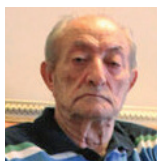




Iraq, U.S. will start talks on exit of forces in June **3**



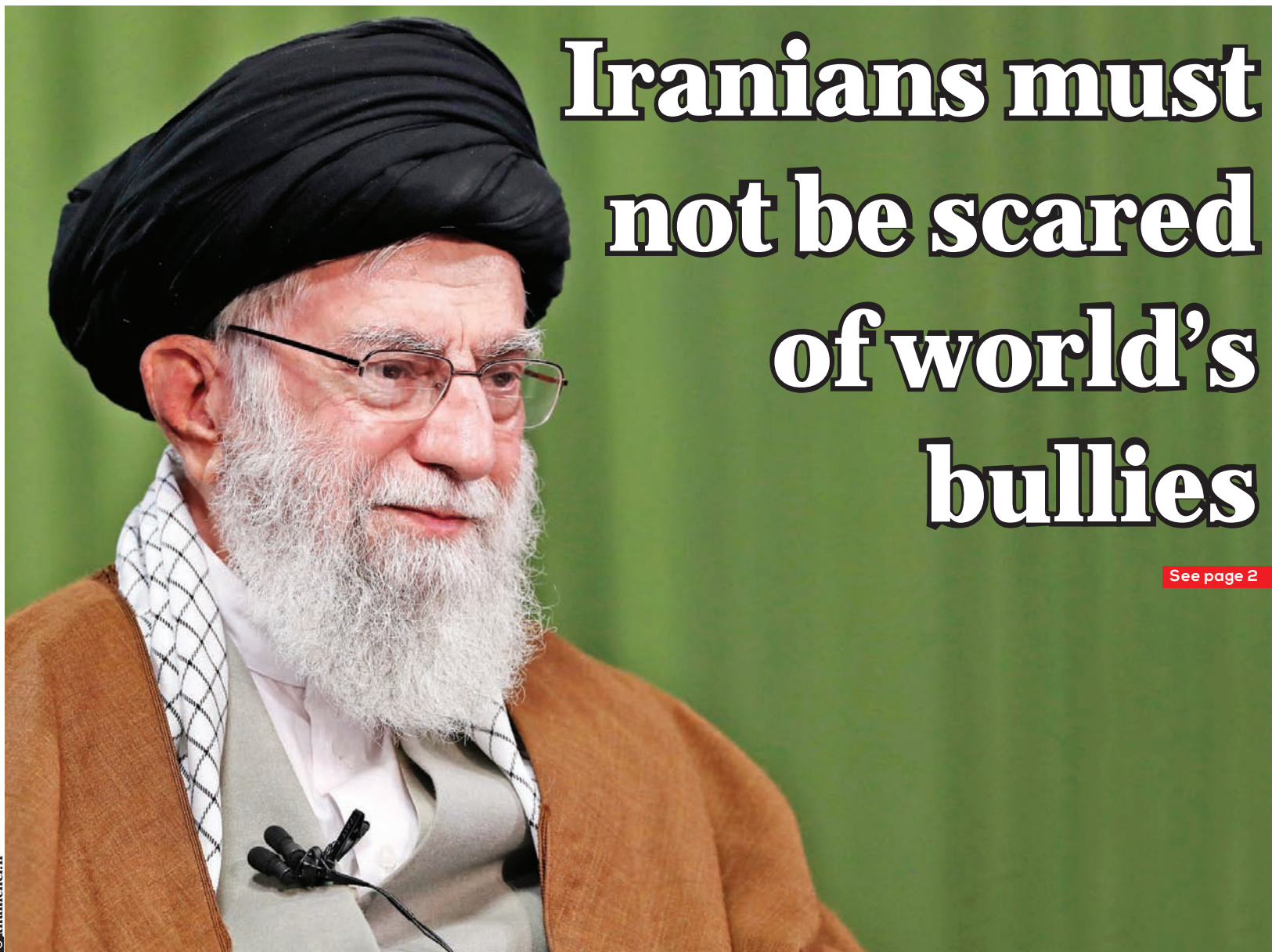
TPPH to start National Power Plant project this year **5**



Former Iran basketballer Salabi passes away **11**



Pol Literary Agency sends 3 Persian books to Croatia for translation **12**



Iranians must not be scared of world's bullies

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West Bank annexation in line with 'deal of century': Iran

TEHRAN — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi has strongly denounced the Zionist regime's move to expand its illegal settlements and annex parts of the occupied West Bank.

In a statement on Sunday, Mousavi described the annexation as a violation of international law and a part of the "shameful plan" proposed by U.S. President Donald Trump,

known as the "deal of the century", according to the Foreign Ministry website.

Just recently the Zionist regime's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and his main rival Benny Gantz signed a coalition agreement that includes a clause to advance plans to annex parts of the West Bank, including Israeli settlements, starting on July 1. **→3**

Senior businesswoman dismisses U.S. claim that Iran doesn't need IMF loan

By Ebrahim Follahi

TEHRAN — It has been nearly two months since Iran requested the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for financial support through the fund's Rapid Financing Initiative (RFI), but so far no help nor a clear answer has been received.

In early March, IMF announced the allocation of \$50 billion funding, under the emergency RFI program, for helping countries affected by the coronavirus

pandemic; and Iran, as one of the major countries affected by the disease, immediately applied for a \$5-billion loan.

As the processing of Iran's loan application has been prolonged over the normal required time and rumor has it that the IMF has rejected Iran's application, a senior official at the fund announced that the IMF is actively consulting with member states and all requests must be investigated based on standard IMF policies. **→4**

'World's longest qanat' under restoration in central Iran

TEHRAN — A restoration project has been commenced on sections of Zarch Qanat in central Iran, which had been harmed by recent flash floods. Widely known as the world's longest subterranean aqueduct, the qanat is stretched some 80 km across Yazd province.

"The main water well of the world's longest aqueduct, which is harmed by

rising water levels, is being drained in a project supervised by the cultural heritage department general of Yazd province," ISNA reported on Thursday.

"Due to the recent downpours and floods in Yazd, lots of mud entered this global [UNESCO-tagged] aqueduct and caused the closure of three shafts and the rise of water in it." **→8**



ARTICLE
Payman Yazdani
Political analyst

Significance of IRGC comdr. remarks, review of Trump's bluffs and setbacks

Commander of Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami along with IRGC Navy Commander Admiral Alireza Tangsiri and a group of deputies from the IRGC headquarter visited Naze'at region as well as Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs on Thursday morning.

Referring to Iran's strategic move of launching a military satellite into space on Wednesday, Major General Salami said, "The significant message regarding the successful satellite launch is that we are determined to develop our territorial defense power on land, sea, and space. We will never stop."

Reacting to threats by U.S. officials such as Donald Trump who ordered U.S. troops to attack Iranian forces if they harass U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf, Salami noted, "We will target any U.S. combat unit which jeopardizes our security in the Persian Gulf."

He further referred to the recent remarks by U.S. officials and emphasized, "We announce to Americans that we are fully committed to defending our national security, water borders, maritime interests and the safety of shipping and our forces at sea. Any action will be met with our decisive, effective, and swift response."

Examining the history of U.S. behavior in the region towards Iran and the Resistance Axis suggests that their threats are nothing but a bluff and psychological warfare, and whenever Americans are convinced that their ill-considered action will be responded strongly, they have tried to withdraw from their previous threats and statements. Here are just a few of their retreats over the past year:

On June 20, 2019, the IRGC aerospace force identified and destroyed a U.S. RQ-4 Global Hawk UAV which had entered Iranian airspace. Following this move, the U.S. threatened to target several Iranian centers. But after the White House made sure that any ill-considered action would provoke a strong reaction from Iran, U.S. president took a humanitarian stance and claimed that no one had been killed in the Iranian attack and he did not want anyone to be killed in the U.S. attack. Therefore, He refused to respond. **→7**

Home quarantine good opportunity for growth: trumpeter Luca Aquino

By Manijeh Rezapoor

TEHRAN — Italian jazz trumpeter Luca Aquino has said that people and artists and musicians, in particular, can consider the home quarantine a good opportunity to develop their skills.

"These days may provide a good opportunity for artistic growth but perhaps the resulting artwork will not be professional productions, because everything has stopped and who knows when it will return," Aquino told the Tehran Times in a recent interview.

"These days of home quarantine I'm studying a lot. I am studying music techniques but I am also composing a little. I try to take care of the sound and keep the facial muscles in shape. The trumpet is a difficult instrument and you must always keep in shape.

We musicians are fortunate that our work matches our passion. Jazz and music is my whole life," he added.

He called the COVID-19 pandemic a really horrible situation and said "Everything has slowed down and has almost stopped. It is like a nightmare, but at the moment, we can only stay in our homes and wait," he said.

He said that there are many people at risk who work in poorly protected environments but for musicians, especially those who make their livings on concerts, it is a deadly stop.

He mentioned that many musicians are uploading music on the web to cheer friends and fans as much as possible.

He noted that in his country, which went through difficult days at the beginning of the spread of the new virus, most Italians have responded

well to the government's restrictive measures.

However, he called it a totally unexpected situation and added, "No one knows what will happen next."

He said that he has plans to resume playing on stage as he did before.

"Traveling and meeting new people and cultures will be the other thing I will do. My last concert was in Tehran during the Fajr Music Festival. It was really amazing: amazing audience, theater, people. It seems like a lifetime ago. It is so nice to have a live audience ahead. Thinking of playing only for social media makes me sad," he concluded.

Aquino, together with his pianist friend Fabio Giachino and double bassist Dario Miranda gave a performance during the 35th Fajr Music Festival at Vahdat Hall in Tehran in February.

UAE-backed separatists break with Saudi-sponsored militants, declare self-rule in southern Yemen

UAE-backed separatists have broken with once-allied Saudi-sponsored militants in Yemen, saying they will establish a self-ruled administration in the war-torn country's southern regions.

In a statement released early on Sunday, the so-called Southern Transitional Council (STC), which is supported by the United Arab Emirates, declared emergency rules in Yemen's port city of Aden and all the southern governorates, Press TV reported.

"The Southern Transitional Council announces a self-administration rule in the south, as of midnight Saturday, April 25th 2020," the STC said.

It also accused the Riyadh-backed government of former Yemeni president Abd Rabbuh

Mansur Hadi of corruption and mismanagement.

Mohammed al-Hadhrami, the foreign minister of the self-proclaimed Hadi regime, described the STC's announcement as a "complete withdrawal" from a power-sharing settlement signed between the two sides last year.

"The announcement by the so-called transitional council of its intention to establish a southern administration is a resumption of its armed insurgency... and an announcement of its rejection and complete withdrawal from the Riyadh agreement," he said in a statement posted by the ministry on Twitter.

"The so-called transitional council will bear alone the dangerous and catastrophic conse-

quences for such an announcement," he added.

Last week, the STC warned of an "imminent war" with Saudi-sponsored militants in Yemen.

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

In August 2019, heavy fighting erupted between pro-Hadi elements and the southern separatists when the latter took Aden, the temporary seat of Hadi's regime.

The Aden clashes came weeks after the UAE announced a surprise plan to withdraw part of its troops from Yemen in a major blow to its coalition allies. **→10**



Gavkhuni wetland displays colorful return of flamingos

TEHRAN — Gavkhuni wetland in the central province of Isfahan, which was replenished last year, is hosting hundreds of flamingos for the second year after years of dryness, IRNA reported on Sunday.

Stretching to 47,000 hectares, Gavkhuni is a salt marsh with an average depth of about 1 m. which is located on the terminal basin of the Zayandeh-rud river. **→9**



REPORT
Farnak Bakhtiari
Tehran Times journalist

Iran taking final step toward malaria elimination

Iran has not had any indigenous cases of malaria for two years in a row, and if the country's passes this year with no indigenous cases, the World Health Organization will grant it a certificate of malaria eradication, Ahmad Raeisi, head of the Malaria control department of the Ministry of Health, has stated.

On World Malaria Day (April 25), WHO joined the Roll Back Malaria (RBM) Partnership to End Malaria in promoting "Zero malaria starts with me", a grassroots campaign that aims to keep malaria high on the political agenda, mobilize additional resources, and empower communities to take ownership of malaria prevention and care.

Between 2000 and 2014, the number of malaria-related deaths fell by 40 percent worldwide, from an estimated 743,000 to 446,000.

Pointing out that the prevalence of coronavirus has made it difficult for healthcare professionals around the world to continue so, Raeisi said: "Of course, our prediction based on our observations is that this year we will be able to pass without indigenous cases of malaria and in 2021 we will be able to celebrate the elimination of malaria in the country."

There are 20 countries in the world that are moving towards the elimination of malaria; in the Eastern Mediterranean region, Iran is at the forefront of this issue, followed by Saudi Arabia, he highlighted.

He went on to say that a vaccine is being tested in three African countries, which is by no means a vaccine for countries such as Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and India, where major cases are reported malaria parasite.

The vaccine is only used to treat malaria falciparum and is designed to reduce mortality; fortunately, the vaccine has been well-received in African countries, but it only reduces the incidence of malaria falciparum deaths, while more than 90 percent of the cases in these countries are Malaria parasite, which naturally cannot be treated by the vaccine, he explained. **→9**

U.S. sanctions threaten Iranians' lives: university professor

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** - Robin Ramcharan, lecturer at the Webster University of Thailand and Executive Director of the Bangkok-based Asia Centre, has said that continuation of the United States sanctions against Iran when the country is fighting the coronavirus threatens the Iranian people's lives.



"The international community is duty bound to suspend or totally lift sanctions in crises such as this pandemic," Ramcharan told ILNA in an interview published on Sunday.

Pointing to the U.S. action in impeding the International Monetary Fund to give Iran a loan, the executive director of the Bangkok-based Asia Centre said Washington's move is contrary to humanitarian spirit.

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 International Monetary Fund to cope with the coronavirus crisis.

Josep Borrell, the EU's foreign policy chief, on Wednesday criticized the U.S. for blocking an Iranian request for a loan from the IMF, 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 banker Abdolnaser Hemmati wrote on his Instagram page a message in Farsi which 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."

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.

Iran has called U.S. sanctions "economic and medical terrorism".

In late March, Foreign Minister Zarif said U.S. medical terrorism against Iran "even exceeds what would be permissible on the battlefield".

The Trump administration has slapped the harshest ever sanctions in history against Iran. It has introduced a total ban on Iran's oil export with the aim of strangulating the Iranian economy.

These illegal moves are taking place while Iran is being hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic, killing more than 5,700 people and infecting over 90,000.

Rouhani says religious sites will be reopened in 'white' risk zones

'The country will be divided into three risk zones: white, yellow and red'

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani says Iran will be divided into three risk zones based on the number of COVID-19 infections and fatalities, adding that religious sites could reopen in areas designated as "white".

Speaking during a meeting of the National Headquarters for Managing and Fighting the Coronavirus in Tehran on Sunday, Rouhani said the Health Ministry would draw up a map of "white," "yellow" and "red" risk zones in the country.

In the white areas, religious sites, mosques and holy shrines would be allowed to reopen and hold Friday prayers under the health guidelines issued to curtail the coronavirus pandemic.

"Tomorrow, if we were told that the city of Mashhad is white, i.e. the Health Ministry came to the conclusion that it would be white for two weeks, then the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS) would reopen based on the protocols the ministry declares," he said.

The Health Ministry, he added, should specify the date on which the white risk zones - that are now about 127 counties - can reopen mosques and hold Friday prayers while observing the health protocols.

"This is the first step in opening up religious sites that are of great interest to the people, and God willing, we hope that the white areas will expand day by day and we will have better conditions while the people observe the protocols", Rouhani said.

He also called on Iranians to help the economically vulnerable groups during Ramadan.

"Of course, our people have always come to the scene whenever there have been floods, earthquakes and other problems. Now, the month of Ramadan is also one of those occasions during which people should step forth and help in the face of hardships and problems."

Iran has been among the countries hardest hit by the highly contagious virus that first showed up in China in late December 2019 before spreading across the globe.

Illegal U.S. sanctions have hampered the virus fight in Iran, which reported its first COVID-19 infection cases in late February.

On Sunday, Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said the death toll from the new coronavirus outbreak in Iran had risen by 60 in the past 24 hours to 5,710.

The total number of diagnosed cases of the new coronavirus in Iran has reached 90,481, he said, adding 69,657 patients have also recovered and been discharged from hospital.

(Source: Press TV)

Iran, Qatar highlight importance of inclusive government in Afghanistan

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, the Qatari foreign minister, have highlighted the importance of an inclusive government in Afghanistan.

In a phone conversation on Saturday, the officials discussed the latest developments in Afghanistan and Iran's efforts in line with political agreement in Afghanistan and formation of an inclusive government in the country.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Iranian analyst Pir Mohammad Molazehi is of the opinion that prevention of extra-regional interference will guarantee peace in Afghanistan.

"Iran wants a more active role by influential regional players and prevention of extra-regional players' interferences. Iran believes neighbors of Afghanistan can guarantee peace in the country," Molazehi told IRNA in an interview published on April 18.

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

"Talks to settle political crisis in

Afghanistan have started. It seems that Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani have reached preliminary agreement in the way that 50 percent of the government officials be appointed by Abdullah and 50 percent by Ghani," he stated.

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

In an interview with IRNA published on April 15, he said that cooperation among all Afghan political groups is required to end the political deadlock in the country.

He noted that Iran supports such approach. Nozar Shafiei, also an expert on international affairs, has said that Ghani has no way but to reach an agreement with Abdullah.

"If he [Ghani] does not understand this situation, a continuation of developments will be harmful to him," he told ISNA in an interview published on April 16.

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

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

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

Ayatollah Khamenei: Iranians must not be scared of world's bullies

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei suggested late on Saturday that the Iranian people must not be afraid of the United States and other bullying powers.

