

Zionist regime to regret West Bank occupation **3**

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Knowledge-based firms making headway in fighting COVID-19



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Iran says deeply concerned as UN releases report on migrants held in U.S.

TEHRAN — Iran has voiced concerns about a UN human rights report saying that 1500 migrants are in jeopardy in U.S. detention centers during the coronavirus pandemic.

"We raise deep concern about @UN-HumanRights report indicating 1500 #migrants are in jeopardy, as they're held in overcrowded & unsanitary detention center in America," Iranian Foreign Ministry said it a tweet on Tuesday.

"The regime must be held accountable for poor treatment of migrants," it said. "They are not offenders. Let them go!"

A UN human rights expert on Monday urged the U.S. government to stop detaining migrants who are being "held for processing" of their immigration claims in "overcrowded and unsanitary administrative centers," citing concerns about the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. **→3**

Agricultural, foodstuff exports bring Iran \$5.8b of revenues in a year

TEHRAN — Iran exported over \$5.8 billion worth of agricultural and foodstuff products in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), Head of Agriculture Ministry's Planning and Economic Affairs Department Shahrokh Shajari said.

According to the official, about 7.104

million tons of such products worth \$5.821 billion were exported to foreign destinations last year, IRNA reported.

In the mentioned period, over 6.941 million tons of agricultural and foodstuff products worth \$6.392 billion were also imported into the country, according to Shajari. **→4**

Iran's tourism incurs \$1.2b loss due to coronavirus in 2 months: expert

TEHRAN — It seems to be too early to estimate the full impact of the coronavirus outbreak on Iran's travel industry, however, the head of the Association of Iranian Hoteliers says the industry has lost 53 trillion rials (about \$1.2 billion) just over the past two months.

Although the government has offered loans with a 12-percent interest rate for people who are facing financial problems in this industry, such amount of bailouts

will not compensate for much of the losses, IRNA quoted Jamshid Hamzadeh as saying on Monday.

He noted that the travel industry has led to direct employment of 240,000 people as well as indirect employment of 550,000 people, whom are at risk of losing their jobs.

He also called for tax exemption to be extended to the tourism industry, at least by the end of the current Iranian calendar year 1399, which ends on March 20, 2021. **→8**

ARTICLE
Salman Parviz
Journalist

Oil producers dig into savings amid fiscal deficits

Today many of the world's major cities remain under lockdowns while their respective government is implementing work-from-home schemes. This has dramatically reduced the number of cars on the streets and cut the demand from the transportation sector. With WTI hovering around \$10 and Brent on \$20 a barrel, oil producing nations are feeling the pinch.

When planning their annual budget no government predicted such a bleak situation and oil producing nations planned their budgets on higher than real prices, as a result they are facing fiscal deficits.

Global oil demand for oil is down by as much as 30 million barrels a day, a 30 percent reduction.

IMF predicts West Asian economies to contract this year. "Vulnerabilities are high in certain countries" with "high levels of unemployment and low growth," said Jihad Azour, the IMF's Middle East and Central Asia director.

Most nations are turning to their state-owned investments vehicles commonly referred to as Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF) designed to buffer oil price shocks. Today's situation shows the need for economic diversification among oil producing nations.

The private oil producers on the other hand are either shutting down or reducing production levels and freezing new drilling projects for the time being.

In the Islamic Republic a fund called National Development Fund of Iran (NDFI) was founded 2011. SWF's real assets are not officially declared and in this piece I will quote news agencies and other unofficial sources.

NDFI is reportedly worth \$91 billion. On April 6, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei approved withdrawal of one billion euros from NDFI to help fight the coronavirus epidemic.

The funds will be used for revamping funding needs of the overstretched health care system and the unemployment insurance fund. President Hassan Rouhani has thanked the leader for his move on his website and added that the needs will preferably come from domestic products and knowledge-based companies. **→5**

Calligraphy of Quranic verses embellishes Tehran exhibit

TEHRAN — The Saba Art and Cultural Institute in Tehran is playing host to an exhibition of calligraphy of Quranic verses in various styles.

