hadn't been clever in the past, and so we need to be clever going into the future.

■ Does FAO change any of its programs or policies in the face of the outbreak? In particular, in Iran?

FAO is working very hard now to offer policy advice, data support and concrete assistance to member states amid the COVID-19 international health crisis. We are developing new public-access tools and a data hub to help speed up necessary decisions. So we are changing our work flow for sure!

At the same time, lockdown means FAO's technical staff are often working virtually. But they are certainly still doing the core work that the Organization is mandated to do, such as the upcoming Forest Resource Assessment, contributing to biodiversity conventions, promoting robust governance of food safety standards and – as you in Iran know well – leading the battle against the Desert Locust infestations in numerous countries.

In fact, FAO just increased its allocation of funds to support capacity building for Iran's experts in this area, which is one where FAO has decades of experience. We plan to optimize rather than change our programmes, and if member states and other partners agree, will happily expand them. For example, FAO is leading a multi-year campaign to eradicate Peste des Petits Ruminants, a virus that causes huge economic damage to livestock farmers in Iran and surrounding countries.

It's worth remembering that FAO's campaign to globally eradicate Rinderpest – the only viral infectious disease besides smallpox to have been stamped out – was done amid all sorts of civil conflicts and natural disasters, because all stakeholders agreed that no factional interest should prevent success. We will persist.

## Tehran is ahead of us in coronavirus battle: London mayor

**SOCIETY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Mayor of London Sadiq Aman Khan has said that many of the measures taken in London to counter coronavirus are similar to those taken in Tehran, and Tehran is even ahead.

Khan made the remarks in an online meeting with Tehran mayor Pirouz Hanachi on Friday.

Referring to the conditions imposed on Iran by U.S. sanctions, Khan said: "In meetings with the British government officials, I would tell them about the problems of Tehran in relation to sanctions and I hope that this problem will be solved soon."

Hanachi for his part noted that Iran is fighting coronavirus and sanctions at the same time, adding "Despite the pandemic, start-up businesses have been activated in Iran and many services were provided in person before the outbreak, are now done online and on virtual networks."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Hanachi said that in the global crisis, countries usually put aside their differences and problems and try to help each other so that the situation does not get worse.

To many of us urban administrators in Iran, the onslaught

of coronavirus has underscored an important fact of life: no town, city or nation can be indifferent to global crises, even in far-flung corners of our world, Hanachi told The Guardian on April 4.

Indeed, while the mantra of good governance over the past century has been to "think global, act local", we must today think and act both locally and globally.

Doubtless there are things that we could do differently, like every country in the world. But we are operating against the backdrop of the most extreme sanctions regime in history. The US embargo not only prohibits American companies and individuals from conducting lawful trade with Iranian counterparts, but given that the sanctions are extra-territorial, all other countries and companies are also bullied into refraining from doing legitimate business with Iranians, even the selling of medicines.

This unjust treatment of Iran has come about via the policies of one country – the United States – whose ruling administration does not seem to prioritize even its own national interests, but instead the narrow interests of a gov-

erning party. The outcome of such irresponsible policies and behavior is not limited to Iran; they have also inflicted harm on the American public.

In order to better confront these new global crises, there is a need for politicians to realize that the path to pursuing national interests is not separate or contrary to that of global interests and international accountability.

The world cannot go on like this. If global leaders fail to seize the opportunity to embrace change, we will all continue to remain highly vulnerable to communicable diseases, environmental catastrophes, global warming, terrorism, violent extremism and other shared threats.

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

The Iranian health ministry on Saturday announced that the total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus has reached 89,328 of whom 68,193 equaling 76 percent, have recovered.

## Zarivar Lake hosting flocks of storks once again

**SOCIETY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Zarivar Lake, a major tourist attraction in western Iran, is hosting again thousands of storks that wing their ways to make their nests around the lake's mountainous areas, however, locals in surrounding villages have decided to build safer nests for them.

Darreh Tafi is a village near Zarivar Lake, which plays host to 60 pairs of stork and many tourists who come to watch stork nests and their newly hatched chicks.



Oak forests near Zarivar Lake are the main nesting spots for storks. Villagers on the outskirts of Zarivar Lake believe that white storks are a symbol of good fortune and peace, which is why the people of the villages around the lake build nests for these birds.

■ **Over 700 storks nest in villages around Zarivar**

Ebrahim Hemmat Boland, head of the Marivan department of environment, said that "Every year, the border city of Marivan welcomes thousands of white storks on the three sites of Bilo, Darreh Tafi and Qolqoleh."

He went on to say that storks are migratory birds that come to Marivan every year for breeding and nesting and they have a very good ecological relationship with the people of the region and accept the prefabricated nests of the people without hesitation.

The village of Darreh Tafi annually hosts about 300 storks, Bilo village hosts about 400, and the village of Qolqoleh also hosts about 70 of white storks that begin to nest and reproduce, he explained.

"We annually monitor the health and reproduction status of the birds and encircle a number of chicks in the nests to assess migration status for behavioral studies, and to protect the birds' habitat," he highlighted.

Bilo site is now a hunting-prohibited area, which is likely to improve to national natural monument in the coming years due to the presence of storks, the untouched oak forests and the diversity of plant and animal species, which will be one of the areas under the management provincial DOE, he explained.

The biggest and most important threat to these birds in the city of Marivan is the power transmission wires, several casualties are reported each year as a result of electric shocks, he lamented.

Locals are very protective of the storks and even during winter they take care of the vacant nests and prepare them for the storks' return, and when they get hurt or injured everybody makes efforts to heal them, he concluded.

Storks are large, long-legged, long-necked wading birds with long, stout bills. They belong to the family called Ciconiidae, and make up the order Ciconiiformes. Many species are migratory. There are nineteen living species of storks in six genera.

Myths about the storks' immunity goes back to ancient beliefs; in Egypt it was believed that their souls were human, while in the ancient Greece beliefs storks have been protectors of elderly people and take care of the aged parents while living on their roofs. The Greeks also held that killing a stork could be punished by death.

The storks were also revered in Islamic beliefs which held that storks were thought to go on pilgrimage to Mecca, where they headed for after staying in Iran.