"Fear of the United States will have bitter results. In the past years, we have witnessed that some of our statesmen's fear of the United States caused difficult problems for them,"

he said at a Quran recitation ceremony which was held through videoconference at the presence of a number of outstanding Holy Quran reciters.

The Leader said that "not being afraid of the enemy and standing strongly against him" is an important order of Quran.

It has been noticed in the course of history that those who have feared great powers they have faced "tough and bitter" difficulties,

Ayatollah Khamenei remarked.

"Today's situation of certain Islamic governments and their humiliation by the cruel powers are the result of their fear of the enemies of Islam," the Leader regretted.

Ayatollah Khamenei mentioned "not trusting or turning to the oppressors", "the observance of justice and fairness in life," and "not betraying a trust" as other orders of Islam.

The Leader attached great importance to obeying the practical guidelines of Quran as the only way to save humanity from cruelty, discrimination, war, insecurity, depression of values and to establish security, health and welfare.

The holy Quran instructed human beings to use their wealth and power for the development of other humans' lives and help the needy people, the Leader said.

IRGC Ground Force to get Fotros drone

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Defense Ministry plans to deliver the Fotros drone to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Force in the near future.

"We have serious and good interaction with the Defense Ministry in this respect and we have held expert level meetings with the ministry. We have discussed the features of the drone," Colonel Akbar Karimloo, commander of the IRGC Ground Force's drone division, told the Tasnim news agency in an interview published on Sunday.

Karimloo also said that the Defense Ministry is upgrading another drone named Mohajer-6 which conforms to international standards.

He noted that the drone has greatly enhanced the IRGC Ground Force's capabilities in patrol missions and combat operations along northwestern and southeastern borders.

Brigadier General Aziz Nasirzadeh, the commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF), said on April 19 that Iran is among the top five countries in manufacturing drones.

"We are among the top regional countries in manufacturing drones and using unmanned aircrafts," Nasirzadeh



told a press conference.

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

Iran's Army took delivery of a "massive number" of reconnaissance and combat drones on April 18.

Defense Minister Amir Hatami announced that a "massive

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

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

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

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

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

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

Zarif, UN chief say it's necessary to send aid to Yemen

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres held a phone conversation on Sunday discussing the necessity to send humanitarian aid to the war-stricken Yemen, especially as the country is being hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

For this purpose, the two top officials

highlighted, it is needed to open the Yemeni borders and also protect security of borders and ports.

Guterres also welcomed Iran's efforts for a truce in Yemen and pushing for start of political talks between the warring sides in the country.

In another telephone conversation on April 12, Zarif and Guterres discussed

regional developments, especially in Yemen.

Zarif expressed Iran's support for dialogue to settle regional issues, noting that the Yemen crisis does not have a military solution.

He added that a consistent ceasefire can be a good start for the political resolution of the ongoing conflict in the country.

In April 2015, Zarif submitted a letter to

Ban Ki-moon, then UN secretary general, outlining Iran's four-point peace plan for Yemen.

The plan calls for an immediate ceasefire and end of all foreign military attacks, humanitarian assistance, a resumption of broad national dialogue and establishment of an inclusive national unity government.

Iran's launch of military satellite within UN charter: senior Pakistani security expert

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Maria Sultan, a senior Pakistani security expert, has said the launch of military satellite by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps is within the charter of the United Nations.

She told IRNA in an interview published on Sunday that the launch conforms to Article 51 of the UN charter which guarantees Iran's right to self-defense.

The IRGC 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 UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

"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 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 and develop nuclear weapons.

Also on Friday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said the position of France and Britain on the launch of the 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 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. So, Iran's space program is for defensive objectives and has not been designed for other purposes," Mousavi explained.

U.S. Treasury blocks, seizes domains of Iranian media outlets

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — The U.S. Treasury Department has blocked and seized the .com domain of the Iran newspaper and other Iranian media outlets in its latest wave of anti-Iran measures.

Mahdi Shafiei, the Iran newspaper's managing director, said on Saturday that legal efforts were underway to take back the domain.

Shafiei said in the meantime that the newspaper's website can be accessed via "Irannewspaper.ir".

The newspaper's .com domain was seized by the Treasury Department's Florida-based "OFAC Holding".

According to Deutsche Welle, the .com domains of some other Iranian websites including the Iran Daily, Al Vefagh, Iran Varzeshi and Iran Sepid have also been blocked and seized by the OFAC Holding.

In a statement on Sunday, Iran's Foreign Ministry strongly denounced the U.S. Treasury's hostile measure, describing it as a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and freedom of expression.

"The [U.S.] regime's act of silencing the alternative media movement has reduced America to the main violator of the law-based international order," it added.

Mohammad Marandi, a professor at the University of Tehran, criticized the "Trump regime" for silencing Iranian websites and commentators including himself.

"Western corporate/state media will be indifferent, because it's only their free-



dom that matters," he said in a tweet on Saturday.

"When my FB/Insta accounts were disabled & the US State Dept banned me from AUB campus, all western media contacts stayed silent," he added.

On Sunday, Marandi also criticized the "Obama regime", saying, "The move to silence Iranian voices began with the Obama regime, when all Iranian/Iranian affiliated TV channels were sanctioned & blocked from communications satellites."

"They were mostly in Persian & infinitely small in number compared to western media," he tweeted, underlining that "Trump is just more crude".

Back in January, the .com domain of Fars news agency went offline worldwide due to U.S. sanctions.

In a post on its Twitter account at the time, Fars said access to its .com domain had been blocked upon the U.S. Treasury's order.

Internet users trying to access farsnews.com also found only a blank screen, along with a message stating "farsnews.com's server IP address could not be found."

The news agency said it had received an email from its server company, which "explicitly said that the blockage is due to an order by the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) and its

inclusion in the list of Specially Designated Nationals (SDN)."

However, Fars can still be accessed through its .ir domain.

U.S.-based giant tech companies such as Google, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter also have a history of targeting Iranian accounts, including those belonging to major broadcasters.

In December 2019, Google blocked access to Press TV and Hispan TV's official YouTube accounts without any prior notice.

Since Donald Trump became the president of the United States in January 2017, Washington has ramped up anti-Iran measures. Trump adopted a "maximum pressure" policy against Iran later on, after withdrawing from the historic 2015 Iran nuclear deal in May 2018.

The U.S. government has since targeted Iranian officials and organizations with vicious sanctions.

Back in April 2019, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) was black-listed by the U.S. as a "foreign terrorist organization". In retaliation, the Iranian Supreme National Security Council named the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) a terrorist organization.

In June 2019, Trump announced new sanctions against Iran, targeting office of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and top commanders of the IRGC.

In July 2019, the U.S. Treasury Department said it was imposing sanctions on Zarif for acting on behalf of Ayatollah Khamenei.

Zarif holds phone talks with Iraqi, Omani foreign ministers

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif held separate phone talks on Sunday with his Iraqi and Omani counterparts about bilateral relations and the latest developments in the region.



In the talks with Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohamed Ali Al-Hakim, the two diplomats congratulated each other's nations on the start of the holy month of Ramadan. They also discussed various issues including Tehran-Baghdad ties, the latest political developments in Iraq and the region, and the fight against the novel coronavirus. Tasnim reported.

Zarif and Oman's Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah also talked about the latest developments in Tehran-Muscat ties, regional issues, and joint efforts in the battle with COVID-19.

Prior to talks with the two counterparts, Zarif and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres held a telephone conversations on the need to send humanitarian aid to the war-stricken Yemen, which is also facing the coronavirus pandemic.

Iraq, U.S. will start talks on exit of forces in June: military spokesman

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — The spokesman for the commander-in-chief of the Iraqi armed forces has revealed that Baghdad and Washington will start talks on the exit of U.S. forces from Iraq in June, an Iraqi newspaper reported on Sunday.

In an interview with the Al Sabaah newspaper, Major General Abdul Karim Khalaf said in line with a resolution by the Iraqi parliament to remove U.S. forces from Iraq the two countries will start detailed talks in June on a complete removal of U.S. forces based on a time schedule.

Khalaf pointed to a recent letter by the U.S. ambassador to interim Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, saying in line with the letter a comprehensive dialogue will take place on the exit of U.S. forces from Iraq.

The spokesman added that even with the implementation of the removal of U.S. forces, Iraq and the U.S. will maintain their security ties in areas of training forces and exchange of experiences.

In the future talks, the major general added, economic, political, and security relationship between Iraq and the U.S. will be discussed in line with the Baghdad-Washington strategic agreement.

Following the assassination of top Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) deputy commander Abu-Mahdi al-Muhandis in a terrorist attack by the U.S. military on June 3 in Baghdad's international airport, the Iraqi parliament voted for a resolution on January 5 tasking the government to order the expulsion of U.S. forces from Iraq.

Under a pressure by resistance forces, political groups and the Iraqi public opinion, the U.S. has been evacuating some military bases in Iraq. On April 8, Abdul Mahdi had revealed the content of a letter by the U.S. State Department in which the exit of U.S. forces from Iraq had been raised in comprehensive talks with Baghdad in the future.

The U.S. embassy in Baghdad had formally submitted the letter to Abdul Mahdi.

Earlier, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had also said in a statement that negotiations will start with Iraq in mid-June based on the strategic relationship between the two countries.

Envoy underlines broadening ties with Bosnia-Herzegovina

TEHRAN (FNA) — Iranian Ambassador to Sarajevo Mahmoud Heydari in a phone call with Bosnian Foreign Minister Bisera Turkovic stressed expanding bilateral relations.

Mahmoud Heydari congratulated Bisera Turkovic, the Bosnian government and nation on coming of the blessed month of Ramadan and wished them success and wellbeing, while underscoring mutual relations.

Bisera Turkovic, for her part felicitated the Iranian envoy on the arrival of Ramadan and thanked Iran and the Iranian medical community for their efforts in the battle against coronavirus and hoped that the Iranian nation would overcome the disease outbreak very soon.

Both sides focused on the promotion of mutual cooperation and exchange of each other's experiences in combating COVID-19.

Heydari had earlier sent congratulatory messages on Friday to the chairman of the presidential council and the head of the Islamic community in Bosnia on the arrival of Ramadan.

In relevant events on Saturday, Iranian First Vice-President Eshaq 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.

U.S. urges UN to renew Iran arms embargo

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Washington has called on the United Nations Security Council to extend its arms embargo on Iran, which will otherwise expire in October.

Citing the Islamic Republic's recent satellite launch, Pompeo said in a statement on Saturday that Tehran should not be allowed to buy and sell conventional weapons.

On Wednesday, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) successfully launched Iran's first military satellite into the orbit.

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

Pompeo pointed to the announcement, claiming it showed that Iran's space program was in fact "neither peaceful nor entirely civilian".

He claimed that the technology used to launch the satellite was compatible with that used to launch ballistic missiles, saying "Iran's dangerous missile programs" need to be constrained.

He further called on the European Union to "sanction those individuals and entities working on Iran's missile programs."

He also claimed that lifting the sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic may give rise to "violence" in West Asia.

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



Tehran will end in October 2020.

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

Russian Foreign Ministry's Department for Nonproliferation and Arms Control Director Vladimir Ermakov said in February that the UN Security Council was not discussing the possibility to extend the arms embargo imposed on Iran.

"I can assure you that there is no official discussion on reviewing the UN Security Council's Resolution 2231 either at the Security Council or at any other platform," Ermakov said, when asked whether there were any talks on possibly extending the embargo.

"The above-mentioned resolution, which, I would like to note, envisions an authorization-based procedure for delivering weapons and military equipment to Iran and from Iran,... does not actually provide a mechanism or even an option to extend it," Ermakov added.

Last week, Pompeo made similar accusations, saying, "The arms embargo on Iran — the world's leading state sponsor of terror — expires six months from today. The UN Security Council (UNSC) must extend the embargo before Iran's violence escalates and they start a new arms race in the Middle East (West Asia). The clock is ticking."

"In the last year, Iran fired ballistic missiles at its neighbors, mined and captured oil tankers, smuggled weapons into conflict zones, and shot down a civilian passenger jet. We can't risk Iran buying more advanced weapons and transferring their arsenal to irresponsible actors," he said in a tweet.

Following the satellite launch on Wednesday, Pompeo said that "Iran needs to be held accountable", claiming that it was not consistent with the resolution.

Reacting to Pompeo's remarks, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said neither the United States nor its European allies, with their "flimsy" misreading of the landmark nuclear deal, were allowed to "lecture" the Islamic Republic on its missile program.

"Iran neither has nukes nor missiles DESIGNED to be capable of carrying such horrific arms," the top Iranian diplomat said in a Twitter post on Friday.

West Bank annexation in line with 'deal of century': Iran

1→ Mousavi said such illegal measures violate international law and threaten regional peace and security, and called on the United Nations and the other international circles to act against such moves within the framework of their duties and responsibilities.

Mousavi also deplored the Zionist regime's abuse of the current circumstances in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, saying, "Alongside the battle with coronavirus, the oppressed people of Palestine are struggling against other viruses such as occupation, blockade and sanctions."

The spokesman further asked the international organizations and assemblies and the world countries to help the Palestinian people and not allow the oppressed people of Palestine to be displaced from their homes once again.

The Palestinian territories belong to the Palestinian people, Mousavi underlined, noting, "The Zionist regime is a usurper and occupier regime, and the only solution to the Palestinian crisis is holding a referendum among the main inhabitants of that territory and formation of an independent Palestinian



government with Bait al-Muqaddas as its capital."

Defying an international outcry, Trump in late January announced the general provisions of the plan dubbed 'the deal of the century' at the White House with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at his side.

All Palestinian groups have unanimously rejected the deal which gives Jerusalem al-Quds the status of "Israel's

undivided capital" and authorizes further Israeli annexations in the occupied West Bank and the Jordan Valley.

Trump's deal gave rise to a storm of indignation and opposition among people and politicians as well as international organizations right from the start.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said the proposal put forward by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei with regard to Palestine

is the "most reasonable and practical solution" to the Palestinian issue.

The easiest way is to hear the voice of all Palestinians, including Muslims, Jews and Christians, who should determine the future of Palestine in a democratic process, Zarif said in February.

He also said that the U.S. has lost the opportunity to participate in the process of solving the Palestinian issue by presenting the plan.

Ignoring the Palestinian rights and condoning the usurpation of the Palestinian lands, the U.S. has no place in this respect and it is only the Palestinian people who should determine their own future, Zarif said.

The United Nations and the European Union have also warned Israel not to annex parts of the occupied West Bank, Al Jazeera reported on Friday.

The UN's special Middle East envoy Nickolay Mladenov on Thursday said such a move would be a "devastating blow" to the internationally-backed two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as the EU said annexing Palestinian territory "would constitute a serious violation of international law".

Police bust 415 kg of narcotics in southeastern Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) — Iran's anti-narcotics police forces of Sistan-Baluchestan province have managed to capture 415 kilograms of drugs in an armed clash in Saravan region, bordering Pakistan.

Commander of Sistan-Baluchestan Border Guards Second Brigadier General Mohammad Mollashahi broke the news on Sunday, noting that following comprehensive intelligence activities, the police forces traced the haul of the narcotics, which was mainly constituted of opium in a Peugeot sedan trying to transport the drugs into the central parts of the country.



Two offenders were also captured during the operation, he added.

The Islamic Republic has been actively fighting drug trades originating from Afghanistan in the past four decades, despite its high economic and human costs. The country has spent more than hundreds of millions of dollars on sealing its borders and preventing the transit of narcotics destined for European, Arab and Central Asian countries.

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

Details of plan for privatization of state-owned enterprises announced

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The executive regulations of the budget plan of the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 19) regarding the privatization of state-owned enterprises was referred to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs for implementation, Tasnim news agency reported on Sunday.

As reported, the decision in this regard was made during a cabinet meeting on April 5, in which the Finance and Economic Affairs Ministry was authorized to offer the shares of some government-owned companies and enterprises, however the capability and competency of the candidates should be assessed beforehand.

The mentioned ministry is obliged to hand over all the revenues



gained from the offerings to the government in order to be used as part of the current year's budget incomes.

In its planned budget for the previous Iranian year (ended on March 19), the Iranian government had expected to earn some 106 trillion rials (about \$2.5 billion) of income from divesting shares of state-run companies to the private sector.

The plan was set to continue in the current calendar year to offset some of the budget deficit.

In early March, Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejjasand said offering the shares of state-owned companies, which are planned to be privatized, would be sped up.

He further highlighted that Iran's stock market is reaching its real status, adding, "People are gradually getting acquainted with the capital market's potential and welcoming it."

Dejjasand had previously said that the government should amend its policies and methods of setting the prices and transferring the shares in the process of privatization.

In Iran, implementation of privatization plan aimed at more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on implementation of the general policies of the Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

The government envisioned a large privatization program in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year. Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

Downsizing the government is on the agenda, but a number of factors has been hindering privatization trend in the country, among them government's high interference in the management of the transferred companies is a challenging one.

China retains policy room to shore up growth

China retains ample policy room to shore up the virus-hit economy amid sustained epidemic control measures, officials with multilateral development banks (MDBs) said.

China has so far shied away from supporting consumers directly, although there have been some noteworthy local pilots in this regard, said Martin Raiser, World Bank country director for China, in an interview with Xinhua, believing that there may be room to expand such support.

In particular, China's social protection system could be expanded and modernized to provide better support for the poor and vulnerable, which would also boost consumption, Raiser said.



China has room for increasing targeted investment in non-traditional infrastructure, he said. The country's policy makers reacted early to mitigate the economic fallout of COVID-19, Raiser said, noting that the country has provided additional liquidity to the market and granted targeted support to small and medium-sized enterprises as well as companies operating in critical supply chains.

China's economy shrank by 6.8 percent year on year in the first quarter (Q1) of this year as the novel coronavirus epidemic deals a huge blow to economic activity.