The exhibit named "Secrets and Mysteries" displays some calligraphy works of verses of the holy Quran by a number of calligraphers from Iran and the world of Islam in two sections, the institute has announced.

The first collection includes a selection of calligraphy works and manuscripts from the Malek National Library and Museum in Tehran inscribed in different styles from the early Islamic period to the Qajar era (1789-1925).

A selection of calligraphy works chosen from the second Quran Inscription Festival has also been put on view in collaboration with the Center for Publications of Quran of the Islamic Republic of Iran.



File photo depicts a calligraphy work by master of calligraphy Gholamhossein Amirkhani.

The exhibit will be running until the end of the holy month of Ramadan which falls on May 24 at the institute located on Mozaffar St., near the intersection of Taleqani and Vali-e Asr Ave.

Every year during the holy month of Ramadan, known as the spring of the Holy Quran, an inter-

national Holy Quran exhibition has been held.

However, the exhibit was cancelled this year due to the spread of the coronavirus in the country.

Last year, the 27th edition of the exhibit was held at Tehran's Imam Khomeini Mosalla offering a variety of cultural and Quranic products in different sections.

Pakistan was the guest of honor, while the exhibition, also played host to guests from Lebanon, India, Turkey and several other countries.

Copies of the Holy Quran published by various Iranian and international publishers were put on view at the exhibit.

The exhibit also dedicated sections to display top translations and interpretations of the Holy Quran.

A number of meetings, seminars and art exhibitions on the Holy Quran were also organized on the sidelines of the event.

Mining sector accounts for 25% of Iran's annual non-oil income

TEHRAN — Iran's Deputy Industry Mining, and Trade Minister Darioush Esmaili said the mining sector accounted for 25 percent of the country's non-oil revenues in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19).

Speaking to the state TV on Monday evening, Esmaili noted that the steel chain had the biggest share of the income in the mentioned industry.

"We also have good prospects for the current year, as well," the official said.

Underlining the fact that Iran is one of the richest countries in the mining sector, he added: "If we can make good use of the

capacities in this sector, it can increase the people's welfare and comfort."

The official further mentioned the limitations and problems that the U.S. sanctions created for the mining sector in the previous year, saying: "despite all the hardships the production of minerals and mining products in the country not only didn't fall but also increased and especially in the steel chain the level of exports also rose."

The Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry has provisioned operational targets in the mining sector's three major areas of

exploration, extraction and processing, for the current year, he added.

"In the mining industry sector, we have targeted a 25 percent increase in the production of mineral products, and in the exploration sector, we will add about 20 percent to the previous reserves", the official said.

Earlier this month, Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) announced that mining exploration operations are underway in 652,061 square kilometers of land.



© ISNA / Alireza Mohammadi

On the verge of oblivion? Meet stone lions deserted in southwest Iran

Some cultural heritage enthusiasts say that hundreds of stone lions, which were placed on top of the tombstones of brave and courageous people of Bakhtiari tribe in the past, are now on the verge of oblivion and even fading away.

Bakhtiari nomads regard such stone statues, locally called 'Bard Shirs' as a symbol of bravery, valor, and characteristics like adroitness at hunting and shooting in war as well as horseback riding on top of the gravestone of that group of people.

Scattered across certain graveyards in Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari province, southwest Iran, these statues remind men who enriched the history of their tribes in a mythical form by their names and departed this life.

ARTICLE
Mohammad Jafari
Tehran Times journalist

Nationwide protests in late 2019, COVID-19-based lockdown, what is the next in Lebanon?

The Lebanese citizens, who poured into the streets in late 2019 calling for structural economic change, have faced the novel coronavirus outbreak and the following lockdown which has emptied the Lebanese people's pockets more than ever but meantime have made them more determined to seek the best way possible to root out the economic and political instability from their country via basic reforms.

Aya Majzoub, a Lebanese researcher at Human Rights Watch, wrote in her article published by Al Jazeera that coronavirus brought protests to a halt, but government's mishandling of the crisis proves political change is needed.

"We are coming back." This promise from Lebanese citizens flooded social media on April 17, the six-month anniversary of Lebanon's anti-government uprising.