## WORDS IN THE NEWS

### 'Biggest' Bosnia grave being opened

(July 28, 2003)

Forensic experts are due to open what is believed to be the largest mass grave ever found in Bosnia. The grave is thought to contain up to 700 Muslim men and boys killed after the fall of Srebrenica to Bosnian Serb forces in 1995. This report from Nick Hawton: The grave is in an area known as Crni Vrh, or Black Peak. It's mountainous country, just a few kilometres from the border with Serbia; **dense woodland** surrounds the site.

It used to be an old front line and the ground is **still laced with mines**. No one is sure how many people are buried but it could be as many as seven-hundred, making it more than twice as large as any **mass grave** so far found in Bosnia.

They are thought to be victims of the Srebrenica massacre, when seven-thousand Muslims were killed by Bosnian Serb forces in July 1995. The bodies were **dumped** in numerous graves across the region, and every year more of these sites are discovered. Weeks of **painstaking** work lie ahead before **forensic experts** establish just how many people are buried and then begin the difficult task of identifying them. But this is just the **tip of an iceberg**. There are still around twenty-thousand people missing from the Bosnian war.

The head of the Bosnian Commission for Missing Persons, Amor Masovic, says the discovery of every new grave helps relatives finally **come to terms with** what happened to their **loved ones**.

■ **Words**

**dense woodland**: thick forest

**front line**: a place where two armies are fighting each other **still laced with mines**: with some mines still dangerously present **mass grave**: a grave in which a large number of bodies have been hurriedly buried

**dumped**: placed quickly and carelessly

**painstaking**: extremely thorough

**forensic experts**: people who examine objects scientifically in order to discover information about a crime

**tip of an iceberg**: just the start of something much bigger

**come to terms with**: learn to accept

**loved ones**: used to refer to members of family or people cared about when something unpleasant or dangerous has happened to them.

(Source: BBC)

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

### 56% of motorcycles running in only 5 provinces

Some 56 percent of the total motorcycles in the country are running in only five provinces, Ali Mohammadi, a senior traffic police official has said.

Of all 32.9 million vehicles in the country, motorcycles amount to 11.6 million, accounting for 35 percent of the total vehicles moving in the country, he stated.

According to the statistics, 56 percent of motorcycles are plying the roads in 5 provinces of Tehran, Khorasan Razavi, Isfahan, Fars and Khuzestan, he added.

There are 2 million motorcycles in Tehran, 1.3 million in Khorasan Razavi, 1.2 million in Isfahan, 916,000 in Fars, and 564,000 in Khuzestan, he also said.

### ۵۶ درصد موتورسیکلت ها در ۵ استان تردد دارند

رئیس مرکز شماره گذاری و تعویض پلاک پلیس راهور ناجا گفت: بنابر آمارها، ۵۶ درصد موتورسیکلت ها تنها در ۵ استان تردد می کنند.

سرهنگ علی محمدی روز یکشنبه افزود: از ۳۲ میلیون و ۹۰۰ هزار دستگاه انواع وسایل نقلیه در کشور، ۱۱ میلیون و ۶۵۰ هزار دستگاه یعنی معادل ۳۵ درصد را موتورسیکلت ها شامل می شوند.

وی اظهار داشت: برابر آمارها تهران بزرگ، خراسان رضوی، اصفهان، فارس و خوزستان ۵۶ درصد موتورسیکلت های کشور را در خود جای داده اند.

رئیس مرکز شماره گذاری و تعویض پلاک پلیس راهور ناجا گفت: تهران بزرگ با حدود ۲ میلیون دستگاه موتورسیکلت، خراسان رضوی ۱.۳ میلیون دستگاه، اصفهان ۱.۲ میلیون دستگاه، فارس ۹۱۶ هزار دستگاه و خوزستان با ۵۶۴ هزار دستگاه موتورسیکلت بیشترین موتورسیکلت های کشور را به خود اختصاص دادند.

## PREFIX/SUFFIX

### “cerebro-, cerebr-”

■ **Meaning**: brain

■ **For example**: Passive smoking is considered a major cause of **cerebrovascular** disease, which causes strokes.

## PHRASAL VERB

### Think something up

■ **Meaning**: to produce a new idea, name etc. by thinking

■ **For example**: She was trying to think up an excuse.

## IDIOM

### Give somebody a (good) run for their money

■ **Explanation**: to make your opponent in a competition use all their skill and effort to defeat you

■ **For example**: They've given some of the top teams a run for their money this season.



## Rights groups: Prominent Saudi rights activist dies in custody

Prominent Saudi rights activist Abdullah al-Hamid, 69, has died in custody in a hospital in Saudi Arabia, according to rights groups and a Swedish foundation that awarded him a renowned prize.

The Right Livelihood Foundation, which awards the prize known as the Alternative Nobel, said on Friday al-Hamid, who was serving an 11-year prison sentence, was taken to hospital after suffering from ill-health in a Riyadh prison earlier this year, al Jazeera reported.

He subsequently had a stroke and fell into a coma in early April, according to rights groups including Amnesty International.

“Dr al-Hamid was a fearless champion for human rights in Saudi Arabia,” Lynn Maalouf, Amnesty’s Middle East research director, said in a statement.

“Our thoughts are with his family and friends, who for the past eight years had been deprived of his presence as a result of the state’s inhumane repression,” she added.

## UN pushes for global vaccine effort, deaths near 200,000

The global coronavirus death toll approached 200,000 Saturday as the United Nations launched an international push for a vaccine to defeat the pandemic.

Governments around the world are struggling to limit the economic devastation unleashed by the virus, which has infected nearly 2.8 million people and left half of humanity under some form of lockdown, AFP reported.

The scale of the pandemic has forced medical research on the virus to move at unprecedented speed, but effective treatments are still far away and the United Nations chief said the effort will require cooperation on a global scale.

“We face a global public enemy like no other,” Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told a virtual briefing Friday, asking for international organizations, world leaders and the private sector to join hands.

“A world free of COVID-19 requires the most massive public health effort in history.”

The vaccine should be safe, affordable and available to all, Guterres stressed at the meeting, which was also attended by the leaders of Germany and France.

## Brazil becoming coronavirus hot spot as testing falters

Cases of the new coronavirus are overwhelming hospitals, morgues and cemeteries across Brazil as Latin America’s largest nation veers closer to becoming one of the world’s pandemic hot spots.

Medical officials in Rio de Janeiro and at least four other major cities have warned that their hospital systems are on the verge of collapse, or already too overwhelmed to take any more patients, AP reported.

Health experts expect the number of infections in the country of 211 million people will be much higher than what has been reported because of insufficient, delayed testing.