The deep contraction in Q1 was expected, Raiser said, adding that economic growth in the country for the rest of the year will largely depend on external demand as well as the effectiveness of domestic policy response.

Dominik Peschel, head of the economics unit for the Asian Development Bank resident mission in China, noted that China has registered recovery in industrial production in March, which was surprising.

Official data showed that the industrial output in China edged down 1.1 percent year on year in March, narrowing by 12.4 percentage points from the drop in the first two months.

"This suggests that the resumption of work in industry has progressed well overall," Peschel said.

The country has acted decisively to limit the adverse impact of the COVID-19 shock on the domestic economy, Peschel said, adding that further temporary measures to stabilize jobs, income and consumption would support the recovery of the economy and strengthen its resilience.

Peschel also stressed the importance of reforms for the country to support long-term growth as debt level in the country would inevitably increase as a result of short-term stimulus.

"In this context, the task for policy makers is to design policies that work effectively in such a new environment," Peschel said.

(Source: xinhuanet)

Senior businesswoman dismisses U.S. claim that Iran doesn't need IMF loan

1 → However, claiming that Iran has adequate financial resources to deal with the virus, the U.S. administration has opposed Iran's request and many believe that the U.S. opposition is the main reason for IMF's stalling.

In this regard, Tehran Times conducted an interview with Ferial Mostofi, a senior member of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), who is also the head of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA)'s Investment Committee.

■ Does Iran really need the fund?

The U.S. believes that Iran has enough resources to contain the virus and even if it didn't, the sanctions have not blocked the country's access to healthcare and medical products.

So we asked Mostofi, as a businesswoman and as a representative of the country's private sector, does Iran really need this loan?

Well, even before the outbreak of coronavirus and its economic consequences, Iran was already facing economic pressure. It was expected that the country would face budget deficit due to the U.S. sanctions and the significant reduction of oil exports; and now, with the pandemic being added to the



equation, the country's economic situation is much more problematic and saying that Iran does not need the fund as much as others is absurd, she said.

■ What the funding should be spent on?

"First and foremost, Iran needs this money to battle the virus and save people's lives, human lives matter, if the government had enough resources [as they claim] to support

people financially to keep them in lockdown, then the virus could have been contained much sooner and much easier," she said.

Here it should be noted that although Trump administration officials continue to insist that food and medicine are exempt from U.S. sanctions, evidence suggests that unilateral sanctions are collectively targeting the public since limitations on trade and the unwillingness of financial institutions

Aluminum ingot output planned to rise 63% by March 2021

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani announced that production of aluminum ingot in the country is planned to increase 63 percent by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2021), IRNA reported.

Iran's major aluminum producers produced 275,716 tons of aluminum ingots in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), according to the data released by the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry.

The country's aluminum ingot production in the past year fell eight percent in comparison to the figure for its preceding year.

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

On April 23, during the inauguration ceremony of Iran's biggest aluminum production complex (in the central Fars province), Rahmani said the country's aluminum production is expected to be doubled with this unit going operational.

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

He went on underlying the country's



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

As reported, South Aluminum Corporation (SALCO), which was inaugurated by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani during a ceremony via video conference, has an output capacity of 300,000 tons per year and the project was launched with an investment of around \$1.2 billion.

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

Iran plans to reach the annual production of 1.5 million tons of aluminum ingot by the Iranian calendar year 1404 (March 2025-March 2026).

'FTA with EAEU a great opportunity for Iran, Belarus to expand trade'

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani said Iran's Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Eurasia Economic Union (EAEU) has created a great opportunity for Iran and Belarus to deepen their trade ties.

Rahmani made the remarks in a meeting with Belarus Ambassador in Iran Yuri Ivanovic Lazarcic on Saturday, the ministry's news portal Shata reported.

Referring to earlier economic agreements between the two countries, Rahmani said the two sides should take serious measures to remove the barriers in the way of realization of these agreements and the expansion of trade.

He further noted that the preferential trade agreement between Iran and the member states of the Eurasian Union has provided a good ground for increasing trade relations between the two countries.

"Expansion of economic relations requires identification of common grounds and areas for cooperation and the two sides should take necessary measures in this regard," Rahmani said.

Belarusian ambassador, for his part, said, "We are taking all the necessary measures to benefit from all the opportunities available for promoting economic cooperation between the two countries."



Lazarcic referred to promoting economic diplomacy between Iran and Belarus as one of his main duties, saying: "We are looking to hold the two countries' joint economic committee meeting, and in this regard, we are ready to hold a virtual meeting via video conference."

Iran and Belarus signed an agreement in December 2019 for promoting mutual trade.

The agreement was signed by the Head of Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) Mehdi Mir-Ashrafi, and the Chairman of Belarus State Customs Committee Yuri Senko on the sidelines of a World Customs Organization (WCO) event in South Korea.

In the mentioned agreement, several important factors including identifying the two sides' needs, increasing efficiency, customs control of goods, and vehicles in transit between the two countries were emphasized.

Annual imports of basic commodities up 2.5 folds

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's import of basic goods has risen by 2.5 folds in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), according to an official with Government Trading Corporation (GTC) of Iran.

Amir Talebi, the acting director of GTC's foreign trade department, said last year most of the basic commodities imported via ports were unloaded directly from vessels to the trains which reduced the cost and time of transportation significantly, IRNA reported.

"Our duty is supplying the basic goods required in the country and to do so we are constantly monitoring and investigating the markets to purchase these goods in the best condition", Talebi noted.

The official said that over two million tons of rice,



oil and sugar have been imported to the country in the past year, some of which has been distributed and some has been stored.

Last week, Head of Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (known as RAI) Saeed Rasouli announced that transit of basic goods to the ports via railway network in the first Iranian calendar month of Farvardin (March 20-April 19) was tripled compared to the figure for the same month last year.

"The direct transport of goods from ship to train, which took place in the country's ports after 15 years, plays an important role in increasing the speed of cargo transportation and reducing the costs," the official highlighted.

How to plan your company's future during the pandemic

Business leaders today are rightly focused on the huge business continuity challenges posed by COVID-19. First and foremost they must ensure that employees are as safe as possible, securing financial sustainability, assessing the resilience of supply chains and reinforcing crucial systems to support unprecedented levels of remote working and online trading – while withstanding an upsurge in cyberattacks.

Unsurprisingly, the organizations that were further down the digital transformation journey before COVID-19 struck are tending to adapt to the crisis better than their peers. Their business models and working processes meant that they were able to pivot more rapidly or accelerate changes already underway. The businesses that lack a robust digital backbone or an online presence have struggled, as have those exposed to high street retail, transportation, energy and tourism sectors. Meanwhile, software companies providing collaboration tools, software-as-a-service and cloud capacity are seeing high levels of demand to meet rapidly changing customer and business behavior.

However, businesses, no matter how digitalized, need to try and look beyond the immediate business continuity or liquidity

issues caused by the pandemic. As more focus turns to the loosening of restrictions in place by governments, we should all be thinking about what the future may look like. What lessons should we take from this pandemic to prepare for the "new normal" following COVID-19? How can we enable our organizations to thrive in a post-crisis world?

1. Devise a lockdown exit strategy

Many national economies are experiencing large drops in GDP. Hence, governments are thinking seriously about lockdown exit strategies that will allow them to reboot economies while minimizing the threat to human lives. Similarly, businesses will need to figure out how they restart their operations while continuing to prioritize the wellbeing of their staff and dealing with the aftermath of lockdown and its immediate implications.

This will require them to consider if and how staff return to offices or visit customer sites – while maintaining social distancing protocols. Few businesses, if any, will return to the same working and customer service practices they enjoyed only six months ago, with short-term impacts to productivity, costs and employee morale. They may need to introduce greater agility and flexibility into their supply chain so that they can switch

to new suppliers if necessary.

2. Consider the changing role of the state

The crisis has had the effect of dramatically expanding the state in many markets as governments have implemented strict rules to save lives and unveiled massive stimulus packages to save jobs and businesses. These measures have come at a huge economic and social cost, which is why many governments will be focused on ensuring that their countries won't have to shut down to the same extent should another pandemic strike again in future. Following the financial crisis 10 years ago, governments around the world introduced more than 15,000 pieces of new legislation to strengthen the global financial system. You need to think about how new regulation may impact your organization's business model and factor that into your strategy going forward.

Rather than invite a coordinated global response, the common threat of the pandemic has created more division and, in some cases, intensified competition. Going forward, we are likely to see greater regulation – potentially in areas such as employment rights, accessibility of data and the cash and liquidity buffers held by large businesses. We will likely see a rapid acceleration towards "e-government", the

digitization of healthcare and role of state in its universal provision.

With the dramatic fiscal intervention by the state in supporting impacted workers and businesses, it seems inevitable that we will see short-term nationalization in some industries as well as direct state intervention in newly designated industries of strategic importance. We should also prepare for changes to the taxation system as governments look to recoup some of their recent outlay and rebalance the books in the medium-term.

3. Use technology to augment, not replace, people

Technology has enabled us to rethink the ways in which we perform fundamental activities during this crisis. Stock exchanges are still operating even though their physical trading floors are closed. The UK has established a virtual Parliament. Contact centers around the world are switching to remote ways of working, with some making use of artificial intelligence to maintain expected levels of customer service. While we have long had a strong culture of flexibility and remote working at EY, we flexed further and have over 300,000 people across 150 countries working from home.

(Source: World Economic Forum)

TPPH to start National Power Plant project this year

ENERGY TEHRAN – Iran's Thermal Power Plants Holding Company (TPPH) is going to begin the construction operations of the country's National Power Plant project in collaboration with the Mapna Group, IRNA reported.

According to the TPPH Managing Director Mohsen Tarztalab, the construction of this power plant with a 60-percent efficiency will be carried out in the current year (started on March 19).

"The operational planning for the power plant project is being pursued with the Thermal Power Plants Holding Company and Mapna Group's joint investment so that the project will be implemented in one of the country's current power plants," Tarztalab explained.

The official also mentioned his company's overhaul plans for the current year, saying: "This year, before the summer peak, more than 92,000 power plant overhaul operations will be completed and put into operation."

So far, about 80 percent of the programs in this sector have been completed, and before the peak of electricity consumption, all repair programs in gas, thermal and combined cycle units of both private and public sector power plants will be completed, he added.

According to the TPPH head, with the completion of the overhaul operations, the efficiency of thermal power plants will increase to 39 percent this year.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he mentioned the Energy Ministry's A-B-Iran program, noting that this year, under the framework



of the "A-B-Iran" program 3,044 megawatts (MW) of new power plants will be put into operation.

Under the A-B-Iran scheme [the acronyms A and B stand for water, electricity in Persian], the ministry inaugurates some water and electricity projects across the country every week.

Earlier this month, Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian announced that following the "A-B-Iran", scheme, the ministry is going to inaugurate 250 major water and electricity projects worth 500 trillion rials (about \$11.9 billion) during the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2021).

The next chapter of the oil crisis: the industry shuts down

Negative oil prices, ships dawdling at sea with unwanted cargoes, and traders getting creative about where to stash oil. The next chapter in the oil crisis is now inevitable: great swathes of the petroleum industry are about to start shutting down.

The economic impact of the coronavirus has ripped through the oil industry in dramatic phases. First it destroyed demand as lockdowns shut factories and kept drivers at home. Then storage started filling up and traders resorted to ocean-going tankers to store crude in the hope of better prices ahead.

Now shipping prices are surging to stratospheric levels as the industry runs out of tankers -- a sign of just how distorted the market has become.

The specter of production shut-downs -- and the impact they will have on jobs, companies, their banks, and local economies -- was one of the reasons that spurred world leaders to join forces to cut production in an orderly way. But as the scale of the crisis dwarfed their efforts, failing to stop prices diving below zero last week, shut-downs are now a reality. It's the worst-case scenario for producers and refiners.

"We are moving into the end-game," Torbjorn Tornqvist, head of commodity trading giant Gunvor Group Ltd., said in an interview. "Early-to-mid May could be the peak. We are weeks, not months, away from it."

In theory, the first oil output cuts should have come from the OPEC+ alliance, which earlier this month agreed to reduce production from May 1. Yet after the catastrophic price plunge on Monday, when West Texas Intermediate fell to -\$40 a barrel, it's the U.S. shale patch that is leading.

■ U.S. drilling activity has nearly halved since January

The best indicator of how the U.S. industry is reacting is the rapid drop in the number of oil rigs in operation, which last week fell to a four-year low. Before the coronavirus crisis hit, oil companies ran about 650 rigs in the U.S. By Friday, more than 40 percent of them had stopped working, with only 378 left.

"Monday really focused people's minds that production needs to slow down," Ben Luckock, co-head of oil trading at commodity merchant Trafigura Group, said. "It's the



smack in the face the market needed to realize this is serious."

Trafigura, one of the largest exporters of U.S. crude from the U.S. Gulf of Mexico, believes that output in Texas, New Mexico, North Dakota and other states will now fall much faster than expected as companies react to negative prices, which have persisted for several days last week in the physical market.

Until prices collapsed on Monday, the consensus was that output would drop by about 1.5m barrels a day by December. Now market watchers see that loss by late June. "The severity of the price pressure is likely to act as a catalyst for the immediate turnaround in activity and shut-ins," said Roger Diwan, oil analyst at consultant IHS Markit Ltd.

■ WTI plunged into negative price territory

The price shock has been particularly intense in the physical market: producers of crude streams such as South Texas Sour and Eastern Kansas Common had to pay more than \$50 a barrel to offload their output last week. ConocoPhillips and shale producer Continental Resources Inc. have all announced plans to shut in output. Regulators in Oklahoma voted to allow oil drillers to shut wells without losing leases; New Mexico made a

similar decision.

North Dakota, which for years was synonymous with the U.S. shale revolution, is witnessing a rapid retrenchment. Oil producers have already closed more than 6,000 wells, curtailing about 405,000 barrels a day in production, or about 30 percent of the state's total.

The output cuts won't be limited to the U.S. From Chad, a poor and landlocked country in Africa, to Vietnam and Brazil, producers are now either reducing output or making plans to do so.

"I wouldn't want to get sensational about it but yes, clearly there must be a risk of shut-ins," Mitch Flegg, the head of North Sea oil company Serica Energy, said in an interview. "In certain parts of the world it is a real and present risk."

In emergency board meetings last week, oil companies small and large discussed an outlook that's the most somber any oil executive has ever witnessed. For the small firms, the next few weeks will be all about staying afloat. But even for the bigger ones, like Exxon Mobil Corp. and BP PLC, it's a challenge. Big Oil will offer an insight into the crisis when companies report earnings this week.

Saudi Arabia, Russia and the rest of the

OPEC+ alliance will join the output cuts on Friday, slashing their output by more than 20 percent, or 9.7 million barrels a day. Saudi Aramco, the state-owned company, is already trimming to reach the target. And Russian oil companies have announced exports of their flagship Urals crude would drop in May to a 10-year low.

Even so, it may not be enough. Every week, 50 million barrels of crude are going into storage, enough to fuel Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and the U.K. combined. At that rate, the world will run out of storage by June. What's not stored onshore, is stashed in tankers. The U.S. Coast Guard on Friday said there were so many tankers at anchor off California that it was keeping an eye on the situation.

Before the crisis hit, the world was consuming about 100 million barrels a day. Demand now, however, is somewhere between 65 and 70 million barrels. So, in a worst-case scenario, about a third of global output needs to be shut.

The reality is likely to be less severe as storage would continue to bridge the gap between supply and demand. Plus, oil traders say consumption has probably hit a bottom, and will start a very gentle recovery.

■ Refiners shut

But before that takes hold, the great shutdown will spread through oil refining too.

Over the past week, Marathon Petroleum Corp., one of the biggest U.S. refiners, announced it would stop production at a plant near San Francisco. Royal Dutch Shell PLC has idled several units in three U.S. refineries in Alabama and Louisiana. And across Europe and Asia, many refineries are running at half rate. U.S. oil refiners processed just 12.45 million barrels a day on the week to April 17, the lowest amount in at least 30 years, except for hurricane-related closures.

More refinery shutdowns are coming, oil traders and consultants said, particularly in the U.S. where lockdowns started later than in Europe and demand is still contracting. Steve Sawyer, director of refining at Facts Global Energy, said that global refineries could halt as much as 25 percent of total capacity in May. "No one is going to be able to dodge this bullet."

(Source: Bloomberg)

When oil became waste: a week of turmoil for crude, and more pain to come

The magnitude of how damaged the energy industry is came into full view on April 20 when the benchmark price of U.S. oil futures, which had never dropped below \$10 a barrel in its nearly 40-year history, plunged to a previously unthinkable minus \$38 a barrel.

In just a few months, the coronavirus pandemic has destroyed so much fuel demand as billions of people curtail travel that it has done what financial crashes, recessions and wars had failed to ever do - leave the United States with so much oil there was nowhere to put it.

While the unusual circumstance of negative oil prices may not be repeated, many in the industry say it is a harbinger for more bleak days ahead, and that years of overinvestment will not correct in a period of weeks or even months.

"What happened in the futures contract the other day indicated things are starting to get bad earlier than expected," said Frederick Lawrence, vice president of economics and international affairs at the Independent Petroleum Association of America.

"People are getting notices from pipeline companies that say they can't take their crude anymore. That means you're shutting down the well yesterday."

Evidence of the erosion of value for a product that has been a mainstay of global society since the late 19th century abounded across the world last week.

In Russia, one of the world's top producers, the industry is considering resorting to burning its oil to take it off the market, sources told Reuters.

Norwegian oil giant Equinor slashed its quarterly dividend by two-thirds. Next week will bring earnings reports from the world's largest oil companies including Exxon Mobil Corp (XOM.N), BP PLC (BP.L) and Royal Dutch Shell PLC. They are all expected to detail additional spending cuts, and investors will be watching closely for how those companies plan to manage dividends.