Just a couple of months ago, Lebanon's streets were buzzing with protests. Today, they are eerily quiet and deserted.

The coronavirus pandemic brought months of nationwide protests to a screeching halt, as people stayed home to protect their health and the government banned public gatherings and enforced a lockdown to prevent the spread of the virus.

But the rampant corruption, extreme inequality, regressive tax system, rapidly deteriorating standards of living and almost non-existent social safety net that drove more than a million Lebanese people to the streets in protest are as prevalent as ever.

The COVID-19 crisis has only exposed and exacerbated these problems. The government's uncoordinated and inadequate response to the pandemic has further eroded public trust in its ability to help people weather this pandemic and pull Lebanon out of its worst economic crisis in decades.

Months before the COVID-19 outbreak, the World Bank predicted that the portion of Lebanon's population living below the poverty line would rise from 30 percent to 50 percent in 2020. **→7**

U.S. faces tough, messy battle if it pushes plan to extend Iran arms embargo

By staff and agency

In a report published by Reuters on Tuesday, it is said that the United States will face a tough, messy battle if it uses a threat to trigger a return of all United Nations sanctions on Iran as leverage to get the 15-member Security Council to extend and strengthen an arms embargo on Tehran, diplomats said.

Washington has shared its strategy, confirmed by a U.S. official speaking on condition of anonymity, with Britain, France and Germany, who are council members and parties to the 2015 deal between Iran and world powers.



Under that deal, a UN arms embargo on Iran is due to expire in October. A U.S.-drafted resolution to extend the embargo has been given to Britain, France and Germany, the U.S. official confirmed, but UN diplomats said it has not been shared with the remaining 11 council members, including Russia and China.

"It will be dead on arrival," predicted a Security Council diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity.

A resolution needs nine votes in favor and no vetoes by Russia, China, the United States, Britain or France to be adopted. Diplomats said the United States would likely struggle to get Russia and China to allow an arms embargo extension.

The Russian and Chinese missions to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Russia and China are also parties to the Iran nuclear deal.

If the council does not extend the arms embargo, the next step in the U.S. plan would be to try and trigger a so-called snapback of all UN sanctions on Iran, including the arms embargo, using a process outlined in the nuclear deal.

"It's very difficult to present yourself as a compliance watcher of a resolution you decided to pull out of," said a European diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Either you're in or either you're out."

Some UN diplomats said that while legal opinions on whether the United States could do this were split, ultimately it would be up to council members to decide whether to accept a U.S. complaint of "significant non-performance" by Iran.

It is a move likely to be challenged, diplomats said.

"It's going to be messy from a Security Council standpoint because, regardless of what (Britain, Germany and France) think, Russia and China are not going to sign up to that legal interpretation," said a European official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has advised U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to "stop dreaming", saying the Iranians always decide their destiny.

"2 yrs ago, @SecPompeo and his boss declared 'CEASING US participation' in JCPOA, dreaming that their 'max pressure' would bring Iran to its knees. Given that policy's abject failure, he now wants to be a JCPOA participant. Stop dreaming; the Iranian Nation always decides its destiny," Zarif tweeted on Monday.

In a report on Sunday, The New York Times said Pompeo is preparing a legal argument that the United States remains a participant in the Iran nuclear accord that President Trump has renounced, part of an intricate strategy to pressure the United Nations Security Council to extend an arms embargo on Tehran or see far more stringent sanctions reimposed on the country.

"In an effort to force the issue, Mr. Pompeo has approved a plan, bound to be opposed by many of Washington's European allies, under which the United States would, in essence, claim it legally remains a 'participant state' in the nuclear accord that Mr. Trump has denounced — but only for the purposes of invoking a 'snapback' that would restore the UN sanctions on Iran that were in place before the accord," The Times said.

Trump unilaterally quit the nuclear deal in May 2018 and introduced the harshest ever sanctions in history on Iran as part of his administration's "maximum pressure" strategy against Iran. By its exit from the nuclear accord, the U.S. flagrantly violated UN Security Council Resolution 2231 that endorsed the pact.