Meanwhile, President Jair Bolsonaro has shown no sign of wavering from his insistence that COVID-19 is a relatively minor disease and that broad social-distancing measures are not needed to stop it. He has said only Brazilians at high risk should be isolated.

In Manaus, the biggest city in the Amazon, officials said a cemetery has been forced to dig mass graves because there have been so many deaths. Workers have been burying 100 corpses a day - triple the pre-virus average of burials.

Ytalo Rodrigues, a 20-year-old driver for a funerary service provider in Manaus, said he had retrieved one body after another for more than 36 hours, without a break. There were so many deaths, his employer had to add a second hearse, Rodrigues said.

So far, the health ministry has confirmed nearly 53,000 COVID-19 cases and more than 3,600 deaths. By official counts, the country had its worst day yet on Thursday, with about 3,700 new cases and more than 400 deaths, and Friday was nearly as grim.

## Another U.S. Navy warship at sea reports a coronavirus outbreak

Another U.S. Navy ship at sea has reported a coronavirus outbreak and is returning to port, the Navy said Friday.

A Navy statement said at least 18 members of the crew of a destroyer, the USS Kidd, have tested positive and it expects the number to grow. It said it is evaluating the extent of the outbreak aboard the ship.

The Kidd is in the Caribbean, where it has been operating as part of a counter-drug mission. The Navy said it has a crew of about 350. It is only the second Navy ship, among about 90 deployed around the world, to report a coronavirus outbreak. The other is the USS Theodore Roosevelt.

One sailor who displayed symptoms was flown off the Kidd on Thursday to a medical facility at San Antonio, where he tested positive for the virus.

After the positive case was confirmed at San Antonio, the Navy deployed a specialized medical team to the ship to conduct contact tracing and additional onsite testing.

“The first patient transported is already improving and will self-isolate. We are taking every precaution to ensure we identify, isolate, and prevent any further spread onboard the ship,” said Rear Admiral Don Gabrielson, commander U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command and U.S. 4th Fleet. “Our medical team continues coordinating with the ship and our focus is the safety and well-being of every Sailor.”

The Navy said the ship will return to port, where the crew will continue to clean and disinfect the ship, observing protocols in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Navy-specific guidelines.

The Navy continues to struggle with a coronavirus outbreak aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt, an aircraft carrier that is docked in Guam and has more than 800 confirmed virus cases.

(9Source: AP)

# Saudi Arabia, al-Qaeda commit war crimes in Yemen in form of ‘unholy union’

Saudi Arabia and the al-Qaeda militant group have reportedly been committing war crimes against the oppressed Yemeni nation in the form an “unholy” alliance.

The MintPress News, an online news website, reported on Friday that Saudi mercenaries and members of al-Qaeda’s branch in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, called al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), closed their ranks in the beginning of the war on Yemen and jointly occupied the Jawf province using the same U.S.-supplied weapons, Press TV reported.

“Since 2015, when Saudi Arabia announced from Washington D.C. that it had launched a military campaign against the poorest country in the Middle East, it has been an open secret that both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates had formed an unholy union with al-Qaeda’s branch in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, known colloquially as AQAP, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula,” the report said.

“In al-Jawf, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and AQAP was well underway by 2016 when the Kingdom launched a military campaign to take the province. Saudi and AQAP forces fought side by side, sharing the same weapons, trenches, operations command centers, resting places, and extremist ideals,” it added.

The report also noted that al-Qaeda boosted its recruitment in Yemen under the Saudi backing and turned Jawf into its stronghold in the impoverished country.

“AQAP has hobbled by in Yemen for years, feeding off the relentless cycle of poverty and hunger and only occasionally emerging from the shadows to claim credit for an attack or seek new recruits. It was not until 2015 when the group began to receive support from Saudi Arabia that it became brazen enough to emerge from its hiding places into the streets of al-Jawf’s towns. Generous Saudi backing meant that AQAP could boost recruitment, build new training camps and promote the organization’s ideology, an offshoot of the official Saudi state religion of Wahhabism,” it said.

Wahhabism is the radical ideology dominating Saudi Arabia, freely preached by regime-backed clerics there, and inspiring militant outfits such as al-Qaeda.

The al-Qaeda terrorists used abandoned homes in Jawf to stock weapons, make bombs



and train militants, according to the report.

“By early 2020, AQAP had a sizable real estate portfolio in al-Jawf and Marib and ran most of the provinces’ large businesses. Sprawling villages in al-Jawf, the second largest governorate in Yemen, turned into strongholds of the organization after residents were forced to flee to other areas. AQAP turned some of the abandoned homes into factories used to manufacture explosive belts, IEDs and car bombs. Others were used to stock weapons, train militants,” it said.

Recently, the Yemeni armed forces managed to liberate Jawf after retaking the province’s Nihm district in a battle that left 2,000 Saudi-backed elements, including terrorists of al-Qaeda and Daesh, dead or captured.

“By March, the Yemeni army had successfully subdued Nihm and advanced all the way to al-Jawf and Ma’rib. Now, for the first time in nearly 55 years, al-Jawf and most of Marib Province is under Yemeni control following decades of de facto rule by Riyadh through its various Yemeni proxies,” the report said.

With the liberation of Jawf, it added, Saudi-sponsored mercenaries left behind weapons and unexploded ordnances, with the remnants of cluster bombs still embedded in the ground.

“In their haste to escape the coming onslaught, Saudi forces left behind a slew of both medium and heavy weapons as well as the ammunition required to make them come to life. Whole stores of weapons, unexploded ordnance, and mines were abandoned, often amidst the tattered flags of Saudi Arabia and al-Qaeda and in huge tunnels reminiscent of those left behind in the wake of the wars in Syria and Iraq,” the report said.

### Secret al-Qaeda prisons uncovered

In the Jawf villages of Khazaf and al-Marwan, the al-Qaeda militants turned homes into secret jails, with complex tunnels systems used to hold and torture prisoners.

“Inside one home that turned it into a makeshift AQAP prison, we saw four three-square-meter windowless cells with heavy steel doors. As we made our way from cell to cell, I was struck by the sight of a pile of woman’s clothing, a prayer outfit, and a baby’s diapers, all piled into a morbid testament of the crimes committed here. I also found a note, a scrap of paper with the following scribbled onto it: “I am Um Assamah, Why did you imprison me and my three daughters?” the report explained.