U.S. billionaire Harold Hamm's Continental Resources Inc sent servicers out into fields in Oklahoma and North Dakota in the middle of the week to abruptly shut wells, and the company



declared it could not make crude deliveries to customers due to poor economics.

Continental's decision to declare force majeure - usually reserved for wars, accidents or natural disasters - came as a shock, bringing a sharp response from the leading refinery industry group. But some say there is a logic behind it, even if it may not pass muster in court.

"You sign contracts based on the average norms that a society has experienced over the last 100 years. If we have a new event that is not covered by those norms, it goes into force majeure. That's what Harold Hamm and others are saying - that these are circumstances outside the norm," said Anas Alhajji, an energy market expert based in Dallas.

Even the long-rumored decision by the White House to tell Chevron Corp (CVX.N) last week it could no longer operate in Venezuela, where it has had a presence for nearly 100 years, met with a shrug.

"The global climate is terrible," said one person close to a Western oil company in Venezuela. "The license almost didn't matter anymore."

The market is forcing the hands of all producers. Across the world, governments and companies are preparing to shut

down output, and many have already begun.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies had already committed to record cuts of 10 million barrels of daily supply that have yet to take full effect. That commitment was not enough to prevent oil's fall below zero.

Saudi Arabia has said it and other OPEC members are prepared to take further measures, but made no new commitments. It is a measure of the depth of demand destruction that even if OPEC stopped producing altogether, supply may still exceed demand.

More than 600,000 barrels per day in production cuts have already been announced in the United States, along with another 300,000 bpd of shut-ins in Canada. Brazil's state-run Petrobras has reduced output by 200,000 bpd.

Azerbaijan, part of the group of nations known as OPEC+, is forcing a BP-led group to cut output for the first time ever. Oil majors in those countries have generally been excluded from government-imposed cuts.

"We have never done it before since they came to the country in 1994 and signed the contract of the century," a senior Azeri official told Reuters.

That accommodation can no longer be made with the world running out of space to put oil. As of Thursday, energy researcher Kpler said onshore storage worldwide is now roughly 85 percent full.

Demand is expected to fall by 29 million bpd in April, the International Energy Agency estimated. Paris-based IEA expects consumption to pick up in May, but researchers cautioned that its expectation of a mere 12 million bpd fall in year-over-year demand may be too optimistic.

"I'm sure hearing the same numbers about demand destruction of 20 to 30 million barrels a day," said Gene McGilligan, analyst at Tradition Energy, who was working at the New York Mercantile Exchange when U.S. crude futures were launched in 1983. "Until we see some kind of alleviation of that, you have to wonder what is in store."

(Source: Reuters)

Is natural gas the beneficiary of lower oil prices?

Before oil prices fell off, U.S. natural gas prices were already weak, with gas producers shifting toward maintenance capital spending and reducing growth in the second half of 2019. In recent weeks, oil-focused E&Ps have responded to the lower price environment by cutting growth capital spending, and drilling activity has plummeted. Associated gas, which describes natural gas produced by oil wells, has been a major driver of growth in natural gas production in recent years, contributing to the oversupply that has depressed prices. Associated gas production is likely to decrease in oily basins as a result of potential shut-ins and natural production declines as a well matures. On Kinder Morgan's earnings call on Wednesday, management said they expected shut-ins to occur with the Permian and Bakken among the most impacted areas. As shown in the chart below, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) expects U.S. marketed gas production to decline 8.8 percent from March 2020 to March 2021 before beginning to rise in 2Q21 as gas prices are expected to recover.

One potential silver lining of gas production declines is higher natural gas prices over time as the market rebalances. The Henry Hub natural gas benchmark price has traded below \$2 per million British thermal unit (MMBtu) for most of 2020 as a result of oversupply concerns due to production growth and above average inventory levels as well as demand uncertainty related to the coronavirus more recently. According to the EIA's most recent Short-Term Energy Outlook, the price of Henry Hub natural gas is forecasted to increase to an average price of \$2.11/MMBtu in 2020 and \$2.98/MMBtu in 2021 as a result of lower gas production and an improving demand outlook toward the end of this year. Notably, the average 2021 price was revised higher 19 percent over the price forecast from March of \$2.51/MMBtu. The EIA's projection aligns with the Henry Hub forward curve, which reflects stronger pricing in 2021. Considering prices for the full year, the average forward price is \$2.35/MMBtu for the rest of 2020 and \$2.74/MMBtu for 2021. To quantify the price improvement further out on the curve, the January 2021 natural gas contract price has increased from a year-to-date low of \$2.46/MMBtu as of February 28 to \$3.09/MMBtu as of April 22. Over the same time period, the WTI contract price for January 2021 has declined from \$46.00 per barrel (bbl) to \$29.77/bbl.

The implications of natural gas prices and production for midstream companies depend on the time frame being examined. In the short term, a depressed pricing environment and declining volumes are challenging, especially for gathering and processing companies with greater exposure to the wellhead. For these companies, the focus will remain on taking steps to maximize financial flexibility. In contrast, midstream companies with a high percentage of fee-based cash flows under take-or-pay contracts and those with exposure to demand-pull pipelines are better positioned to withstand potential volume declines. KMI's release this week provides some clues as to how natural gas transportation is holding up in a tough environment. KMI's Natural Gas segment EBDAl guidance was lowered by 4 percent over its initial budget for 2020 compared to a reduction of 17 percent for its Products segment, which includes refined products pipelines and terminals. Based on adjusted segment EBDA, KMI's gas business consists primarily of pipeline transportation, including 74 percent interstate pipelines and LNG, 14 percent intrastate pipelines, and 12 percent gathering and processing. While natural gas fundamentals are challenged at the moment, the outlook for natural gas could be improving as lower associated gas production helps to rebalance the market. For midstream companies with assets that transport or process dry gas production in the Northeast and Haynesville, higher natural gas prices could improve the drilling outlook for these areas toward the end of this year or early next year. While the current natural gas outlook remains challenged in the short term, there are reasons for some optimism looking forward.

(Source: seekingalpha.com)

Renewable energy loses steam as Asian subsidies wane

Global capacity for renewable energy ended 17 years of growth in 2019, as Asian governments scaled back expensive subsidies designed to make their power grids greener.

The trend could continue in 2020 as the coronavirus outbreak forces factory shutdowns for producers of the necessary equipment, delaying future green power projects and slowing the international shift away from fossil fuels.

Roughly 176 gigawatts of renewable generating capacity was added worldwide last year, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency, 2 percent less than in 2018. New solar power capacity totaled 97.68 GW, or 2.5 percent less than in 2018.

Asia was a major contributor to the slowdown, with the continent adding 12 percent less renewable power capacity than in 2018. China and Japan logged declines of 15 percent and 40 percent, respectively.

Global renewable capacity has grown continuously since 2003, as governments introduced feed-in tariffs and other incentives to promote green energy.

But these efforts carry an upfront expense. Japan's feed-in tariffs have cost the public more than 2 trillion yen (\$18.6 billion) so far. The country plans a switch to a feed-in premium system, where renewable energy producers receive a premium on top of market rates. China has reduced government subsidies for renewables.

"Even if we want to build new renewable plants, we have no choice but to be cautious," an industry insider said.

The pandemic has upended the supply chain for renewable energy equipment. Denmark's Vestas, the world's leading producer of wind turbines, suspended production at two Spanish plants due to the virus outbreak. Rival Siemens Gamesa Renewable Energy halted work at six of its 10 Spanish factories.

In China, factory utilization rates for solar panel producers fell to about 60 percent in February. The figure has since rebounded, but many worry about the long-term effects of disruptions in the country, which produces 70 percent of the world's solar panels.

Production stoppages could exacerbate other issues tied to renewable projects. Offshore wind farms cannot be built during the winter when waves are too choppy.

"Some projects could end up delayed for a full year," an industry insider said.

Renewable energy has benefited in recent years as investors shy away from fossil fuels.

"Investments in renewables will remain active from an environmental, social and governance perspective," said Mana Nakazora at BNP Paribas. But reduced incentives could slow the trend, since they make it harder for investors to recoup their funds.

Further growth in renewable energy also requires updates to electrical grids worldwide, as they have little excess capacity. More households and businesses will need to install batteries to smooth out fluctuations in supply and demand and ease the burden on electrical grids.

(Source: Nikkei)

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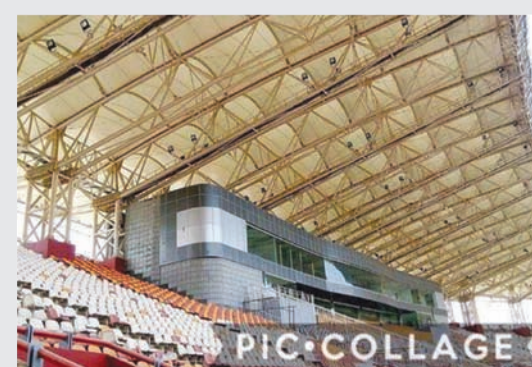


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How a Rockefeller by-birth man initiates legal path to bypass U.S. Congress to make key decisions!

The founding fathers of the War Powers Resolution, including George D. O'Neill, once embarked vigilantly on initiating a faction-like group consisting of the wings of the Democratic and Republican parties to ultimately marginalize the Congress in making very important decisions, including declaring or ending a war.

Curtis Ellis, a policy director with America First Policies and a senior policy advisor with the Donald J. Trump presidential campaign in 2016, has explained in his article published by the Anti War that how the Congress can be easily ignored while behind the curtain or shadow-powers decide for the country to enter or to end a war.

At 4:30 p.m. Wednesday, February 28, 2018 Senators Mike Lee (R-Utah), Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) introduced a bipartisan joint resolution to remove U.S. armed forces from hostilities between the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthis in Yemen pursuant to the War Powers Resolution. Their bill laid the groundwork for the first-ever successful vote in the Senate to withdraw U.S. armed forces from an unauthorized war, one they believed was unconstitutional.

Earlier on that day Sanders and Lee held a news conference. "The founding fathers gave the power to declare war to the Congress, the branch most accountable to the people. For far too long, Congress under Democratic and Republican administrations has abdicated its constitutional role in authorizing war," Sanders began, jabbing his hand to emphasize the point.

"This is not a partisan issue," Sanders continued. "Support for the Saudi intervention in Yemen began under a Democratic president and has continued under a Republican president. Senator Lee is a conservative Republican, I am a progressive Independent."

Lee referenced James Madison and the Federalist papers, explaining "this legislation is neither liberal nor conservative, neither Democratic nor Republican. This is an American principle, a constitutional principle."

He acknowledged the elephant in the room, "It's not every day that Senator Sanders and Senator Murphy and I come together on something but we firmly agree on this, underscoring the fact that this is not a partisan issue." Indeed, it's not every day a democratic socialist and free market libertarian walk into a Capitol Hill Newser together.

Newser is an American news aggregation website.

Three months earlier, in November 2017, the House overwhelmingly passed a resolution stating that the use of U.S. military forces in the Yemen conflict was not authorized by Congress. Only 30 members opposed it.

Anyone familiar with the ways of Washington understands nothing happens spontaneously in the swamp. The wheels of government turn slowly and someone is behind the scenes greasing the axle or monkeywrenching the gears.

So an inquiring mind would ask: how did this most unlikely of alliances happen? Who made it happen and why?

Meet the "who"—George D. O'Neill, Jr., a quiet, lanky, reserved man of 69 years, a sculptor, jewelry maker, and pilot, a fifth-generation Rockefeller who manages small family agriculture and construction materials operations. George grew up between Lake Wales, Florida and Oyster Bay, New York—an enclave of the American aristocracy on the North Shore of Long Island. His father was a Harvard man and Wall Street investor who served on corporate boards. His mother, the granddaughter of John D. Rockefeller Jr., was honored for her education philanthropy.

Though a Rockefeller by birth, George is not a "Rockefeller Republican." He's a Trump supporter and has been from the beginning—even before. He was a Buchanan Brigade stalwart in Pat's 1992 campaign. That antiestablishment, populist conservative uprising pitted economic nationalism against globalism and presaged Donald J. Trump's victory 24 years later.

O'Neill's lifelong interest in the question of war's impact has focused specifically on the issue of endless wars from a MAGA perspective: How can America be great when we're fighting unsustainable wars and not honoring the Constitution? How can we be a great nation when we carelessly waste and damage the lives of our military members, hurt their families, and run around the world wrecking thousand-year-old cultures? Have any of these misguided interventions achieved any of the promised successes? Does anyone benefit besides a small number of business, political, and media elites?

"Make America Great Again (MAGA)" is a campaign slogan used in American politics that was popularized by Donald Trump in his successful 2016 presidential campaign.

He edited two books on the subject, *Come Home America* and *The Impact of War*, compilations of lectures and other writings, accomplishments he is most proud of. The Rockefeller family has been interested in the impact of war going back to World War I. They provided food, clothing and medical aid for refugees in Europe. The Rockefeller fortune funded research and treatments for diseases the war brought with it—wounds, infections, dysentery and PTSD, then called "shell shock." The family endowed the League of Nations Library in Geneva and donated Manhattan real estate for the United Nations headquarters in Turtle Bay.

While the family has been famously (or notoriously, depending on one's point of view) internationalist (see: League of Nations, United Nations, Council on Foreign Relations), O'Neill has an American nationalist and constitutional concern for the millions injured by our wars: "Why do we fight endless wars without congressional approval?" Constitutional concerns are as important as antiwar concerns.

Which brings us back to the question of how he built a bipartisan consensus on ending endless wars.

There has not been much bipartisan cooperation on this or any other issue, to put it mildly, and O'Neill deserves credit for merging the Left and Right. He spent years building relationships across the political spectrum and earning credibility with leftist groups.

O'Neill hosted small dinners of 10-15 people in Washington, D.C. and New York with a diverse flock: Quakers, Code Pink, The American Conservative, Koch Industries, The Nation and



the Cato Institute all breaking bread.

These dinners began in February 2010 with a gathering of people from the conservative, progressive, and libertarian movements along with assorted 1970s-era activist-intellectuals. It proved to him people of disparate points of view could work together on the war issue.

A key turning point was a September 2017 meeting O'Neill had with two people from the Left. One of them was Keane Bhatt, who at that time was working for the Progressive Caucus and drafting the first Yemen war powers resolution. Ro Khanna (D-Calif.) and Mark Pocan (D-Wis.) of the Progressive Caucus needed Republican support for their bill. At dinner that evening they gained co-sponsorship from Republicans Thomas Massie (R-Ky.) and former North Carolina congressman Walter Jones.

The first bipartisan Yemen war powers resolution was soon introduced. After years of discussion, this was the first real action taken to end the forever wars. Soon after that the Progressive Caucus people were introduced to members of Senator Mike Lee's staff and the Senate bill was underway.

It was in 2017 that O'Neill founded the Committee for a Responsible Foreign Policy, declaring:

Foundational to responsible and thoughtful foreign policy is the need for congressional consent for all acts of war. The committee sponsors monthly lectures and briefings with veterans, military academics, members of Congress and others on topics including the moral and financial impact of endless war, its impact on military families, presidential powers and the Constitution. As a result of these many interactions there is a war powers network in Washington to inform the many different interested organizations of events and writings.

The committee initially got pushback as being anti-military. Quite the opposite: It is defending the men and women of the military who are asked to sacrifice their lives.

"Our leadership has not put together a policy or a strategy that justifies that sacrifice and that's unforgivable," Brigadier General Donald Bolduc said at a recent briefing. If Congress isn't fully committed by giving its consent on the front end, there will be no accountability or backup down the line.

Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-Fla.) joined the briefing on "Reforming Foreign Agent Registration Act laws to end forever wars." The congressman who represents the district that is home to Pensacola Naval Air Station told the audience "the dominant movement in this town is to sell out to the war lobby." Gaetz refuses to be part of that dominant movement and called out the fabrication of "threat construction to feed a military-industrial complex in this town."

Think tanks funded by foreign money (which they are not required to report) do more of the heavy lifting in the "threat construction" project than meets the eye, shaping American policy and public opinion to ensure the "military-industrial complex in this town" is well-fed. Remember that the next time you read an op-ed from a "distinguished fellow" explaining the necessity of American involvement in some conflict or another.

O'Neill's work prepared a path for the Bipartisan War Powers Caucus, a House group whose founding members include Ro Khanna along with Reps. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), Andy Biggs (R-Ariz.), and Ken Buck (R-Colo.). The group is committed to "reaffirming Congress's constitutional responsibility on matters of war and peace."

The War Powers Caucus is a group that says it is "dedicated to restoring Congress's constitutionally-mandated authority over matters of war and peace."

Jon Stoltz, an Iraq War veteran and chairman of the liberal Vote Vets PAC and his counterpart at the conservative Concerned Veterans of America saluted the bipartisan caucus. "When two groups, or ideologies, that are so opposed to each other end up joining forces, it makes a big impact," Stoltz said, adding, "the most impactful bipartisan work for the country isn't coming from the middle, it's coming from the wings of the parties."

The war in Yemen proved to be a tipping point. Washington awoke one day to discover American forces were assisting the Saudis with intelligence, target selection, and aerial refueling.

Yemen revealed how easily the United States can get involved in a conflict without approval from anyone outside the White House. Where was the oversight? Was there any? Modern tech-centric, remote-control warfare makes it easy to finagle around the edges of the Constitution and contravene the clear intent of the American Founders.

Liberals and progressives were concerned about the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Conservatives wanted to know what the United States was contributing to the conflict, how we got there and whether our presence was ever authorized by Congress.

The Committee for a Responsible Foreign Policy held its first public event in March 2018—a photo exhibit in the Russell Senate Office Building called "The Impact of War," featuring outsized three by five foot images of the Yemen war. Senators Lee and Sanders spoke about the Yemen war powers resolution they

recently introduced, the first time a War Powers Resolution had been introduced in the U.S. Senate.