Doctors from across the world condemn U.S. sanctions on Iran: ISNA

POLITICAL **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A number of doctors from various countries have sent a letter to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres condemning the United States' sanctions when the world is fighting the coronavirus pandemic, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

The letter was signed by more than 170 doctors, the news agency said.

The doctors protested against the U.S. "cruel" sanctions which are contrary to human rights.

The sanctions endanger the people's lives, said the letter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

U.S. behavior can endanger security in Persian Gulf, Rouhani says in call with Xi

POLITICAL **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani told the Chinese leader late on Monday that the United States' interfering behavior can endanger security and stability in the Persian Gulf.

"Security in the region and waterways is important to Iran. However, unfortunately, the United States' dangerous behavior disrupts security and stability in the Persian Gulf region," Rouhani told President Xi Jinping in a phone conversation.

Rouhani also said, "Today, the world is in a situation in which all should help each other and not to continue illegal and inhuman sanctions."

He expressed hope that there would be a world without sanctions through efforts of countries such as China.

For his part, Xi said that peace and stability in the Persian Gulf are very important for international peace.

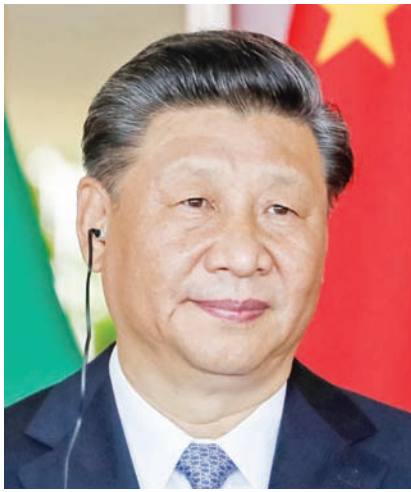
He said that Iran's proposed Hormuz peace initiative is "very positive" for regional security.

At the United Nations summit in New York in late September 2019, Iran officially unveiled the proposal for regional security.

"Based upon the historical responsibility of my country in maintaining security, peace, stability, and progress in the Persian Gulf region and Strait of Hormuz, I would like to invite all the countries directly affected by the developments in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz to the 'Coalition for Hope', meaning Hormuz Peace Endeavor," Rouhani told the UN delegates.

Foreign Minister Zarif has invited all regional states to join the peace plan for securing the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.

In a tweet in September, Zarif said the initiative entails "dialogue, confidence-building, freedom of navigation, energy security,



non-aggression, and non-intervention".

In a post on his Twitter account on October 15, Zarif renewed Iran's call to all countries bordering the Persian Gulf to join Tehran to "forge a blueprint for peace, security, stability, and prosperity" in the region.

In a press briefing on November 25, the Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi announced that three countries have accepted to join Iran's Hormuz peace plan.

"Three countries have given written response to Iran's invitation and other countries are studying it," he said.

Mousavi also called on certain Persian Gulf Arab states to abandon reliance on foreign forces for their security, saying dependence on foreigners is just an "illusion"

"We called on the countries to respond to Iran's peace-seeking call and abandon illusions. We have stressed that the presence of foreign countries undermines security and stability. We hope this initiative of Iran would face with a positive response,"



Mousavi stated.

■ Xi says China ready to join Iran for ultimate victory over COVID-19

Xi also said that China stands ready to join Iran and the rest of the international community in boosting anti-pandemic co-operation and achieving the ultimate victory over COVID-19.

He expressed his sincere sympathy with and firm support for the Iranian government and people who are fighting the COVID-19 outbreak, saying that the two countries, by helping each other and sharing weal and woe, have fully demonstrated the deep friendship between the two countries and their peoples in the battle against the disease, according to Xinhua.

The Chinese people, said Xi, are concerned about the Iranian people's epidemic fight, adding that the country has sent to the Iranian side several batches of anti-epidemic materials and its first team of experts to foreign countries.

He also said that the Chinese side stands ready to continue working with Iran in enhancing cooperation to battle the epidemic, share related experience, and offer help within China's ability, adding that he believes that the Iranian people, under the leadership of Rouhani, will score the victory over the virus at an early date.