A 60-year-old resident told MintPress that the place was a women’s prison that “from outside it looked like simple houses

but when we entered, we found cells, tunnels, and implements of torture.”

In the city of al-Hazm, Jawf’s provincial capital, a mother recounted how her daughter Samirah Hezam Mahareh, a mother of three young girls, was kidnapped from her home by armed militants loyal to Saudi Arabia on July 5, 2018.

“Two years have passed since they kidnapped my daughter,” she told MintPress.

Samirah was first taken to a secret prison in al-Hazm and then transferred to another detention facility, the report said. Her whereabouts are still unknown.

### Saudi strikes meant to cover up atrocities

Last week, Saudi jets pounded Khazaf and al-Marwan in a bid to conceal their involvement in the crimes against the Yemeni people.

Such air raids, the report said, are meant to cover up “untold war crimes occurred in the forgotten desert villages.”

According to a tally released last November by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project or ACLED, more than 100,000 Yemenis have been killed in the Saudi war.

The Western-backed bombing campaign, coupled with a naval blockade, has plunged Yemen into what the UN says is the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

## China sent team including medical experts to advise on North Korea’s Kim

China has dispatched a team to North Korea including medical experts to advise on North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, according to three people familiar with the situation.

The trip by the Chinese doctors and officials comes amid conflicting reports about the health of the North Korean leader. Reuters was unable to immediately determine what the trip by the Chinese team signaled in terms of Kim’s health.

A delegation led by a senior member of the Chinese Communist Party’s International Liaison Department left Beijing for North Korea on Thursday, two of the people said. The department is the main Chinese body dealing with neighbouring North Korea.

The sources declined to be identified given the sensitivity of the matter.

The Liaison Department could not be reached by Reuters for comment late on Friday. China’s foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment late on Friday.

Daily NK, a Seoul-based website, reported earlier this week that Kim was recovering after undergoing a cardiovascular procedure on April 12. It cited one unnamed source in North Korea.

South Korean government officials and a Chinese official with the Liaison Department challenged subsequent reports suggesting that Kim was in grave danger after surgery. South Korean officials said they had detected no signs of unusual activity in North Korea.

On Thursday, U.S. President Donald Trump also downplayed earlier reports that Kim was gravely ill. “I think the



report was incorrect,” Trump told reporters, but he declined to say if he had been in touch with North Korean officials.

On Friday, a South Korean source told Reuters their intelligence was that Kim was alive and would likely make an appearance soon. The person said he did not have any comment on Kim’s current condition or any Chinese involvement.

An official familiar with U.S. intelligence said that Kim was known to have health problems but they had no reason to conclude he was seriously ill or unable eventually to reappear in public.

### ADVERTISEMENT

A U.S. State department spokeswoman had no comment. U.S. Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, when asked about Kim’s health on Fox News after Trump spoke said,

## Clinton: ‘Please don’t poison yourself because Trump thinks it could be a good idea’

Former U.S. Secretary of State and First Lady Hillary Clinton has blasted President Donald Trump after he suggested scientists should investigate inserting disinfectants into the body as a way to cure COVID-19 caused by the novel coronavirus.

Clinton, Trump’s 2016 bitter presidential rival, warned on Friday that people not to poison themselves based on the president’s advice.

“Please don’t poison yourself because Donald Trump thinks it could be a good idea,” she wrote on Twitter.

Clinton’s comment comes as Trump faces criticism from medical professionals for his remarks. Doctors and health experts urged people not to drink or inject disinfectant.

Trump said at his daily media briefing on Thursday that medical experts should explore whether inserting light or disinfectant into the bodies of people infected with the novel coronavirus might cure the disease

He also asked if there was a way to use disinfectants on the body “by injection



inside or almost a cleaning.”

“Is there a way we can do something like that by injection, inside, or almost a cleaning?” he said. “It would be interesting to check that.”

“Maybe you can, maybe you can’t ... I’m not a doctor. But I’m, like, a person

that has a good you-know-what,” Trump said, pointing to his head.

Trump claims remarks were ‘sarcastic’ On Friday, Trump on Friday said he was being sarcastic when he suggested a day earlier that scientists should consider exposing the body to light, heat and

disinfectants the coronavirus patients.

“I was asking a question sarcastically to reporters like you just to see what would happen,” Trump told reporters at the Oval Office in the White House.

“I was asking a sarcastic — and a very sarcastic question — to the reporters in the room about disinfectant on the inside,” he continued. “But it does kill it, and it would kill it on the hands and that would make things much better. That was done in the form of a sarcastic question to the reporters.”

When a reporter pointed out that the president had turned to experts next to the stage when he presented the idea on Thursday, Trump claimed he was asking those officials “whether or not sun and disinfectant on the hands ... can help us.”

Trump’s explanation raised eyebrows among those who watched the Oval Office briefing.

“It didn’t seem like it was coming off as sarcastic when he was talking and turning to Dr. Birx on the side,” Fox News anchor Bret Baier said on air after Trump’s retraction.



# Exclusive: IWF acting president Papandrea lauds Iranians

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN**

International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) acting president Ursula Papandrea says the Iranian women lifters have risen faster than even expected and she is very happy for them.

Papandrea was elected the first-ever female vice president for the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) in May 2017. Now, she is the IWF acting president after Tamas Ajan was forced to step down from active duty.

This resignation comes amid the ongoing investigation of allegations of financial corruption, false drug testing, and subsequent cover-up made against Ajan and the IWF.

The IWF's Oversight and Integrity Commission, which is chaired by Papandrea, has also been mandated to continue its work until June 19.

In an exclusive interview with Tehran Times, Papandrea, who is also president of the U.S. Weightlifting Federation, discussed about several issues including rising Iranian female weightlifters.

■ Tehran Times: As acting president of IWF, what is your plan until June? You are in a very difficult situation since IWF will have to reschedule the Olympics qualification program, following postponing the Games over coronavirus.

I am taking the time it has afforded me to rebuild and reform the IWF. I have started the process of moving our IWF headquarters to Lausanne, Switzerland, the official headquarters according to the IWF Constitution and the city of the International Olympic Committee headquarters. I will prepare the IWF to function solely out of Lausanne for the future. It is a huge task. We must also hire key professionals. This is what lay ahead.

It is a huge misfortune for the athletes and our concern for their safety and our member federations is also a concern for the IWF. We just created a fund for the member federations to request funding for COVID-19 related costs. Iran was the second country affected by the virus after China. I know it has created a hardship on the IRI federation. I hope they will apply for some funding so we can assist in some of the COVID-19 related costs like disinfecting the gyms, masks and like items.