The Committee for a Responsible Foreign Policy sees another front in the battle to restore Constitutional government and end endless wars: the states.

The National Guard ostensibly is under the command of state governors, and that's the hook. Traditionally the National Guard has assisted in local disaster relief. But 30,000 National Guard troops from across America are deployed outside of the continental United States. The Pentagon is using many if not most of them to wage war overseas.

When those troops signed up to protect our nation from invasion, quell insurrection, and enforce the laws of the land they were not told they would be separated from their families for months at a time and exposed to physical and mental damage. Some have served five tours in Iraq. The Mississippi National Guard was in Iraq when Katrina hit.

National and grassroots veterans' groups are pushing "Defend the Guard" legislation at the state house level. It would allow governors to veto overseas deployments of the National Guard unless there has been a congressional declaration of war. Advocates are as diverse as Veterans for Trump and the West Virginia ACLU.

Defend the Guard bills have already been introduced in nine states—Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Michigan, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, South Carolina, West Virginia, and Wyoming. Activists are seeking out sponsors in 20 more states.

Sgt. Dan McKnight is a U.S. Marine Corps Reserves and active duty Army veteran who served 18 months in Afghanistan with the Idaho Army National Guard. He heads BringOurTroopsHome.US and, when he's not hiking the backcountry of the Sawtooth Wilderness, he's lobbying to defend the Guard.

Senator Jim Risch (R-Idaho), chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, signed a pledge sponsored by BringOurTroopsHome.US, promising that he will "insist that Congress exercise the Constitutional authority granted solely to the legislative branch to declare war" as provided by Article 1, Section 8, Clause II of the U.S. Constitution.

McKnight sent a letter to President Trump asking him to order all National Guard troops deployed overseas to return home to assist state and local governments' response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Idaho House of Representatives cited the pandemic when it adopted a resolution urging Congress formally to declare war before taking Idaho National Guard troops away from the state. The West Virginia House of Delegates adopted a similar resolution.

The pandemic is the latest but hardly the only example of unprecedented challenges our nation faces. In this unfamiliar landscape, the old maps pointing left and right are worse than useless. They lead us into a defile from which there is no escape.

But we need not go that way. The map is not the territory.

Bringing our troops home from foreign military adventures, ending our dependence on China for essential goods, building 21st century infrastructure, protecting the rights and liberties of Americans from corporate-government-media power grabs—these are opportunities to find common ground, and that ground is not necessarily in the middle.

O'Neill and his unlikely collaborators on the War Powers Resolution votes show how the extremes of both parties can unite and break the grip of the dead and corrupt hand of the Washington Establishment.

That lesson is more important than ever.

It should be noted that the War Powers Resolution (also known as the War Powers Resolution of 1973 or the War Powers Act) (50 U.S.C. 1541–1548) is a federal law intended to check the U.S. president's power to commit the United States to an armed conflict without the consent of the U.S. Congress.

According to Morris Fiorina, an American political scientist, in reading 59, what institutions make up the "Washington Establishment"? What types of activities does he identify as being typical of contemporary congressmen and women? According to Morris Fiorina, the Washington Establishment is comprised of "congressmen, bureaucrats, and voters".

According to an article published by medium.com in 2018, Ladd Everitt, a longtime gun control professional & volunteer who has worked for CSGV, George Takei's One Pulse for America, Million Mom March, named O'Neill of as a gun nut, serial abuser of women and children, sexual deviant and a big fan of Vladimir Putin.

Everitt, in his article, wrote about complicated ties between O'Neill and Russian Maria Butina in 2016 and 2017.

Everitt explained that that operation relied on support from both NRA (The National Rifle Association of America) leaders and organizers with the National Prayer Breakfast.

He added that While there has been a good amount of discussion about U.S. Person 1 (Erickson) in the media, there has been surprisingly little discussion about "U.S. Person 2." U.S. Person 2 helped Maria Butina arrange a "series of dinners in the District of Columbia and New York City involving Russian nationals and U.S. persons having influence in American politics" along with Paul Erickson. The dinners took place in 2016 and 2017 and were classified as "friendship and dialogue" events.

Event-planning is an area where conservative scion and Rockefeller heir (est. worth: \$200 million) George D. O'Neill, Jr. has expertise.

On January 31, 2017, he hosted a private dinner during the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. that was attended by Paul Erickson and Butina's boss, Russian central bank head Alexander Torshin. Also present were "[other] former and current Russian officials... U.S. Republicans and conservatives including two congressmen [Republicans Dana Rohrabacher of California and Thomas Massie of Kentucky], a conservative magazine publisher, some journalists, and others."

One week later, on February 8, Butina emailed U.S. Person 2 and told him, "Our delegation cannot stop chatting about your wonderful dinner."

Greek-Turkish dispute over Aegean Sea may lead the two-NATO states towards military confrontation

By Mohammad Jafari

Demilitarized statues of the Aegean Sea's islands has in recent years been a source of serious tensions between the two NATO member states of Greece and Turkey, causing regional states to start getting worried about a possible military confrontation between Ankara and Athens if the relevant international bodies do not mediate in time.

Ankara's continuous that Athens has violated international law by arming 16 of 23 Aegean islands placed under demilitarized status which

Elif Selin Calik, a journalist, independent researcher and expert in global diplomacy field, explained the current concerning situation in the Aegean Sea in her report published by the Middle East Monitor.

She stated that the people of Greece and Turkey argue over many things. Food, for example; both claim "baklava" as their own, and prepare it in their own way. It would have been better for all concerned if this was the most serious of their disagreements, but it isn't.

Unfortunately, the "demilitarization of the Aegean Sea" is one of the most contentious disputes between the two countries. This was demonstrated recently in Turkish Admiral Cihat Yaycı's new book, *Requirements of Greece: The problems in the Aegean with questions and answers*. The admiral is a familiar figure, as he is regarded widely as the architect of the maritime agreement signed last year between Turkey and the UN-recognized Government of National Accord in Libya in a move designed to counter Greek's exploratory drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Historically, there is more to the demilitarization issue than meets the eye. In 1983, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) prepared a contingency study to secure NATO's interests in the military confrontation between two of its member states.

In fact, the "demilitarized status of the Eastern Aegean Islands" has been the accepted legal status quo in the long-running dispute between Greece and Turkey. The islands were demilitarized by several international agreements which imposed legal obligations upon the Greek government in Athens.

Starting from the Treaty of London in 1913, the militarization of the islands was restricted and their demilitarized status was confirmed in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. Subsequently, the 1947 Treaty of Paris, which ceded the Dodecanese Islands, including the largest, Rhodes, from Italy to Greece, also confirmed their demilitarized status.

However, Greece argues that the 1936 Montreux Convention on the Turkish Straits should be applied regarding militarization. Ankara insists that Greece's obligation to disarm the islands remains unchanged under the Montreux Convention, since there is no provision that is different from the Treaty of Lausanne on the issue.

Hence, the re-arming of the Aegean islands has always been a hot issue between the two countries, especially since the 1960s when relations between Ankara and Athens soured over the Cyprus question and extended to Greek claims over Aegean airspace and territorial waters. Turkey's first reaction to Greece's arming of the islands in the Aegean was a diplomatic note passed to Athens on 29 June, 1964.

According to Admiral Yaycı, Greece destroyed the demilitarized status of the islands and this affected the relevant sections of the Lausanne and Paris agreements. "With the 1936 Royal Decree in Greece, which declared that the territorial water borders were increased to six miles instead of three, the status quo held by the two countries was changed. In that way, the Greek government destroyed the balance of the Lausanne Treaty," he wrote in his book. [Translated from Turkish]

In January, Turkey's Minister of Defense, former General Hulusi Akar, warned that Greece had violated international law by arming "16 of 23 Aegean islands" supposed to be held under demilitarized status. Moreover, in 2018, Greek armed forces conducted a military exercise on the Mediterranean island of Kastellorizo, which lies just two kilometers from the Turkish coast of the Ka? district of Antalya Province. The exercise was not only provocative but also a clear violation of the demilitarized status of the island.

In retrospect, it is obvious that the demilitarization of the Eastern Aegean Islands was recognized internationally because of their overriding importance for Turkey's security. In fact, there was and remains a direct link between sovereignty over the islands and their demilitarized status. In this respect alone, Greece has no right to reverse this status unilaterally under any pretext.

However, despite Turkish objections, the Greek government has been violating the status of the islands in the Eastern Aegean since the 1960s in clear contravention of its treaty obligations. Such illegal acts have increased considerably in recent years and have become a major source of tension between the two countries. Turkey's appeals to Greece to respect the demilitarized status have all been disregarded. Joint membership of NATO has not enabled them to resolve the issue amicably.

On April 23, Turkey celebrated National Sovereignty Day and the 100th anniversary of the Grand National Assembly. Although this marked the establishment of the secular, modern republic, the Turks have not forgotten that as a consequence of the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War they were coerced into signing the Treaty of Sevres in 1920. Worse still, under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne they were forced to surrender a lot of former Ottoman territory. As it moves toward the centenary of the Lausanne Treaty, Turkey will, no doubt, prepare itself to protect its sovereign rights post-2023.

Earlier this year, Greece pushed back against Turkish demands that it demilitarized 16 Aegean islands.

"Greece does not provoke, does not violate the sovereign rights of others, but it doesn't like to see its own rights violated," said Greek Defense Minister Nikos Panagiotopoulos in January, according to the VOA.

The dispute dates back to 1974 when Athens started to militarize the islands off the Turkish coast in response to Turkey's invasion of the Mediterranean island of Cyprus after a pro-Greek coup.

It should be added that the race for hydrocarbon resources around Cyprus has brought tensions between Greece and Turkey to a peak as Ankara claims areas of the sea that Athens says are in its exclusive economic zone. Dogfights and naval confrontations in the Aegean have accompanied the sparring over Mediterranean territories.

Greek-Turkish relations have for decades experienced regular crises over disputes about their maritime jurisdictions, and the close proximity of their warships in disputed seas raises the risk of confrontation.

The two countries almost came to blows in 1996 over the uninhabited Kardak islets, known as Imia in Greece, after three Greek military officers were killed when their helicopter crashed over the islets during a patrol.

Exploitation of natural gas resources has been a source of tension in the eastern Mediterranean between Ankara and Athens since 2019, as all parties have stepped up their gas exploration and drilling efforts.

Significance of IRGC comdr. remarks, review of Trump's bluffs and setbacks

➡ After the martyrdom of Lt. General Soleimani, Iran vowed to take strong revenge against U.S. terrorist forces. As usual, after the Iranian threat, U.S. officials, including the president himself, began to threaten Iran, saying that if Iran took any action against U.S. forces, the White House would give Iran a painful and extensive military response.

However, we witnessed that the Revolutionary Guards retaliated strongly against the U.S. terrorist forces by launching a massive missile attack on the Ain al-Assad base, and the U.S. President, who knew that any action against Iran's

retaliatory attack would have an extensive and painful response, claimed that the damage was insignificant and tried to find an excuse for not responding to Iran. The IRGC's missile strike was unprecedented since the end of World War II.

Moreover, at the end of the last Iranian Year, we witnessed extensive U.S. military moves in Iraq and at the same time, the U.S. media initiated large-scale psychological warfare claiming that the U.S. is preparing to attack Iraqi Resistance and the forces close to Iran. Following the Iraqi group's decisive stance to any possible U.S. move and the General Qaani's visit to Iraq which

indicated the Resistance strong determination to respond to any hostility, We finally saw that the U.S. withdrew from its previous threats.

We have recently seen that U.S. president and a number of U.S. officials have threatened Iran again. Trump has ordered U.S. troops to shoot down Iranian forces if they harass U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf. The visit of the Commander of Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps of the triple Islands and his warning to U.S. officials that Iran will not hesitate to defend its interests and territorial integrity can be assessed in this regard. He is trying to show U.S. empty threats

and their inability in the region by visiting these Islands.

And as usual again a day after the U.S. president's threat the pentagon officials tried to water down his remarks. A day after his threat the Foreign Policy wrote following Trump's twitter message the Pentagon's officials were surprised and sought to manage up, downgrading Trump's remarks to a warning.

"What he [Trump] was emphasizing is all of our ships retain the right of self-defense, and people need to be very careful," said David Norquist, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense.

Travel vouchers proposed for medical professionals after corona ends

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – The Society of Iranian Archaeology has proposed tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan to provide medical professionals with travel vouchers after the coronavirus pandemic is defeated.



The proposal has envisaged visiting historical and tourist sites that are under the supervision of the ministry, IRNA reported. “As we know, the country’s healthcare professionals, particularly nurses, doctors and laboratory technicians, have been at the forefront of the fight against coronavirus in the past two months. And they have been exhausted and run out of strength,” the society wrote to in a letter on Saturday.

The Islamic Republic plans to increase the number of tourism arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million by 2025 thanks to its numerous tourist spots, including 24 ones being placed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Foreign investors invited to Qom tourism projects

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Qom tourism department welcomes foreign investors to participate in its tourism projects, provincial tourism official Hamid Yazdani said on Saturday, CHTN reported.



Referring to the foreign immigrants living in the province, he noted that encouraging foreign investors, currently living in Iran, to participate in ongoing or new tourism projects, is one of the department’s plans.

Although the tourist attractions have been on lockdown over coronavirus across the country, the province’s tourism sector is prepared to improve quickly after the crisis ends, he added.

The country’s second-holiest city after Mashhad, Qom is home to both the magnificent shrine of Hazrat-e Masumeh (SA) and the major religious madrasas (schools).

Apart from sightseers and pilgrims who visit Qom to pay homage at the holy shrine, the city is also a top destination for Shiite scholars and students who come from across the world to learn Islamic studies at its madrasas and browse through eminent religious bookshops.

Tehran in four elements

By Edoardo Ferrari

(Part 2/3)

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. One can imagine the thrust from below that has elevated these mountain ranges and feel the earth coming out into the open, while the expanding city covers everything else.

And it is while crossing the earth through a subway that one has the perception of his presence: the buried earth, the dug earth, the silent earth. While I wait, looking from the window of the car at the mud among the trees, I imagine the innumerable sculptures that could be modeled in these small spaces between the streets.

■ Water

Suddenly, in autumn, the sky lets the rain fall, which seems to bring out the green of the plants, which, until a few moments ago, seemed grayed by the streets.

Looking towards the north you can see the Alborz mountains covered with white snow. It is a relief for the eyes to settle from dawn to dusk on the white peaks beyond the thousands of buildings on the horizon.

Water flows through the streets of the city flooding the channels on the sides of the machines. Wraps the trees to quench their thirst and rushes through the steep streets of Tehran.

It is when the sun returns to shine that the rain falls back into the sky again, evaporating quickly. The mountains still shine in the sunlight while the passersby enjoy moments when everything seems to be still wet.

■ Fire

Inside a car the radio resonates: news, advertising and voices interrupted by the opening of a car door that opens onto the external world, chaotic, for some moments. The sounds of a setar come unexpectedly through the loudspeakers of the car, mixed with the sounds of the road.

Their sound grows rapidly, in succession, the rhythm increases. These notes take me elsewhere as the signs of the shops and the lives of passers-by out of the car whiz like the fingers of the player. In me a fire is lit, inside, and it is as if something unknown, inexplicably animate: it is like traveling on the instrument’s strings back and forth; it’s like feeling fiery fingers. I’m always sitting in the car, but I cannot feel the cold air coming in through the lowered window. The voice of the notes finally gave me warmth on a cold autumn day.

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

‘World’s longest qanat’ under restoration in central Iran

→ 1 Before the project begins, the mother well of the qanat was assessed by a team of experts including Seyyed Mostafa Fatemi, the provincial tourism chief, and Ebrahim Kazemnajand, the director of the UNESCO-tagged site, the report added.

A challenge that faces the qanat is that [after each heavy flood] it should be discharged step by step and manually whenever a massive flash flood happens and this issue may be the least flip to realize the parts of the efforts of [ancient] workers made at the time of digging the Zarch aqueduct as the world’s longest aqueduct.

The qanat starts from the village of Fahraj located in the north east of Yazd and it runs at the depth of 30-40 m beneath the surface. It reaches Zarch, where the water is used for irrigation in lower lands of the city of Yazd.

Based on a recent survey, some 37,000 out of a total of 120,000 ancient subsurface water supply systems, qanats, are still in use in Iran in arid and semi-arid regions of the country.

A select of eleven qanats is collectively been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list under the title of Persian Qanat. Each of them epitomizes many others in terms of geographic scopes, architectural designs and other motives. Such subterranean tunnels provide exceptional testimony to cultural traditions and civilizations in desert areas with an arid climate.

Generally, each qanat comprises an almost horizontal tunnel for collecting water from an underground water source, usually an alluvial fan, into which a mother well is



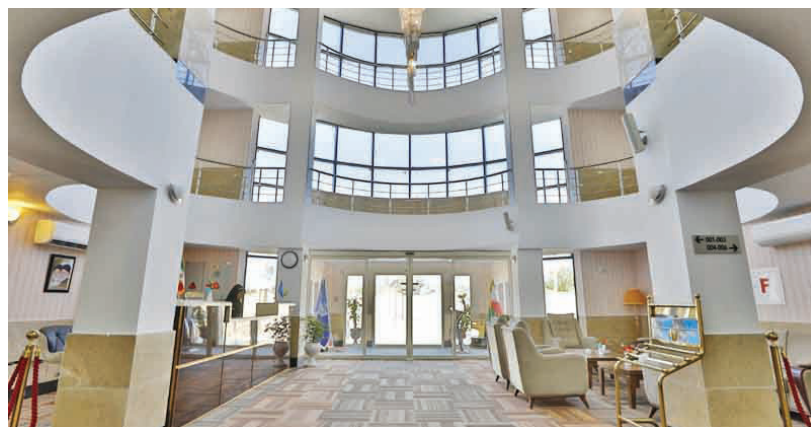
sunk to the appropriate level of the aquifer UNESCO has it that “The qanats provide exceptional testimony to cultural traditions and civilizations in desert areas with an arid

climate.”