Xi stressed that in the face of the global public health emergency, the international community can only form a concerted drive to win over the epidemic by strengthening coordination and cooperation, saying that unilateral sanctions only hinder the efforts of Iran and the international community to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

■ Rouhani says U.S. violates intl. law

In another phone conversation with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on Tuesday, Rouhani said that the U.S. sanctions violate international law.

Washington has even prevented Iran from receiving medical equipment and medicine, Rouhani lamented.

"We expect the international bodies to counter the United States' unilateralism and illegal sanctions against Iran," he noted.

For his part, Ramaphosa said, "It is the time to collectively take action against the common enemy [the coronavirus]. It is not the time to cause problems for other nations through imposing sanctions and pressure."

■ Rouhani urges Europe to counter U.S. inhuman actions

In a phone conversation with Croatian President Zoran Milanovic on Monday, Rouhani urged Europe to resist U.S. inhuman actions.

Continuation of the U.S. behavior is "inhuman", he added.

Milanovic also described the U.S. sanctions and pressure against Iran "wrong" and "inhuman".

Iranian MP says U.S. claims about satellite launch is 'nonsense'

POLITICAL **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Alaeddin Boroujerdi, a veteran Iranian MP who sits on the Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, has said that the United States' claims about launch of a military satellite by Iran are "nonsense".

"What the United States' claims about Iran's launch of satellite being against the Resolution 2231 is nonsense. The United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA [the 2015 nuclear deal] showed it is against this resolution," he told IRNA in an interview published on Tuesday.

He noted that Iran has the right to scientific progress by relying on its own capacities.

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

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo claimed the launch violated the UN Security Council Resolution 2231 that endorsed the JCPOA.

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

In a statement on Thursday, France also claimed the launch was in contravention of Resolution 2231 and called on Tehran to immediately cease all activities related to the development of ballistic missiles designed to be capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

Germany also said that Berlin's position on the Islamic Republic's missile program has not changed, and the program has a destabilizing impact on the region.

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

In response, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Friday that both the U.S. and Europe cannot lecture Iran based on a misreading of 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 'DE-SIGNED 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.

Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organizations, has said claims by the United States that the launch of a satellite by Iran is a violation of Resolution 2231 are instances of "double standards" and "hypocrisy".

"US claims that recent launch of a military satellite by Iran was a violation of 2231 UNSC res. Wrong interpretation. But there is also a different curious aspect- the US attempt to build on the resolution, which it undermines by all possible means. Double standards and hypocrisy," Ulyanov tweeted on Sunday.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova

on Thursday dismissed the U.S. claim that Iran violated the resolution and accused Washington of being in violation of the nuclear deal.

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

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on Friday that France and Britain's stance on Iran's 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 Resolution 2231 by quitting the JCPOA shows their double standards and also giving in to the United States' bullying," Mousavi pointed out.

He strongly dismissed France and Britain's biased interpretation of the UN resolution.

"Iran's nuclear program is just for peaceful purposes based on the fatwa issued by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei] which has been approved by (numerous) reports of the International Atomic Energy Agency. So, Iran's space program is for defensive objectives and has not been designed for other purposes," he said.

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

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

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

OPCW report on Syria chemical attacks one-sided, biased: Iran

(Press TV) — The Iranian Foreign Ministry has denounced as "one-sided" a recent report by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) about a series of suspected gas attacks in Syria's western region of Hama in 2017.

Seyyed Abbas Mousavi, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, said in an interview with the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) on Monday that the initial report published by the OPCW's team on the use of chemical weapons in Syria was "biased, one-sided, non-independent, and outside the jurisdiction and scope" of the Hague-based organization.

In an 82-page report earlier this month, the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) claimed Syrian government forces had been responsible for the alleged chemical attacks on the militant-held town of Lataminah in Hama province during the last week of March 2017.

It alleged that in a span of one week, Syrian fighter jets had twice dropped bombs containing sarin nerve agent on the village and a helicopter had targeted its hospital with a cylinder containing chlorine, affecting scores of people.