■ You've recently published a verse from the Holy Quran on your Instagram account which has gone viral. Could you speak a little more in-depth about your post?

We are all under the stresses the virus has caused worldwide. It is hard to remember the blessings when everyday is difficult. I just wanted to share the love of this quote with others, especially many



of my friends who are not acquainted with the beautiful text in the Quran.

■ You traveled to Iran two years ago for Fajr Weightlifting Cup as head of the U.S. delegation and played a role in the launch of a women's development program in the West Asian country, where the sport had previously been a men-only sport. Please talk about the program.

I was in Ahvaz in 2017 for several days where I conducted a women's training and coaching session as well as attending the Fajr Cup. The program had started about eight months prior and I went to show support and to practically assist as much as possible. I really wanted the women weightlifters to know they have a bright future and that there is worldwide support for them. Since then the women have competed at many competitions beginning with the Asian Junior and Youth Championships in 2017. I have since been able to meet again with several of the women and coaches I met at other international championships including the 2018 world championships.

■ You said you would help the Iranian women to compete internationally. For the first time, Iran sent a female team to the IWF World Championships in Thailand in last year's September. Do you see a bright future ahead of the Iranian

women weightlifters?

It is my dream for them to compete internationally at all levels and to be able to witness their successes. I know the success of the men and expect that the women will be of commensurate level soon. They have risen faster than even I expected! I am very happy for them.

■ International Olympic Committee (IOC) is dissatisfied with the sport due to financial corruption and false drug testing. Is there any plan to reform the situation?

As I mentioned before, I am moving the IWF offices to Lausanne. But of course many reforms are required to ensure we can remain an Olympic sport. Regarding allegations, as chair of the Oversight and Integrity Commission, which was created by the Executive Board in January as a response to the allegation, we hired the best and most trusted sports investigation firm in the world. We await their report in June. In the meantime the former President resigned. This has opened up the opportunity to truly reform and reorganize. We have already taken several steps in creating note independence in the doping controls by handing over more power to ITA.

■ Iran has a long history of victories in weightlifting as the country's lifters

have won so many medals in the Olympics. The country boasts 300 professional weightlifters and it shows that weightlifting is very popular in Iran. Do you think Iran can be a role model in the world?

What the IWF needs is clean athletes on the podiums. I have been very happy to see clean athletes from Iran win many more medals since we have started a more serious anti-doping effort. Of course this should be an encouragement to all weightlifters.

■ The world's strongest powerlifter Siamand Rahman passed away 40 days ago due to a heart attack. The professional sport could be dangerous sometimes. As a highly-qualified coach, have you any advice for the athletes?

I am aware of his death and send my condolences. I do not know enough about it though to make any comment about it.

General advice for athletes is to retain a healthy lifestyle past their career. It is very difficult with the demands of life, family, and career. I have difficulties myself staying active and I own a gym. But it is important to take care and keep the discipline one has as an athlete and carry that into one's health and fitness routine.

## Premier League come up with concrete proposals to finish season: report

The English Premier League are eyeing a resumption of the season on June 8, behind closed doors due to the coronavirus pandemic, and reaching a climax on July 27, according to The Times.

The paper claims football chiefs, along with other sports governing bodies, have been holding talks with the British government about when they can resume and at only "approved grounds".

The Premier League has 92 games remaining since it suspended the season on March 13 with Liverpool agonisingly close to their first ever EPL title.

The Times says Premier League bosses shared their idea 'Project Restart' with the shareholders last week.

The matches would be played behind closed doors -- a maximum of 400 people would be permitted to attend including media though only if they tested negative for the virus -- and at selected stadia to limit stretching the limited resources of the medical services.

Extra changing facilities would be introduced to ensure



social distancing measures were in place whilst players would be required to turn up for training individually and already in their kit.

They have also suggested August 22 as the date for the start of the 2020/21 campaign.

The main sticking point, though, remains the lack of tests available.

Should the season be unable to resume -- the Dutch championship was abandoned without promotion or relegation on Friday -- it would be a financial nightmare for the clubs.

Measures being taken to alleviate some of that has seen the EPL link up with DLA Piper -- a law firm that has advised on TV rights deals for the league in the past -- on an emergency loan fund, with a maximum of £10 million (\$12.4 million) per club.

Some clubs have taken measures agreed with their players to ease the financial burden.

Southampton, West Ham United, Sheffield United and Watford have agreed deferrals with their first-team squads while the majority of Arsenal's players have agreed a 12.5 percent wage reduction.

(Source: AFP)

## FIFA to support member associations in response to COVID-19 impact

FIFA will release all operational funding due to Member Associations for the years 2019 and 2020 in the coming days as the first step of a relief plan to assist the football community impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This measure will mean that a total of around \$150 million will be distributed among the 211 national football governing bodies around the world.

"The pandemic has caused unprecedented challenges for the entire football community and, as the world governing body, it is FIFA's duty to be there and support the ones that are facing acute needs," said FIFA President Gianni Infantino.

"This starts by providing immediate financial assistance to our Member Associations, many of which are experiencing severe financial distress. This is the first step of a far-reaching financial relief

plan we are developing to respond to the emergency across the whole football community. Together with our stakeholders, we are assessing the losses and we are working on the most appropriate and effective tools to implement the other stages of this relief plan.

"I would like to thank the chairpersons of the FIFA Development Committee, Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa, and the FIFA Finance Committee, Alejandro Dominguez, for their commitment and urgent approval of these measures by their committees," the FIFA President added.

As part of the measure, all remaining entitlements of Member Associations to operational costs under the Forward 2.0 Program will be released in full for the years 2019 and 2020. In particular, the release of the second instalment of operational costs for 2020, which was originally

due in July, will be paid immediately.

Under normal circumstances, FIFA's Member Associations would have only received the full amount of the contribution upon fulfillment of specific criteria. Instead, FIFA is now transferring this amount as an active support to help safeguard football across all Member Associations.

Concretely, this means that FIFA will release USD 500,000 to each Member Association in the coming days as well as any remaining entitlement for 2019 and 2020.

This immediate financial assistance should be used to mitigate the financial impact of COVID-19 on football in Member Associations, namely to meet financial or operational obligations that they may have towards staff and other third parties. The standard obligations and responsibilities in relation to the use



of these funds as outlined in the Forward 2.0 Regulations remain fully applicable and will be subject to the standard audit and reporting process.