Throughout the arid regions of Iran, agricultural and permanent settlements are supported by the ancient qanat system

of tapping alluvial aquifers at the heads of valleys and conducting the water along underground tunnels by gravity, often over many kilometers.

Coronavirus: Sistan-Baluchestan reopening hotels as lockdown rules eased



HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** – Residential centers in Iran’s south-eastern Sistan-Baluchestan province have been allowed to reopen as the coronavirus lockdown has been eased, CHTN quoted provincial tourism official Mojtaba Mirhosseini as saying on Sunday.

Hotels can reopen their doors during the holy month of Ramadan observing strict sanitary and social distancing requirements, he added.

He also explained that Sistan-Baluchestan tourism sector aims at promoting the province as a favorite destination for travelers after the

end of coronavirus crisis.

For mainstream Iranians, the name of Sistan-Baluchestan conjures up stories of drought, desiccated wetlands, and dust storms. On the international scale foreigners may consider it a reminiscent of the big red blot on the Iran safety map.

The vast province was long shunned by potential foreign and domestic travelers though it is home to several distinctive archaeological sites and natural attractions, including two UNESCO World Heritage sites, namely Shahr-e-Soukhteh (Burnt City) and Lut desert, parts of latter is situated in Kerman province.

Parthian-era citadel to undergo urgent restoration



HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** – An urgent restoration is scheduled to start on parts of ruined Narin citadel which is estimated to date from the time of Parthian era (247 BC – 224 CE).

The monument is located near the city of Meybod, central Yazd province.

The castle’s fence as well as its foundation and walls need urgent restoration, which will be done in the near future, provincial chief tourism Rasul Moshtaqian said on Sunday, CHTN reported.

He also noted that the castle, which is one of the oldest historical sites in the

region, was inscribed on the national list of cultural heritage in 1975.

The Parthian Empire, also known as the Arsacid Empire, was a major Iranian political and cultural power in ancient Iran. The Parthians largely adopted the art, architecture, religious beliefs, and royal insignia of their culturally heterogeneous empire, which encompassed Persian, Hellenistic, and regional cultures. At its height, the empire stretched from the northern reaches of the Euphrates, in what is now central-eastern Turkey, to eastern Iran.

“Words Alone Will Not Save Jobs”: UNWTO calls for action to support tourism recovery

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Zurab Pololikashvili, secretary general of the UNITED Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), has urged member states to increase pressure on world leaders to take decisive action to safeguard the millions of jobs under threat as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNWTO said in press release on Friday.

“The World Tourism Organization is

taking the lead in ensuring governments do all they can to safeguard livelihoods and shield the most vulnerable members of society,” Pololikashvili said, addressing the third meeting of the Global Tourism Crisis Committee held earlier this month.

UNWTO has also announced that it aims to address the Tourism Ministers of the G20 countries as part of an immediate response to the challenges facing the

travel and tourism sector as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak and accelerate the recovery.

New research from UNWTO has found that 96% of all worldwide destinations have introduced travel restrictions since January 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The report also looked at the level of travel restrictions from country-to-country. The UNWTO has invited potential trav-

elers to submit videos on how they think that the tourism sector will change after the COVID-19.

The Organization expects that international tourist arrivals will be down by 20% to 30% in 2020 when compared with 2019 figures. This could translate into a decline in international tourism receipts (exports) of between \$300-450 billion, almost one third of the \$ 1.5 trillion generated in 2019.

Online festival of handmade cookies underway in Zanjan



HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** – An online festival of traditional handmade cookies is underway in Zanjan province during the holy month of Ramadan, provincial tourism chief has said.

The festival aims at introducing the province’s traditional cookies to families as well as promoting consumption of healthy and organic foods, Amir Arjomand said, CHTN reported on Sunday.

Those interested in participating in this festival can send their videos and photos to the festival’s Instagram page until Ramadan 28 (May 22), he added.

Like other Iranian provinces, Zanjan has its own traditional cookies and sweets such as Naan Ardak, Shirini Shasti and Naan Chai or Chai Choragi.

Zanjan has also a great reputation for its handicrafts. In late January, the capital city of Zanjan was designated as a “world city of filigree” by the World Crafts Council after the WCC assessors visited various craft workshops, stores, exhibits and bazaars of city in a two-day itinerary in last December.

Filigree consists of curling, twisting, or plaiting fine, pliable metal threads and soldering them at their points of contact with each other with a metal groundwork.



Gavkhuni wetland displays colorful return of flamingos

1 → It is the 19th wetland in Iran designated as a Wetland of International Importance on Ramsar list, which as defined by the Ramsar Convention for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, recognizes the fundamental ecological functions of wetlands and their economic, cultural, scientific, and recreational value.

The Convention was adopted in the Iranian northern city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975.

It was in April last year that images of flamingos were published in the Gavkhuni International Wetland, which revealed that these migratory birds landed in the habitat again after two years of absence, and this year, a video of their presence in the wetland was released, raising hope for all kinds of migratory birds to return.

Gavkhuni wetland, which is considered to be home to various species of migratory birds in the east of Isfahan province, has been facing water scarcity and declining water levels over the past decade, with recent surveys showing that the number of migratory birds in the wetland has declined significantly.

Hossein Akbari, the provincial department of environment deputy director confirming the presence of 100 flamingos in Gavkhuni Wetland, said that these birds have been observed in the northern part of the wetland where the Zayandeh-rud river flows into the wetland, and more may be



found in other parts of it."

In previous years, before the wetland dried up, numerous flamingos came to this place, for instance in [the Iranian calendar year] 1386 (March 2007 – March 2008), thousands of flamingos were observed in this habitat, he noted.

Besides flamingos, the wetland is now home to a variety of migratory birds including, ducks, geese, sternidae, pelicans, and grebes, he added.

The migratory birds are now migrating from the northern and cold regions to the south, and the more water the wetland receives, the longer the migratory birds will stay, he highlighted.

He went on to say that drainage and lack of nutrition prevent migratory birds to turn back to the wetland "so that we are seriously pursuing the issue to provide the water right of it and witness water flow into the lakebed."

The water right of the wetland is about 176 million cubic meters per year.

Recent observations show that about 21 percent of Gavkhuni wetland is wet, and about 41 million cubic meters of water entered the wetland in the second half of last year, which is 23 percent of the wetland's minimum annual water needs to maintain its ecological function.

Since it has been deprived of receiving water rights for many years and even reached a complete drought two years ago, the water released last year has penetrated more into its lower layers.

Last winter, about 355 migratory birds of 9 species were counted in this wetland, which demonstrates a great reduction compared to three years ago when 2,151 aquatic birds of 31 species were counted in the area.

The number of migratory birds in the winter, when the Gavkhuni wetland was full of water and normal, averaged 20,000 and even reached 150,000 in the early 1370s (falling on 1991-2001).

Based on the latest data published on Friday by National Drought Warning and Monitoring Center affiliated to Iran's Meteorological Organization, precipitation in the country increased to 263.5 from 201.7 millimeters (mm) of the long-term average, demonstrating a 30.7 percent raise.

Isfahan province also surpassed the long-term precipitation amount of 141.5 mm, as 145.8 mm poured over the province.

Iran taking final step toward malaria elimination

1 → Referring to the use of anti-malaria drugs for COVID-19 treatment, he said that in its first encounter with coronavirus, China has found that chloroquine, one of the world's oldest anti-malarial drugs, appears to have an effect on the entry of coronavirus into lung cells. Of course, in addition to chloroquine, we also use some other antiviral drugs, which are mainly used to treat AIDS.

While there is no link between AIDS and corona or malaria and corona, these drugs can help improve the health of a patient with COVID-19, he added.

He went on to note that in recent years, malaria symptoms were mainly fever or ague, but there are so many anti-fever and painkillers around the world that the malaria parasite does not show the general way it causes the disease.

Since past two years, there have not been any indigenous cases of malaria in our country. However, border traffic has also led to non-native cases, especially in the provinces of Sistan-Baluchestan, Hormozgan and the southern part of Kerman province.

Unfortunately, there have been cases of malaria-causing deaths in the last two years, but they are very rare. Patients in Iran were not infected and brought the disease from outside the borders. More than 95 percent of malaria cases are from Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the other 5



percent are Iranians who have contracted the disease while traveling to those countries, he explained.

Fortunately, the main route of transmission of the disease is still through the bite of the female Anopheles mosquito. There are about six species of Anopheles mosquitoes in Iran, of which there are no more than two or three species, which are actively involved in disease transmission in the south and southeast, and the rest are in the north of the Zagros, from which we do not have malaria transmission, he said.

He concluded that although the most common route of transmission of malaria is mosquito bites, in rare cases there is a possibility of transmission through the use of shared syringes among injecting drug users.

According to WHO 2017 malaria report, the incidence rate of malaria in Iran has decreased significantly from 12,000 people in 2000 to 57 in 2017.

Venezuela seeking Iran's experience in fighting coronavirus

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The Venezuelan deputy health minister Maria Gabriela Castillo has said her country is seeking to use Iran's successful experiences in dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, IRNA reported on Sunday. Gabriela Castillo made the remarks in an online meeting with her counterpart Mohsen Asadi Lari on Sunday.

After a telephone conversation between presidents of the two countries about sharing experiences in combatting the disease, the two sides exchanged the latest information about the measures taken to counter the coronavirus outbreak.

The two countries discussed the severity of the outbreak and the unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States on both.

The Iranian official, while providing explanations about the management of the disease in the form of the national headquarters for coronavirus management and related committees across the country, including strengthening and launching diagnostic laboratory networks, national Basij plan and smart social distancing, the application, as well as the self-diagnostic system and other processes for monitoring people's health status.

Organizing the capacity of people's volunteer forces as well as supporting vulnerable or elderly people, successful activities in producing diagnostic kits and



protection items, performing clinical trials for six drugs and five other treatments, including plasma and stem cells (STCs) were among the issues Asadi Lari noted.

The Venezuelan official for her part pointed to Iran's achievements in dealing with the virus, organizing the establishment and equipping of several laboratories and implementing the screening plan and setting up a virtual education system, and called for more cooperation between the two countries.

Iranian 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 Sunday announced that the total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus has reached 90,481 of whom 69,657 equaling 77 percent, have recovered.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

Mental health screening scheme to be launched at schools

A scheme to determine the prevalence and incidence of psychiatric disorders in students will be implemented at schools across the country by the next school year (starting on September 23), director for education department at the Ministry of Education has said. Since last year, all students on seventh to ninth grades have undergone the mental health screening, so, we decided to conduct the tests on students on all grades, ISNA quoted Masoud Shokouhi as saying on Saturday.

"The scheme will be launched by the beginning of the next school year," he added.

For the current school year, screening of mental health was carried out in February and the results were presented to consultants for in-school or individual counseling, he said.

There are several types of screening that baseline testing is done by teachers, who record their observations on the system, he explained, adding, in the next step, specialist interventions will take place whether by the school counselor or counseling services outside the schools.

غربالگری «سلامت روان دانش آموزان» کلیه مقاطع تحصیلی از مهر ماه

مدیرکل امور تربیتی و مشاوره وزارت آموزش و پرورش، اعلام کرد که از مهرماه آینده غربالگری پایه سلامت روان برای همه دانش آموزان در کلیه مقاطع تحصیلی انجام می‌شود.

مسعود شکوهی در گفت‌وگو با ایسنا، افزود: تا سال گذشته همه دانش آموزان پایه هفتم، هشتم و نهم مورد سنجش قرار گرفتند. وی اظهار کرد: غربالگری پایه سلامت روان برای همه دانش آموزان از سال تحصیلی جدید آغاز می‌شود.

مدیرکل امور تربیتی و مشاوره وزارت آموزش و پرورش ادامه داد: برای سال تحصیلی جاری، غربالگری اولیه سلامت روان بهمن ماه سال ۹۷ انجام شد و نتایج آن جهت استفاده مشاورین در برنامه ریزی‌های درون مدرسه‌ای و فردی در اختیارشان قرار گرفت.

شکوهی افزود: چند نوع غربالگری داریم که غربالگری پایه توسط معلمان انجام می‌شود و معلمان مشاهدات خود را در سامانه همگان ثبت می‌کنند. در مراحل بعدی در صورت نیاز مداخلات تخصصی از سطح مشاور مدرسه تا هسته‌های مشاوره در سطوح استانی و واحدهای مددکاری در بیرون آموزش و پرورش صورت می‌گیرد.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“heli- or helio-”

■ **Meaning:** sun or sunlight

■ **For example:** We have mentioned the newly hatched larv of the barnacle in connection with **heliotropism**.

PHRASAL VERB

Pick on somebody/something

■ **Meaning:** to behave in an unfair way to someone, for example by blaming them or criticizing them unfairly

■ **For example:** Why don't you pick on someone else for a change?

IDIOM

Dance to someone's tune

■ **Explanation:** If you dance to someone's tune, you do whatever that person tells you to do

■ **For example:** He is the company's major shareholder so the management has to dance to his tune.

Ramadan rituals in Iran

People in Iran is mesmerized by the spirit of Ramadan every year. Different tribes and ethnic groups in the country have special rituals to celebrate the holy month of Ramadan. Ramadan has been a great event for Iranians since the advent of Islam and some customs are still alive in different parts of the country to celebrate the fasting month.

Ramadan is one of five pillars of Islam, alongside the declaration of faith; prayer five times a day; alms-giving; and the pilgrimage to Mecca. It is the ninth month of the lunar Islamic calendar during which, Muslims fast from dawn to dusk, which is an exercise in self-restraint, aimed at making the rich experience the suffering of the less unfortunate.



Here are some of these rituals, which are done by Iranians in different parts of the country to celebrate the holy month of Ramadan:

■ Welcoming Ramadan in Mazandaran

People in the northern province of Mazandaran welcome the holy month of Ramadan by fasting three days before the beginning of the month. They begin to fast from the last days of Sha'ban – the month before Ramadan - which is one of the meritorious months in Islam.

They also hold Khatm-e An'am, a kind of ceremony during which the attendees read the Surah Al-An'am from the Holy Quran before the Iftar meal - when people end their fast at sunset.

The attendees break their fast with some bread, pinch of salt and some water, which the host put in a large tray by the host.

■ A bag of blessing in East Azarbaijan

On the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan, women and girls of each family in the northwestern province of East Azarbaijan gather together and sew a bag for their family.

They put some money in the bag and keep the bags in a box until the next Ramadan. They called it 'Barkat Kisasi' in Azeri dialect, which literally means 'bag of blessing', which they believe that protect them from being poor.

■ Jomeh-Alwedaii in Shiraz

On the last Friday of Ramadan, people in the southern city of Shiraz go to mosques to pray for their wishes to come true.

Known as 'Jomeh-Alwedaii', the ceremony is attended by young girls who wish for getting married and infertile couples wish for having a child.

Pregnant women also sew the first cloth of their future child in the mosque on this day believing that it brings happiness and luck for him or her.

■ Ya Ramadan ritual by Turkmen

Turkmen who live in northeastern parts of the country hold several rituals during the holy month of Ramadan. One of them is called 'Ya Ramadan', originally 'Yari Ramadan', which literally means 'half of Ramadan'.

On the 14th and 15th nights of Ramadan, a clergyman or an elderly man accompanied by a group of men walk along alleys and streets of the city or the village and sing a song about the resistance of those who fast during the first two weeks of the month and encourage them to fast for the two coming weeks.

They go door to door and one of them carries a bag in which they collect what the families give them and other people answer 'Allah Hoo'. They share the collected items for poor people.

This year Ramadan began on April 25 in Iran.

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Liberia - Nigerian Peacekeeping Force

(August 04, 2003)

Nigeria's chief of army staff, Major General Martin Luther Agwai has told soldiers preparing to leave for Liberia that they are going as peacekeepers, not to fight any of the rival groups. General Agwai was speaking in Sierra Leone from where the first battalion of peacekeepers, all Nigerian, are setting out. This report from Elizabeth Blunt:

General Agwai was in Freetown to meet the battalion going to Liberia and to give them a **pep talk on the eve of their deployment**. These men have already completed a full tour of duty with the United Nations force in Sierra Leone and had been due to return home. Now they are being sent as the vanguard of an international force to bring peace to Liberia.

General Agwai reminded them that they were going as peacekeepers and although they had a **mandate** to defend themselves if attacked, they were not going to Liberia to fight against any of the **factions**. He will do everything in his power to make sure they could carry out their task with the least possible danger to themselves, he said. He didn't want to have to **bring home a single Nigerian coffin**.

Senior Nigerian officers remember only too well what happened last time they took a regional peacekeeping mission into Liberia in 1990. Despite assurances from two of the factions, fighters from a third force, that led by Charles Taylor, **opened fire on them** on the very first day and from that moment on they became **parties in the war**. They were there for eight long years and lost over a thousand Nigerians dead. No one wants any risk of the same thing happening again.

■ Words

a **pep talk**: a speech intended to encourage them to make more effort

the **eve of**: on the day before

deployment: the organization and preparation of troops, resources and equipment so that they are ready for immediate action

the **vanguard**: the first part of a bigger force

a **mandate**: the authority or instructions from their leaders

factions: organized groups within a larger group

bring home a single Nigerian coffin: send back to Nigeria a single dead Nigerian soldier

opened fire: started shooting

parties in the war: involved in the war

(Source: BBC)

Spain's daily virus death toll drops to lowest in a month

Spain's daily coronavirus death toll dropped to 288 Sunday, the lowest since March 20, as the country eased its lockdown to allow children outside for the first time in six weeks.

The health ministry said the figure dropped from 378 Saturday and brought Spain's total toll to 23,190, the third highest number of deaths after the United States and Italy.