According to the report, the team had based its investigation on a range of evidence, including witness testimonies, videos, forensic reports on recovered munitions scraps, medical records and satellite imagery.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran, as the biggest victim of chemical weapons in the contemporary period, condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone at any place

and time and under any circumstances," Mousavi said.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman added that the OPCW's report on Syria and the type of reasoning and conclusion it provides indicated that the report was prepared and compiled under external pressure, and the sources used in the report had, to some extent, been provided by some terrorist groups and so-called humanitarian organizations, such as the White Helmets.

Stressing that Iran is deeply concerned about the stigmatization of the OPCW's independence and legal personality as a specialized organization with a technical nature, Mousavi said the county disagrees with the formation of an investigation team by OPCW and views this issue as contrary to the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and in contradiction with the UN Security Council's exclusive mandate to maintain international peace and security.

While appreciating the Syrian government's constructive cooperation with the OPCW, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman underlined that, "The time has come for Syria's chemical case to be handled away from politicization, political pressures, and falsified and biased mechanisms."

The Lataminah strikes came days before another alleged sarin assault in nearby town of Khan Shaykhun in Idlib province, which killed more than 80 people on April 4.

The Western countries rushed to blame the incident on Damascus — an allegation rejected by the Syrian



government — with the United States launching several dozen Tomahawk cruise missiles at a Syrian air base, taking the lives of about 20 people including both Syrian soldiers and civilians.

The Syrian government surrendered its stockpiles of chemical weapons in 2014 to a joint mission led by the UN and the OPCW, which oversaw the destruction of the weaponry. However, Western governments and their allies have never stopped pointing the finger at Damascus whenever an apparent chemical attack has taken place.

Right-wing think tanks are using Covid-19 to push war with Iran: In The Times

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — In an article published in In The Times on Monday, Sarah Lazare argues that two right-wing think tanks in America, namely the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) and American Enterprise Institute (AEI), are pushing for war against Iran amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The following is an excerpt of the article:

Since the global Covid-19 pandemic began, a cluster of U.S. think tanks has been aggressively lobbying the Trump administration to escalate militarily toward Iran and tighten U.S. sanctions. This push has come despite warnings that such sanctions are worsening the death toll of Iran's outbreak, which is one of the worst in the world. The think tanks leading this effort—the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) and American Enterprise Institute (AEI)—have cranked out non-stop statements, research documents, videos and media appearances since the crisis began. They are not shouting into the wind, but speaking directly to an administration that has proven willing to act upon their words.

In the 47 days since March 11, when the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a global pandemic, the FDD has posted 56 articles, podcast interviews and videos on its website which either demonize Iran as a uniquely bad actor or urge the United States to take a confrontational posture towards the country. While the steady stream of anti-Iran invectives is not new, the insistence that the Covid-19 crisis builds their case is. One piece from April 14, for example, argues that the crisis strengthens the case for “regime change,” because it will diminish “the regime's credibility even further and add fuel to the outrage and anger that have been building for years.” The unproven theory that mass suffering will accelerate an uprising against the government has long been used to justify a host of punishing U.S. policies against the Iranian people, including sanctions—a form of collective punishment has only unleashed poverty and premature death upon ordinary people.

Yet, throughout the crisis, the FDD has published a flurry of materials arguing that the United States must not let up sanctions during the pandemic. The organization is funded by pro-Israel billionaires and started out in 2001 as an explicitly pro-Israel organization called EMET (Hebrew for truth). Since the pandemic began, it has published written and video posts that include: “Tehran Can Afford to Fight Covid-19 Even Without Sanctions Relief,” “The Coronavirus Is Absolutely No Excuse To Lift Sanctions on Iran” and “Humanitarian channels to Iran continue to be wide open.” In a March 27 video, Mark Dubowitz, the chief executive of FDD, released a video arguing that “the Iranian people know that this is the wrong time to give sanctions relief.”