This financial relief plan is possible thanks to the strong financial position that FIFA has been able to consolidate over the past four years. The next stages of the plan are currently being finalized and will be communicated in due course.

## Sardar Azmoun has no shortage of suitors after a superb season

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Four Premier League clubs, Leicester City, West Ham United, Mikel Arteta's Arsenal, and Carlo Ancelotti's Everton, reportedly want Sardar Azmoun.



Sardar Azmoun is more technically gifted than £53 million Italy international Andrea Belotti and ready for a big move this summer, Massimo Carrera has said of the reported Everton, Arsenal and West Ham United target.

A man who shot to fame with Rubin Kazan, earning that famed 'Iranian Messi' moniker, could be on his way to one of Europe's biggest leagues for the very first time.

According to AreaNapoli, West Ham and Leicester City have made contact over a potential £30 million deal for Azmoun. The same publication also mentions Everton and Arsenal as a prospective destination.

As reported by Corriere dello Sport, Sardar is also one of the targets of Napoli who are in search of a forward in the transfer market.

The priority of the Italian giants to strengthen their front-line is Real Madrid striker Luka Jovic.

Napoli are continuing to talk seriously with Real Madrid for the purchase of Luka Jovic. In Spain, however, he disappointed in his debut season with the Los Blancos, who are already thinking of selling him. Luka Jovic is undoubtedly the big name for the Napoli attack, the footballer who most of all teases the blue fantasies," the Corriere dello Sport's report said.

"In addition to Luka Jovic, the Azzurri's sporting director Cristiano Giuntoli is also continuing to monitor Sardar Azmoun, Zenit Saint Petersburg striker." It added.

Azmoun has also been linked with a move to Spain. As reported by the Spanish media, the director of football of Sevilla, Monchi, set his sight on signing Sardar Azmoun, Iranian striker of Zenit St. Petersburg nicknamed "Messi of Iran".

The striker, 25, has already scored 14 goals this year and made seven assists in 29 official games, including six in the UEFA Champions League. Azmoun played the 2018 World Cup in Russia with Iran. Arrived at a very young age in Russia last February, he went from Rubin Kazan to Zenit for 12 million euros.

It remains to be seen, however, which if any of the European suitors win the race for his sought-after signature.

## Branko Ivankovic congratulates Ramadan

**TASNIM** — Former Iran coach Branko Ivankovic has congratulated the Muslims with the start of the holy month of Ramadan.



Ramadan started on Saturday in most countries.

The ex-Team Melli coach has shared a post in his Instagram account, saying "Ramadan Mubarak".

Asian Football Confederation has also sent congratulation on the occasion of the blessed month.

Many international clubs have also congratulated Ramadan.

The Spanish club Barcelona was the first initiator of this step, after sending a message through its official page on Twitter saying: "Barcelona club congratulates you by the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is good and Happy New Year."

The Italian team Milan wrote: "The month of fasting is welcome, the month of good deeds and generosity came, and on this occasion, AC Milan joins the celebration of the holy month with all the Rossoneri, every year, you, family and friends in all health and wellness."

In England, Manchester City wrote: "Manchester City congratulates you on the blessed month of Ramadan ... Happy New Year."

Chelsea team wrote: "Blessed Ramadan for all those who prepare for fasting during the holy month."

And on the United website it was written: "Your nights are good, Ramadan ... and you are so sweet in Ramadan."

## Moharram Navidkia linked with Sepahan

**IRNA** — Former Sepahan midfielder Moharram Navidkia has been linked with a move to the Isfahan-based football team.

Amir Ghalenoei has failed to meet expectations at Sepahan in the last two seasons and the club's officials have reportedly considered Navidkia as his replacement.

Navidkia is a popular face in Isfahan and as a player he has won five Iran Professional League (IPL) titles with Sepahan.

He has also worked as interim coach in Sepahan in 2015.

Navidkia retired from football in 2016 after 16 years playing for the team.



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## GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

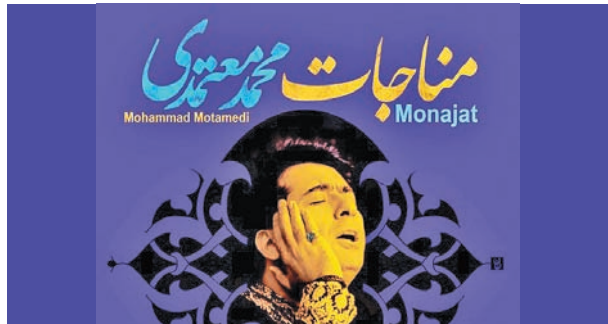
Shunning a person who is attracted by you is a sign of your misfortune, and your inclination towards another who ignores you is a sign of your abjectness.

Imam Ali (AS)

## Mohammad Motamedi releases songs from album “Monajat” to observe Ramadan

**A R T** TEHRAN — Vocalist Mohammad Motamedi has plans to release one prayer on his Instagram page every day with the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan.

He has chosen the poetry of the Persian poet Sadi and the prayers are named “Praise Be to God”.



This image shows the front page of Mohammad Motamedi's Instagram page.

The prayers are selected from Motamedi's album named “Prayers”.

Monajatkhani (prayer reciting) is a style of recitation that has long been practiced during Ramadan and has turned into a major ritual in Ramadan.

## “Mr. Happiness” to come to Iranian homes this weekend

**A R T** TEHRAN — Director Aryan Rezai plans to stage American writer David Mamet's play “Mr. Happiness” online for Iranian theater aficionados on Thursday and Friday.

The short monolog takes place in a 1930s radio station, in which a prim, sincere, advice-to-the-lovelorn personality answers the letters people have written him about their troubles of the heart.

Afshin Hashemi will perform the monolog translated into Persian by Mohammad Monem.

All the money raised by the performances will go to charity at Yarane\_Barekate Mehr, a charity organization supporting female-headed households.

Tickets for the play will be offered on Tiwall on Monday.

“Mr. Happiness” first appeared at the Plymouth Theatre on Broadway in 1978.

## “Spider-Man,” “Doctor Strange,” “Thor” shift release dates

**LOS ANGELES (AP)** — Hollywood studios are shuffling more release dates as a result of the coronavirus, including sequels to “Doctor Strange,” “Spider-Man: Far From Home” and “Into the Spider-Verse.”