The news came as the country took the first steps to ease one of the world's toughest lockdowns.

Spain issued a stringent stay-at-home order on March 14, confining the country's nearly 47 million population to their homes in a bid to slow the spread of the epidemic.

Unlike other countries in Europe and the rest of the world, Spain's children have not been able to go out, with only adults allowed to leave the house to buy food, medicine, briefly walk the dog or because of a medical emergency.

However from Sunday, under-14s can go out once a day, for one hour between 9:00 am (0700 GMT) and 9:00 pm, accompanied by one parent -- and no further than one kilometer from their home.

All Spaniards will be allowed out for exercise and to take walks from next weekend, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said Saturday.

(Source: AFP)

Pakistani doctors launch hunger strike over virus protection fears

Dozens of Pakistani doctors and nurses have launched a hunger strike demanding adequate protective equipment for frontline staff treating coronavirus patients, the lead organizer of the protest said Saturday.



Health workers have complained for weeks that the country's hospitals are suffering chronic shortages of safety gear, prompting the arrest of more than 50 doctors who called for more supplies in the city of Quetta earlier this month, AFP reported.

Frontline staff have been left vulnerable, with more than 150 medical workers testing positive for the virus nationwide, according to the Young Doctors' Association (YDA) in worst-hit Punjab province.

The protesters have kept working in their hospitals while taking turns to demonstrate outside the health authority offices in provincial capital Lahore.

"We do not intend on stopping until the government listens to our demands. They have been consistently refusing to adhere to our demands," said doctor Salman Haseeb.

Haseeb heads the province's Grand Health Alliance, which is organizing the protest, and he said he had not eaten since April 16.

"We are on the frontline of this virus and if we are not protected then the whole population is at risk," he told AFP.

The alliance said about 30 doctors and nurses were on hunger strike, with up to 200 medical staff joining them each day for demonstrations.

Punjab's health worker union are supporting the alliance and also demanding adequate quarantine conditions for medical staff.

Germany warns against race to restart tourism

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas has warned against reopening tourism destinations too quickly, saying Europe should agree on a common path back to freedom of travel, a newspaper quoted him as saying on Sunday.

"A European race to see who will allow tourist travel first will lead to unacceptable risks," Maas told the Bild am Sonntag newspaper.

According to Reuters, Maas referred to the high infection rate in the Austrian ski resort of Ischgl, where many German tourists are believed to have been infected.

"We have already experienced what an infection cluster in a popular holiday resort can do in the home countries of tourists. This must not happen again," he said.

Hundreds of tourists from countries including Germany, Norway and Iceland are believed to have been infected in Ischgl, which is near the point where Austria, Switzerland and Italy meet and is renowned for its party scene.

The local authorities have been widely accused of responding too slowly as it is now clear the virus found a breeding ground in crowded apres-ski bars at various resorts and spread in Ischgl for a month before it was quarantined on March 13.

Austrian authorities lifted coronavirus quarantines this week at three of the country's top ski resorts, including Ischgl, removing the restrictions days before they were due to expire.

The country has suggested a staggered resumption of tourism, initially allowing German visitors in, rather than a full restart of the European Union's suspended open-border pact.

Maas said Europe needs to agree common criteria for a way back to freedom of travel "as quickly as possible, but as responsibly as necessary".

"We must not let the hard-won successes of the last few weeks be ruined," said Maas, adding that otherwise there would be travel restrictions for much longer.

Meanwhile, the German Travel Association (DRV) said 60% of travel agencies and tour operators see themselves directly threatened by insolvency, a survey of member companies published in the Bild am Sonntag showed.

According to the survey, every fifth company has already laid off employees, and 80% have applied for state aid.

U.S. seeking coronavirus compensation political farce: China

China says U.S. accusations that Beijing mishandled the coronavirus outbreak have "no factual and legal basis", adding that seeking compensation for damages caused by the deadly virus is nothing but a political farce.

This came after a number of U.S. states filed a lawsuit against China, arguing that they are suffering huge damages over Beijing's response to the outbreak.

This week, Missouri's Attorney General Eric Schmitt and Mississippi Attorney General Lynn Fitch filed a lawsuit in a federal court, alleging that China's mishandling of the outbreak has led to devastating economic losses for the states.

Schmitt has accused China of lying about the danger and contagious nature of COVID-19, blaming Beijing for making the pandemic worse by "hoarding" personal protective equipment.

Other lawsuits have also been filed in U.S. courts on behalf of business owners, including one in Florida seeking compensation from the Chinese government for coronavirus-related damages on behalf of thousands of people.

In an article published by China Media Group (CMG) on Saturday, Beijing said these lawsuits have been filed in an attempt to cover up Washington's own errors in handling the coronavirus outbreak.

"As the coronavirus situation in the United



States becomes increasingly grave, certain people in the country ... have begun to seek prosecution against, and compensation from, China out of desperation. Their malicious prosecution and abuse of process, without any legal and factual basis whatsoever, is nothing but a farce reminiscent of the Chinese saying: "A thief shouting thief!," the article said.

"Since the outbreak began, a few unscrupulous politicians in Washington, DC have been obsessed with fueling their

political interests from the emergency. The idea of putting people's lives first has never crossed their mind. They have been actively engaged in buck passing, while passively fighting the virus and squandering precious windows of opportunities to curb its spread. This irresponsible behavior has resulted in the United States having the highest number of infections in the world," it added.

"It is the politicians who have undermined public interest with their unethical behavior

North Korean state media report on Kim Jong Un's activities amid death speculation



As the world mulls Kim Jong Un's health, with some suggesting that the leader of North Korea may be dead, guesses continue to be fueled by reports of Kim's alleged heart surgery and his disappearance from high-profile official events.

The state radio of the DPRK reported on Sunday that Kim Jong Un had expressed "appreciation" for workers taking part in building the city of Samjiyon amid speculation on the leader's health and possible demise, according to the South Korean state-run news agency Yonhap. There was no elaboration, however, on his health conditions or on Kim's public activities.

"Comrade Kim Jong-un sent appreciation to workers earnestly and wholeheartedly supporting in furnishing Samjiyon. Workers are in burning passion to earnestly contribute to the construction of a socialist powerhouse without forgetting about the party's trust and expectation for any moment", the state radio said, cited by Yonhap.

On Thursday, Pyongyang's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) report-

ed that Kim had received a congratulatory telegram from the head of Russian Communist Party, Gennady Zuganov, on the anniversary of leader's visit to Russia.

On 22 April, KNCA stated that Kim Jong Un had sent a reply to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's congratulations on Kim Il Sung's birthday.

No details regarding Kim's whereabouts or health conditions were given.

Other state media in North Korea did not report on the leader's activities, and no new photos of the leader have been published, according to Yonhap. His most recent photo appeared on KCNA alongside reports of Kim's inspection of air defence forces in the western part of DPRK on 12 April.

Speculation on Kim Jong Un's health began earlier in the month, when CNN reported that he had undergone surgery and was said to be in "grave danger". Kim did not appear at the high-profile annual celebration of his grandfather's birthday, a major and important occasion in North Korea. New reports followed speculation suggesting that the leader might be dead.

Cuba sends doctors to South Africa to combat coronavirus

Cuba sent 216 healthcare workers to South Africa on Saturday, the latest of more than 20 medical brigades it has sent worldwide to combat the coronavirus pandemic, in what some call socialist solidarity and others medical diplomacy.

The Communist-run country has sent around 1,200 healthcare workers largely to vulnerable African and Caribbean nations but also to rich European countries such as Italy that have been particularly hard hit by the novel coronavirus, Reuters reported.

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump has urged nations not to accept Cuba's medical missions on charges it exploits its workers, which Havana denies. But the calls have largely gone unheeded as overwhelmed healthcare systems have welcomed the help.

Cuba, which has confirmed 1,337 cases of the virus at home and 51 deaths, has one of the world's highest num-

ber of doctors per capita and is renowned for its focus on prevention, community-oriented primary health care and preparedness to fight epidemics.

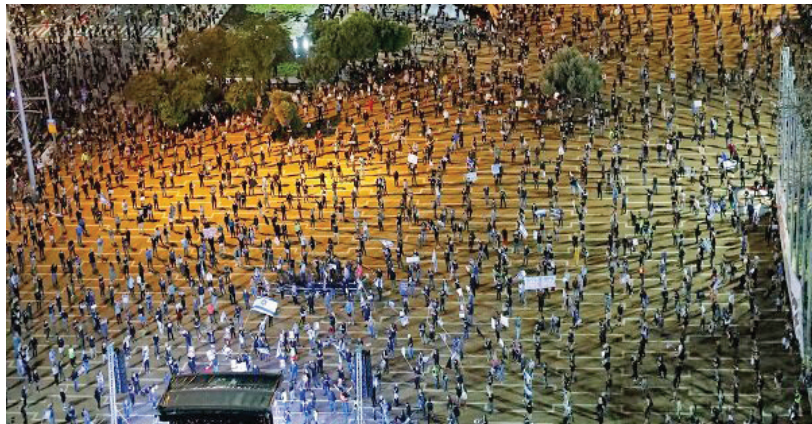
"The advantage of Cuba is that they are a community health model, one that we would like to use," South African Health Minister Zweli Mkhize told a news briefing earlier this month.

South Africa has recorded 4,361 cases, including 86 deaths, with 161,004 people tested for the virus as of Saturday.

The country has a special relationship with Cuba, which supported the fight against apartheid - a conflict that included Cuban troops who fought and died in southern Angola. After Nelson Mandela was freed from prison in 1990, he repeatedly thanked revolutionary leader Fidel Castro.

South Africa sent medical supplies to Cuba to assist in the fight against coronavirus in the plane that is now re-

Anti-Netanyahu 'Black Flag' protesters gather on Tel Aviv's Rabin square



Thousands of Israelis have denounced as maneuvering a power-sharing deal that leaves prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu in power even as he prepares to go on trial for criminal charges.

About 2,000 demonstrators took to Tel Aviv's Rabin square Saturday to protest the deal struck earlier this week between Netanyahu and his election rival, opposition leader Benny Gantz, to form a joint cabinet, Israeli media reported.

Wearing face masks and observing social distancing rules in force to fight the spread of the novel coronavirus, the protesters held signs calling out Netanyahu for corruption and telling him and other corrupt politicians to "go home".

The protesters say the coalition pact gives Netanyahu, who is under criminal indictment in three corruption cases, influence over the appointment of judges and legal officials and is meant to rescue him from his legal troubles, Sputnik reported.

Addressing the rally, former head of Israel's internal spy service Shin Bet Carmi Gilon accused Netanyahu of destroying Israel's Knesset or parliament.

A similar protest was held in the

that should be prosecuted by the international community and American people. Their abuse of process is incompatible with laws, facts and international justice".

According to Press TV, the article also pointed out that the lawsuits have no legal basis and they defy the basic theory of the law.

"First and foremost, their lawsuits against China were filed without any legal basis. According to the international principle of Sovereign Immunity of State, the state, government and property of a country are not subject to the jurisdiction and enforcement of the courts of another country."

"U.S. courts do not have jurisdiction regarding those lawsuits. Even though the cases were submitted to the International Court of Justice, China can verify that it has already fulfilled its obligations," it added.

The coronavirus, which causes a respiratory disease known as COVID-19, emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in Hubei Province late last year, incrementally affecting the rest of the world.

The virus has so far infected over 2,832,000 people worldwide, and over 197,300 have died, according to a running count by worldometers.info.

The United States says the virus has so far infected more than 925,000 and killed over 52,000 others.

→ 1 The fighting stopped in November 2019, when the two sides signed a Saudi-brokered agreement to end their power struggle in southern Yemen.

The infighting highlighted deepening divisions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, whose ties soured over a number of issues, including what the Yemenis view as Abu

Dhabi's intention to occupy Socotra Island and gain dominance over major waterways in the region.

Saudi Arabia, along with a coalition of its vassal states, launched the military aggression on Yemen in a bid to reinstall the Hadi regime and crush the popular Houthi Ansarullah movement.

However, over five years into the war, the kingdom has achieved neither of its objectives.

Reports say Saudi Arabia is looking for an exit from the quagmire in Yemen, where Houthi fighters now have the upper hand against the invaders.

The Western-sponsored bombing campaign has plunged Yemen into what the UN says is the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

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 offensive.

FFIRI not able to receive FIFA financial support due to sanctions

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — The Iranian football federation is trying to find a solution for receiving the financial assistance from FIFA due to sanctions against the country's banking system.

The international governing body of football 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 USD 150 million will be distributed among the 211 national football governing bodies around the world.

However, the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) has serious problems with regard to receiving financial assistance from FIFA.

The Iranian football federation is in an economic crisis for various reasons, and the coronavirus pandemic has worsened the situation and reduced the revenues of the federation.

In this circumstance, FIFA's financial aid to member associations, including Iran, could be a turning point, to some extent, to sort out the situation. 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.



There are still ambiguities how the Iranian Football Federation will be able to receive financial assistance by FIFA, as the broad U.S. restrictions on Iran's banking system still remain and it is not yet clear whether Swiss banks will facilitate the process of the transferring money to the Iranian banks.

Ali Soleimani, the Treasurer of FFIRI, said the sanctions against Iran are in place,

and "FIFA has not yet found a safe solution to pay the revenues of Iranian football and I think the problem with this financial assistance remains the same."

"Many efforts have been made in this regard, but we have not reached a suitable solution," Soleimani Said.

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.

Teenage cyclist declared brain dead after car crash



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iranian teenager cyclist Mahyar Farzaneh, who was injured in a car collision in Yazd on Friday, was declared brain dead. The 17-year-old cyclist was killed as a result of car crash. Farzaneh was a member of Iran Cycling National Team.

"Mahyar was one of Iranian talented cyclists and had a bright future ahead but he was hit by a car unfortunately," President of Iran Cycling Federation Khosro Ghamari said. His family tries to accept organ donation of their deceased beloved.

Iranian climber Sadeghzadeh killed in avalanche



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iranian mountaineer Hossein Sadeghzadeh has been killed after an avalanche in Alborz Mountain range. He lost his life at Shemshak, located north-east of Tehran after he was hit by an avalanche on Friday.

A rescue team found his body after one day on Saturday.

The team consisted of four climbers and the other mountaineers are safe.

Sadeghzadeh was an active climber who lived in Tehran. Tehran Times offers its heartfelt condolence to his bereaved family.

Paris 2024 Olympics plans 'obsolete' - IOC member Drut

Plans for the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris are "obsolete and outdated" in light of the coronavirus pandemic, IOC member and former French sports minister Guy Drut said Sunday.

Former Olympic champion Drut, who won gold in the 110m hurdles in 1976 and took silver four years before, added in a column for franceinfo that the Olympic Games needed to be "reinvented" to put them more in touch with reality.

"The crisis we're going through has a lasting impact on our daily lives, our way of life, our economy, our social pact, our choice of society," wrote Drut.

"It cannot and must not remain without effect on the imperative necessity which is to reinvent ourselves.

"The Olympic and Paralympic Games are no exception to this new context. They too must reinvent themselves."

The International Olympic Committee, jointly with local organizers, has been forced into delaying the 2020 Tokyo Olympics by one year to 2021 because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

But Drut, an IOC member since 1996, argued that postponement of dates was just the tip of the iceberg.

"Can the response to this crisis be translated by simply postponing dates, without the Games model -- both economic and organizational -- also being deeply rethought?" asked the 69-year-old, who served as sports minister in France between 1995-7 under Jacques Chirac.

"The beautiful project that we built and carried in the bid phase for Paris 2024 is now obsolete, outdated, out of touch with reality.

"If the project is to remain unchanged, we must review its means and refocus on the essential. The first necessity

is to make a budgetary reassessment of what Paris 2024 Olympics will cost.

"The Games of yesterday will not be the Games of tomorrow. We have to accept that and together imagine a new model.

"We have to rethink them to adapt them, to keep them relevant to the changing world. They will not be able to take place at any cost, disconnected from reality, on the 'margins' of the world."

In that context, Drut suggested hosting certain events on a single site "whatever the organizing country", citing as an example Tahiti or Hawaii for surfing.

He also proposed limiting the number of additional sports. "It is very expensive to build new equipment for an event that lasts only three, four days," Drut argued.

(Source: AFP)

Professional football in South Korea set to resume under strict COVID-19 measures

The top two men's professional football leagues in South Korea are set to begin in May following a two-month delay to the start of the season caused by the coronavirus crisis.

The Korea Football Association (KFA) has announced the top-flight K League and the K League 2 will both kick off their campaigns on May 8.

It will not be a complete return to normal for players in the league, however, as matches in the early part of the campaign will be held behind closed doors and it is not yet clear when fans will be able to return to stadiums.

Players will be banned from talking to their team mates, opponents or referees in matches, while coaches and other matchday staff have been ordered to wear masks.

Measures have also been put in place to deal with a case of coronavirus in a player or coach during the season.

If any player of coach tests positive for COVID-19, the club will not take to the field for at least two weeks.

Opponents could also stop playing



matches for a fortnight, depending on the results of contact tracing.

A surge in COVID-19 cases in South Korea had forced the KFA to indefinitely postpone the start of the season, which had been scheduled to begin on February 29.

The decision from the KFA, following a meeting of its Board with club representatives, comes after South Korea began to ease guidelines on social distancing put in place to curb the spread of coronavirus.

South Korea, which has reported in excess of 10,000 cases of COVID-19 and more than 240 deaths, has been praised for the way it has dealt with the virus.

(Source: Inside the Games)

Belarusian football wins fans abroad as locals boycott matches

As Belarus resists imposing a lockdown to combat the coronavirus, its football league has stumbled into the international limelight as Europe's only remaining top-flight competition.