Late Friday, both Sony Pictures and The Walt Disney Co. announced updated theatrical release schedules that significantly delay some of their marquee superhero films.

Marvel's “Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness”, the sequel to the 2016 Benedict Cumberbatch film, has been pushed back from November 2021 to March 2022.

Sony said its live-action Spider-Man, the third in the Tom Holland series, is being delayed from July 2021 to November 2021. The animated “Spider-Verse” sequel is now dated for October 2022, back from its original April 2022 release.

Efforts to slow the spread of the coronavirus have resulted in productions being shut down, which has caused a domino effect in the meticulously planned theatrical release calendar all the way into 2022.

But not all the changes announced Friday were delays. Disney said “Thor: Love and Thunder” which will have Natalie Portman taking up the hammer, will be pushed up a week to Feb. 11, 2022.

# “Mate” produced in #Moshahonar movement for home quarantine

**A R T** TEHRAN — Vocalists Salar Aqli and Fazel Jamshidi, and actor Parviz Parastui, members of the nationwide #Moshahonar movement, have released a song named “Mate”.

They joined the movement launched by hundreds of Iranian artists to entertain people during the home quarantine for the coronavirus pandemic.

“We actually felt the need to keep the spirits of people and the healthcare staff up these days. COVID-19 is a tough virus and we are still battling with the disease. I know some may have suffered more financially these days, however, it is a matter of life and death,” Aqli told the Persian service of ISNA on Saturday.

He called the collaboration with Parastui and Jamshidi a good experience and hoped the song would be remembered by the Iranian people.

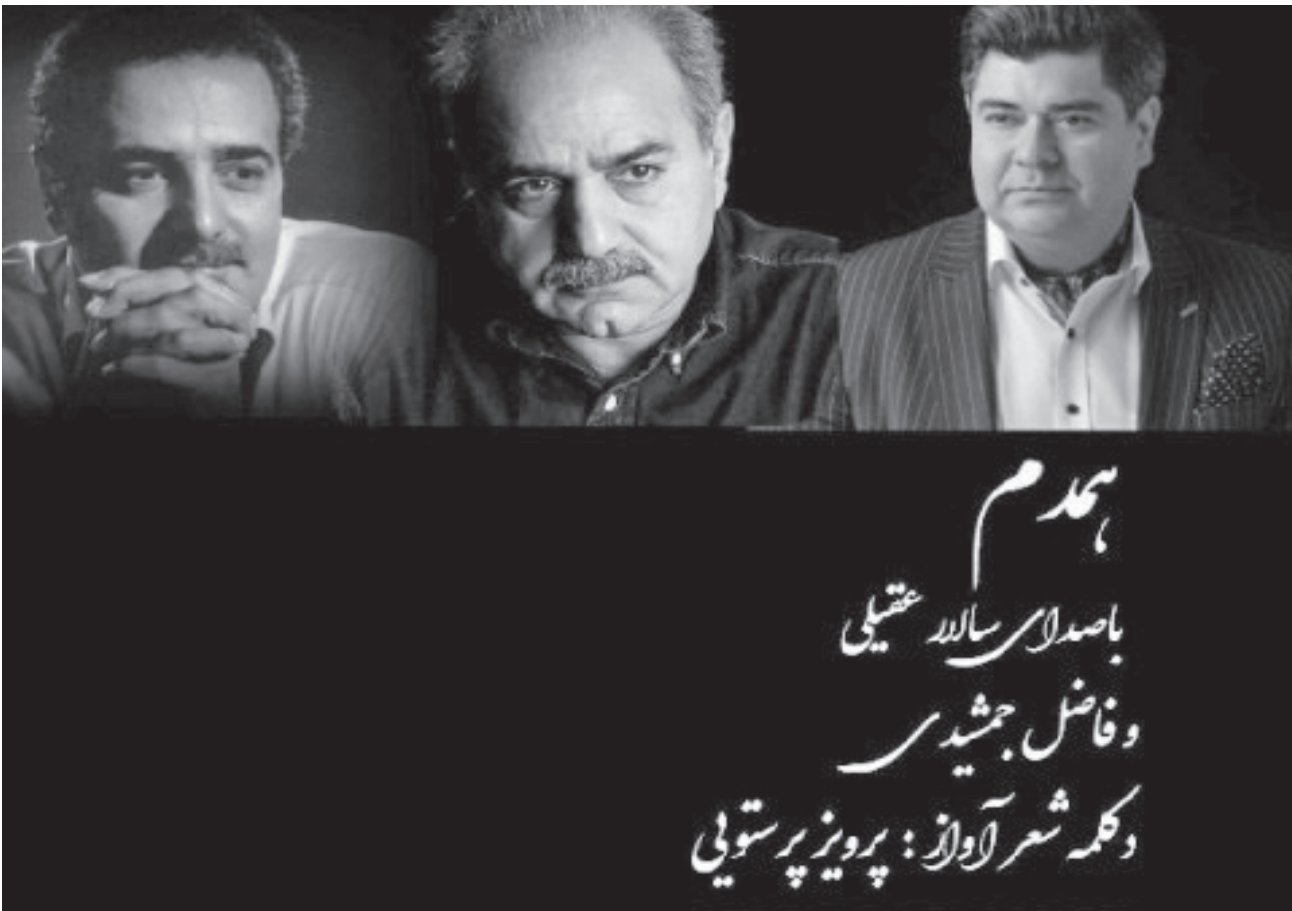
“Parastui enjoys a good voice and his participation as a singer was interesting for me,” he said.

“After the song was released, I received many positive responses from people. I truly must thank the people who always support us. Jamshidi had a great role in the formation of this piece and was the first who proposed the idea. It was a great honor for me to have done this for the people of my country,” he added.

Aqli who performed part of the song said there was no opportunity to record his voice in the studio and that he made use of his cellphone to record his voice.

The song is written by Alireza Bahrami based on a poem by Persian mystic and poet Molana Jalal ad-Din Rumi.

Recording engineer Mohsen Gholami and musicians Alireza Ahmadi, Hossein Rudgar and Roya Baqerzadeh have collaborated in



A poster for the song “Mate” by vocalists Salar Aqli and Fazel Jamshidi, and actor Parviz Parastui.

the performance, while calligrapher Esrafil Shirchi has cooperated in the project.