But players are worried about the health risks and only diehard fans are braving matches. FC Slutsk fan Yahor Khavanski, 26, is "a bit afraid" but could not imagine quitting his weekend football fix.

On Sunday he intends to don a surgical mask and an FC Slutsk scarf and "try not to touch anything" at a clash against rivals Belshina Bobruisk.

"The stadium holds 2,000 people, but only 300 came to the last match. You can sit anywhere you want and keep your distance," he told AFP by phone.

Khavanski says he will keep attending matches, regardless of the risk. In his view, he faces "the same odds of being infected on public transport or in shops".

Life has continued as normal in Belarus, whose authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko has dismissed World Health Organisation recommendations to impose



a virus lockdown.

With a population of nearly 10 million, Belarus has registered 9,590 coronavirus cases. Neighbouring Ukraine, with four times the population, has registered fewer cases.

The Belarusian Football Federation (BFF) has followed the government's lead, saying it will not stop matches under the current guidelines.

The BFF even announced this week its women's league will kick off on April 30 following a two-week delay over fears players had come into contact with people infected with the virus.

(Source: Eurosport)

Former Iran basketball Salabi passes away

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Abolfazl Salabi, the last surviving Iranian player from the 1948 Olympic Games, died on Sunday.



He passed away at the age of 96 in Tehran.

Salabi represented Iran in six matches at the London Olympic Games against Cuba, France, Canada, Ireland and Mexico.

He also was a member of Iran national basketball team at the 1951 Asian Games, where the Persians claimed a bronze medal.

Tehran Times offers its heartfelt condolence to his bereaved family.

Thailand gets ready for hosting Asian Clubs C'ships

The 2020 Asian Men's Clubs Volleyball Championship will be held in August in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand.

The annual topflight tournament was due to take place from April 18 to 25, but was postponed due to the grave COVID-19 concerns and rescheduled for August 30 to September 6.

If things are going satisfactorily and life gets back to normal, it is likely that the first AVC Championship this year will be the Asian Men's Clubs Volleyball Championship in Nakhon Ratchasima.

The Championship, an international volleyball competition in Asia and Oceania contested by the men's clubs of the AVC's affiliated member countries, had dated back to 1999 when only six teams from five nations including two host sides took part in the inaugural Asian Men's Club Championship in Hefei.

The previous 20 Asian Men's Clubs Championship tournaments have been won by six different countries, with Iran claiming 14 times and Korea 2. Qatar, Kazakhstan, China and Chinese Taipei shared one gold apiece.

Shahrdari Varamin are the defending champions and have been drawn in Pool B along with Vietnam, Thailand B and Korea.

Pool A consists of Thailand A, Australia and Hong Kong. (Source: AVC)

Al Ahly seeking to return Iranian midfielder Ebrahimi

Qatari club Al Ahly is seeking to return Iranian midfielder Omid Ebrahimi.

Ebrahimi joined Al Ahly in July 2018 but was loaned to Belgian top-flight team Eupen a year later.

Now, the Qatari club is going to return the iconic midfielder for the new season.

Ebrahimi played 21 matches for Al Ahly and scored four goals for the team in the 2018-19 season.

Sanandaj to host World Wrestling Clubs Cup

IRNA — The head of the Wrestling Federation of Iran in a letter to the governor of Kordestan Province informed him that Sanandaj, the provincial capital of Kordestan province, has been confirmed as the host of the World Wrestling Clubs Cup for Greco-Roman style.

Ali Reza Dabir wrote to Bahman Moradnia that taking into consideration into account the fact that wrestling is deeply rooted in the culture of the Kordestan Province and there are numerous talented wrestlers in the province, the Islamic Republic of Iran Wrestling Federation has decided that Sanandaj host the event.

Dabir wrote that the World Wrestling Clubs Cup is to be held on November 4-6.

The World Wrestling Clubs Cup of 2020 was given to Iran. It should be broadcast live too.

AFC extends condolences on passing of R. Balasubramaniam

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) extends its deepest condolences to the family and friends of Balasubramaniam s/o Ramaiah who passed away on Saturday, April 25, 2020 at the age of 87 after bravely battling a long illness.

Balasubramaniam was a FIFA Referee and AFC Referee Instructor and is widely-regarded as one of the most experienced referees and instructors in Singapore who played a significant role in mentoring the Continent's match officials.

He was also known for his contribution and service to the game as Honorary Secretary to the Football Association of Singapore's (FAS) Referees Committee and was also the first-ever Singaporean referee selected to officiate the Thai King Cup final in 1980.

The thoughts and prayers of the AFC and the rest of the Asian football family are with Balasubramaniam's close relatives, friends and the FAS during this difficult time.

(Source: the-afc)

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Justice puts everything in its place, and liberality brings out things from a special direction. Justice is a statesman who gives everyone his right, and liberality is a habit belonging to one person only. Therefore, justice is worthier.

Imam Ali (AS)

Movies from Iran to compete in Dok Fest

A R T TEHRAN — Three movies by Iranian filmmakers will be competing in various sections of the Dok Fest — Munich International Documentary Film Festival that will take place in the German city from May 6 to 17.

“Sunless Shadows” by Mehrdad Oskui and “The Unseen” by Behzad Nalbandi have been selected to be screened in the official competition.



Photo: “Copper Notes of a Dream” by Reza Farahmand.

“Sunless Shadows” builds a remarkable relationship with a group of adolescent girls who are serving their sentences for the grave crime of murdering their father, their husband or another male family member in an Iranian juvenile detention center.

“The Unseen” is about homeless women in Iran who are locked away, banished to the outskirts of the city, and made invisible. Nalbandi secretly conducted interviews in the camps and creates a world of his own: cardboard animations make those affected visible again.

“Copper Notes of a Dream” by Reza Farahmand will be screened in DOK.horizonte, which is dedicated to films about countries undergoing transition.

The film is about a ten-year-old Palestinian refugee, Malook, who lives in Jarmuk, a suburb of Damascus in Syria, which is ruined during the war with ISIS.

Malook dreams of becoming a singer. Together with his older sister Ghofran, he is planning to organize a concert with professional musicians.

To earn money for the concert, Malook and some friends pull the copper wires out of the walls of vacant buildings that are riddled with bullets and rockets and write apologies for their theft on the walls, in hope the people who have fled will understand, if they ever return.

Tom Hanks, Rita Wilson donate blood for coronavirus vaccine research

NEW YORK (DEADLINE Hollywood) — Tom Hanks and wife Rita Wilson are stepping up to help in the fight against coronavirus. Hanks revealed in a new interview that they volunteered to donate blood for COVID-19 research after recovering from the disease.

“A lot of the question is, is what now? What do we do now? Is there something we can do? And, in fact, we just found out that we do carry the antibodies,” Hanks recently told NPR’s “Wait Wait... Don’t Tell Me!” podcast via MSN.

“We have not only been approached, we have said, ‘Do you want our blood? Can we give plasma?’ And, in fact, we will be giving it now to the places that hope to work on what I would like to call the ‘Hank-cine,’” the actor quipped.

Hanks and Wilson revealed on March 11, that they had tested positive for the virus. The two were in Australia for pre-production of Baz Luhrmann’s untitled Elvis Presley film from Warner Bros, when they fell ill. Hanks, a two-time Oscar winner Hanks is set to play Presley’s longtime manager Colonel Tom Parker in the project.

Over the next two decades, the Statlers won three Grammy Awards and were named top vocal groups nine times by the Country Music Association.

“He leaves a large and loving family and millions of fans who remember his stage and TV antics with smiles and cherish his music that will live with the ages,” Debo Reid said in a statement.

Pol Literary Agency sends 3 Persian books to Croatia for translation

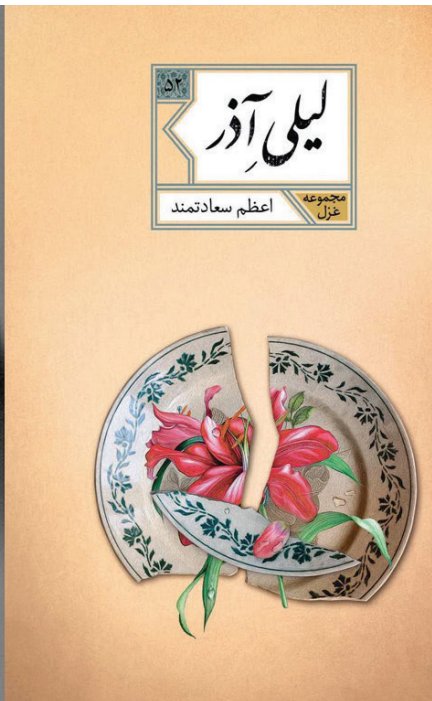
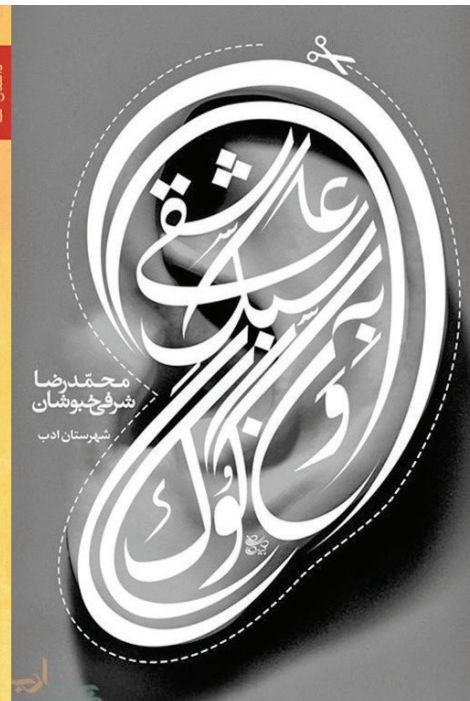
C U L T U R E TEHRAN — The Pol Literary and Translation Agency, a Tehran-based institution that translates Iranian books and presents Persian-language publications around the world, has sent three books by Persian writers to Croatia to be translated into Croatian.

The novels “Romance in a Van Gogh Style” and “Booklessness” by Mohammadreza Sharafi-Khabushan and poetry collection “Leili Azar” by Azam Saadatmand will be translated by a Croatian publisher in collaboration with the Pol agency, the Shahrestan Adab Cultural Institute, the Iranian publisher of the books, announced on Sunday.

“Romance in a Van Gogh Style” tells the love story between Alborz, the son of a housekeeper at the mansion of Khosro Khani, an artist, and his daughter Nazli. Due to his love for Nazli, Alborz encounters mysterious events leading to Khosro Khani.

The book and “The Story of Goharshad” by Saeid Tashakkori shared the award in the Novel for Adults category at the Seyyed Ali Andarzgu Literary Awards launched in 2019 by the Association of Islamic Revolution Publishers to honor books on the 1979 Islamic revolution.

The story of “Booklessness” is set in the Qajar period (1796-1925) and it tells the tale of an antique dealer who is deeply



A combination photo shows the covers of the novels “Romance in a Van Gogh Style”, “Booklessness” and the poetry collection “Leili Azar”.

interested in rare Persian manuscripts. This story and “This Street Has No

Rumble Strip” by Maryam Jahani shared the best novel prize of the 10th Jalal Al-e

Ahmad Literary Awards, Iran’s most lucrative literary prize, in January 2018.

Iranian singers shift to singles amid pandemic

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian singers and musicians have shifted to producing single recordings due to the restrictions the COVID-19 pandemic has imposed on collective life.

Consequently, dozens of musicians have released singles for free on social networks over the past week.

One of the highlights of the recordings is “Lover of the Flower” by singers Amir-Nasser Ranjbar and Saba Kamkar, which has been composed by maestro Hushang Kamkar, who has dedicated the piece to doctors and medical staff.

“I dedicate this piece to those brave men and women of humanity who are willingly sacrificing their lives to save the people of their country,” Kamkar wrote in a

statement for the release of the song.

“I will stay at home to protect myself and the others from the new virus,” he added.

Composer Mohammadreza Cheraghali has released “One Hundred Years of Solitude” based on the 1967 novel of the same title by Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez.

“Sang Sad” has been composed by Ehsan Beiraqdar, who dedicated the composition to Hamid Hamun, a character of Iranian new wave cinema filmmaker Dariush Mehrjui’s 1989 cult film “Hamun” played by Khosro Shakibai.

Lian bandleader Mohsen Sharifian with “Ley Lou”, composer Puya Sarai with “Pray” and pop singer Shahriar Seiqalani with “Repetitious” are also among the musicians.

IIDCYA to release audio versions of more books narrated by actors

A R T TEHRAN — Iran’s Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) plans to release audio versions of 23 young adult books narrated by some celebrated actors or voice actors in its new collection of audiobooks Ketab Ava.

“The collection includes Persian translations of 13 foreign novels and 10 Persian novels,” Mansur Zabetian, Ketab Ava director said on Sunday.

He said that the main point in choosing the artists as narrators was their knowledge of literature.

“We believed that their knowledge would surely affect their narration, however, the voices of the actors and their popularity were also of importance in the project,” he said.

He added that the books are suitable for young adults above 12.

British writer John Christopher’s Tripods Trilogy “The White Mountains”, “The City of Gold and Lead” and “The Pool of Fire”, as well as Iranian novels “When Moji Was Lost”

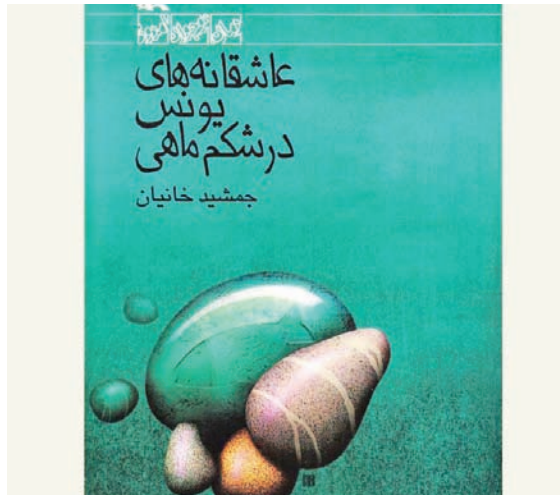
by Hamidreza Shahabadi, “Swimmer” by Abbas Abdi and “Love Song of Yunes in the Fish Belly” by Jamshid Khanian are among the books.

Zabetian emphasized the need for more audiobooks in the world of today and said, “Naturally, in the life of today, which is quick, fast and hard, we need to look for various methods to present literature.”

“Applications have made things easier. On the other side, the publication of books costs too much and readers have less time to spend on reading books, and this way we can offer better works on literature, while visually-impaired individuals will have better access to literature,” he said.

He hoped that IIDCYA’s audiobooks would be warmly received by book readers and that more individuals will have the opportunity to get access to them.

Late March, IIDCYA released hundreds of books ranging from novels and historical books to audiobooks available on Taaghche, a major online Iranian bookstore.



Front cover of “Love Song of Yunes in the Fish Belly” by Jamshid Khanian, which is among the books IIDCYA has turned into audiobooks.

A “Phantom of the Opera” contest seeks singer with style

NEW YORK (AP) — Andrew Lloyd Webber has launched a virtual competition that could lead to one fan singing on Broadway or the West End when musicals resume playing.

The composer has invited singers to make up their own little vocal showcase at the end of the song “Think of Me” sung by the character Christine Daaé from “The Phantom of the Opera.” There’s a little 13-second pocket — called a cadenza — where freestyle vocal gymnastics are encouraged.

The winning contestant will be introduced onstage by Lloyd Webber at either the home of “The Phantom of the Opera” on Broadway or London — whichever opens first — and sing after the performance.

“I just thought, ‘Wouldn’t it be fun to find a cadenza that we could do when finally we reopen in 2047,’” he joked during an interview with The Associated Press. “Everybody is needing something to lift the spirits at the moment.”

Lloyd Webber has tapped talk show host Graham Norton and singer Sierra Boggess, who played Christine in a number of productions of “The Phantom of the Opera,” to help him judge the entries, which have come in over Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. He said he’s been impressed by all of them.



This Dec. 16, 2019 file photo shows composer and executive producer Andrew Lloyd Webber attending the world premiere of “Cats” in New York. (AP/Evan Agostini)

Harold Reid, Statler Brothers bass singer, dies at 80

STAUNTON, Va. (AP) — Harold Reid, who sang bass for the Grammy-winning country group the Statler Brothers, has died after a long battle with kidney failure. He was 80.

Reid died Friday in his hometown of Staunton, Virginia, his nephew Debo Reid said.

The Statler Brothers frequently sang backup for country icon Johnny Cash. Some of their biggest hits included 1965’s “Flowers on the Wall” and 1970’s “Bed of Rose’s.”

Harold Reid was a member of the Country Music Hall of Fame and the Gospel Music Hall of Fame. He was also a comedian.

“He is and will always be loved by his family, friends and millions of fans,” a statement on the band’s website said. “His singing, his songwriting and his comedy made generations happy. He has taken a piece of our hearts with him.”

Reid and three boyhood friends — Lew DeWitt, Phil Balsley and Joe McDorman — formed the Four-Star Quartet in 1948. The group, later known as the Kingsmen, sang mostly gospel music. McDorman quit and was replaced by Don Reid, Harold’s younger brother.

DeWitt once said the group changed its name again because several other acts

— all better known — were billed as the Kingsmen. The new name came from a box of Statler tissue, he said.

The quartet switched to country music in 1964, after meeting Cash and joining his road show.

Over the next two decades, the Statlers won three Grammy Awards and were named top vocal groups nine times by the Country Music Association.

“He leaves a large and loving family and millions of fans who remember his stage and TV antics with smiles and cherish his music that will live with the ages,” Debo Reid said in a statement.



FILE - In this June 5, 1989, file photo, The Statler Brothers, from left, Harold Reid, Don Reid, Phil Balsley and Jimmy Fortune, perform at the 23rd annual Music City News Country Awards show in Nashville, Tenn. (AP/Mark Humphrey)