Hundreds of artists, including thespians,

cinéastes, painters, cartoonists and writers who launched the Moshahonar movement, have announced that they would produce

artworks to showcase on social networks for at least 100 days in order to make the stay at home almost tolerable.

## Children’s writer Susan Taqdis, author of “The Eleventh Step”, dies at 61

**CULTURE** **d e s k** TEHRAN — Some Persian new agencies announced that children's author Susan Taqdis, the writer of the acclaimed story “The Eleventh Step”, died of heart disease at her home in Tehran on Friday. She was 61.

Born in Shiraz, she commenced her career in writing in Kayhan Bacheha, Iran's first children's magazine, by writing the story “My Daddy Was a Thief”.

Taqdis's works were honored at several national literary events. Her story “Did You See a Yellow Nose?” was honored in 2007 at the Parvin Etesami Literary Awards, which are awarded for works by female literati with outstanding achievements in Persian literature.

In 2008, she was honored at Iran's Book of the Year Awards for her “The Eleventh Step” about a lion cub that

never dared to take one more step toward its freedom when the zookeeper forgot to lock its cage's door.

Her other credits include “Do You See the Crimson Too?”, “My Giraffe Is Blue”, “Once Upon a Time”, “Behind the Blue Wall”, “The Life Story of Prophet Noah (AS)”, “The Green Kids” and “The Little Girl and Her Angel”.

“Mrs. Susan Taqdis considered books as the first bricks in the structure of children's mindsets, therefore she tried to lay them properly,” Deputy Culture Minister for Cultural Affairs Mohsen Javadi said in a letter of condolences published on Saturday.

“She wrote for children in magazines and books for years to fill their unblemished minds with words giving an appropriate image of life,” he added.

## Iran’s UNESCO, psychiatric association named actress Motamed-Arya goodwill ambassador

**A R T** **d e s k** TEHRAN — The Iranian Psychiatric Association together with Iran's UNESCO Chair in Health Education have selected actress Fatemeh Motamed-Arya as a Goodwill Ambassador for Mental Health.

Iranian Psychiatric Association's Maryam Rasulian has said that the decision to select the actress as an ambassador was made to draw the public attention to the main issue of mental health, the Persian service of IRNA reported on Saturday.

Rasulian noted that the mental health of people has highly been affected by the drastic changes in social and economic situations of families during the days of battling with the

COVID-19, and that more care and attention is required.

“To achieve a creative and happy society, the mental health of people and the policymakers has been of high importance,” Rasulian added.

Motamed-Arya will act as the ambassador for two years.

In a message released on her Instagram page to commemorate Iran's National Health Week, which was held from April 20 to 26, Motamed-Arya has wished both the Iranian and world medical staff good health, calling them the health heroes.

The actress has been collaborating with the two organizations in the anti-depression campaign named “We Talk”.



Actress Fatemeh Motamed-Arya in an undated photo.

## Frankfurt Book Fair expected to go ahead despite Covid-19 crisis, says Boos

**LONDON (The Bookseller)** -- Frankfurt Book Fair is still expected to go ahead in October despite the coronavirus crisis, its president Juergen Boos has said.

Boos said organizers “cannot yet say” what the fair will look like but the health of those taking part was the organizers' highest priority. He added that a clearer picture would emerge in June.

He said: “Based on the information that is currently available, we expect Frankfurter Buchmesse to take place from October 14 to 18. What Frankfurt's 72nd book fair will look like exactly, we cannot yet say. What is already clear, however, is that it will be a very special event.

“We are incorporating the measures being discussed at the national and state levels into our planning on an ongoing basis, since our highest priority is the health of our exhibitors, trade visitors and the public. We will communicate any concrete developments as soon as they become known. It will probably be possible to provide a clearer picture as of mid-June.”

The coronavirus crisis has already led to the cancellation of key dates in the publishing calendar around the world including the London Book Fair, Bologna Children's Book



Visitors examine books at Frankfurt book fair in Frankfurt, Germany, October 17, 2019. (Reuters/Ralph Orlowski)

Fair and a string of awards ceremonies.

Publishing figures contacted by The Bookseller this week seemed split on whether holding the fair in Frankfurt this autumn was welcome.

Literary agent Peter Cox of Redhammer Management said: “It's possible this might be the death knell of the physical book fair. It would be a shame but for years it hasn't really been necessary to do face-to-face. All the major deals that are announced at Frankfurt and the London Book Fair have been done in advance.”

Curtis Brown chair Jonny Geller, meanwhile, said fairs like London and Frankfurt would have to be more innovative following the crisis and would have to “find clever ways to prove they are useful beyond maintaining personal contacts.” However, Profile publisher Andrew Franklin said he hoped the Frankfurt Book Fair went ahead. He said: “Not having the London Book Fair means it's even more important than usual. We really want to learn from other publishers; gauging their markets, what it's been like, what it's like in Italy and other parts of the world. I really hope it happens. I suspect it's going to be smaller, there are going to be some publishers who won't make it through and people will cut their costs.

“It's not just rights, its sales, all the international booksellers are there, agents are there - it's a very important showcase. It's more important than ever for people to get together, and have a good time there.”

## Locked-down Rolling Stones release new track “Living in a Ghost Town”

**LONDON (Reuters)** — The Rolling Stones gave their fans some satisfaction on Thursday by releasing a new track “Living in a Ghost Town”, part-recorded during the coronavirus lockdown.

The song, powered by a Keith Richards' riff and a chanted refrain, comes with a video showing deserted streets and subway stations in London, Los Angeles, Kyoto and other cities.

“So the Stones were in the studio recording

some new material before the lockdown and there was one song we thought would resonate through the times that we're living in right now,” Mick Jagger said in a statement.

“We've worked on it in isolation. And here it is ... I hope you like it.”

The band said it started recording the track in Los Angeles in 2019. Then, as pandemic restrictions started rolling out across the world, they adjusted some of the lyrics and

added other finishing touches to the mix.

In the video, Jagger is seen singing one tweaked line in a plush, wood-paneled room: “Life was so beautiful then we all got locked down. Feel like a ghost, living in a ghost town.”

Keith Richards said the track had been meant for a new album, “then shit hit the fan ... Mick and I decided this one really needed to go to work right now.”

The release comes less than a week after the band's four members performed “You Can't Always Get What You Want” from their living rooms via a video conference call - part of the global “One World: Together At Home” broadcast brought together by pop icon Lady Gaga.

A string of stars have been heading online to keep their fans entertained during the lockdown.