In fact, doctors in Iran have been begging the Trump administration for relief from sanctions, which are cutting off critical medical supplies, like ventilators, leading to an increase in Covid-19 deaths. While



“The Foundation for Defense of Democracies and American Enterprise Institute are aggressively campaigning for military escalation and a tightening of sanctions.”

humanitarian exemptions technically exist on paper, they are rendered largely meaningless by a difficult-to-navigate web of sanctions, as well as threats and intimidation from the Trump administration, which have scared global banks and firms from doing business with Iran. Researchers were warning that sanctions were causing a shortage in medical supplies before the outbreak began: As Human Rights Watch said on April 6, “these exemptions have failed to offset the strong reluctance of U.S. and European companies and banks to risk incurring sanctions and legal action by exporting or financing exempted humanitarian goods.”

Hoda Katebi, an Iranian-American community organizer with the No War Campaign, told In These Times that the FDD's role is “wildly ruinous—there's no nicer way to put it.” According to Katebi, “You'd think a humanitarian crisis would be a time when war hawks pause rather than ramp up their project. It is telling what their goal is. With all their talk about wanting to help the Iranian people, it's very clear it's quite the contrary.”

Amid calls for sanctions relief, the Trump administration has only dug in more, with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issuing a statement on March 18 announcing a new round of sanctions that “will deprive the regime of critical income from its petrochemical industry and further Iran's economic and diplomatic isolation.” This was soon followed by the Trump administration's intervention to block an emergency \$5 billion loan to Iran from the International Monetary Fund (a position the FDD also supported). But this did not satisfy the FDD. On April 23, a group of “experts and formal officials” signed a letter to Trump urging his administration to “double down on the maximum pressure campaign.” Of the 50 people who signed, 22 were from the FDD, according to a report in the conservative publication The National Interest.

Cavan Kharrazian, international program researcher for the Center for Economic and Policy Research, told In These Times, “Their letter echoes the State Department's categorically false line that these broad economic sanctions have no humanitarian effects. Despite claiming that their ‘hearts go out’ to the Iranian people, they actively contribute to an extremely dangerous foreign policy that harms millions of ordinary Iranians and pushes us closer to escalating military conflict.” This danger is underscored by Trump's April 22 claim that, “I have instructed the United States Navy to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea”—a reference to the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet in the Persian Gulf.

According to Kharrazian, “In the realm of public opinion, FDD CEO Mark Dubowitz is continually quoted in major publication pieces on Iran, such as the New York Times, and FDD staff members routinely host or sit on panels throughout the beltway regarding Iran. Additionally, their ‘experts’ have regularly testified in Congress on foreign policy towards Iran.”

But perhaps the clearest sign of influence is how closely the Trump administration's rhetoric mirrors that of the FDD. On April 6, the State Department published a fact sheet titled “Iran's Sanctions Relief Scam.” This bizarre, screedy document is worth comparing with an FDD memo published the day before: the overlap in messaging, historical examples, and specific data cited is striking. As Kharrazian notes, this is not an isolated case: “If you read the statements coming from Trump's State Department on Iran and the ‘maximum pressure’ campaign, they appear almost completely ideologically aligned with these think-tanks' own positions and talking points, especially during the Covid-19 crisis.”

FDD is not alone in its campaign. The AEI, which has received millions from Koch foundations, as well as corporations such

as ExxonMobil, has launched a campaign to counter activists who are calling for sanctions relief. Yasmine Taeb, senior policy counsel at Demand Progress, tells In These Times, “FDD and AEI have always pushed for policies aimed at war. FDD led the charge against the Iran nuclear deal under Obama, and it opposes U.S. diplomacy with Iran on principle: It sees any U.S. relationship with Iran as coming at the expense of the U.S. relationship with Israel, and it has a track record of supporting escalation for the sake of escalation.”

While the AEI might not be playing as large a role as the FDD, it also is not silent. On March 20, 26 progressive organizations released a statement asking “President Trump, Sec. Mnuchin, and Sec. Pompeo to loosen the administration's crippling sanctions regime on Iran for 120 days in order to aid the Iranian people's fight against the virus.” AEI responded with a press effort to oppose that effort. On March 24, AEI resident scholar Michael Rubin directly blasted the letter in an op-ed in the Washington Examiner titled, “Don't lift Iran sanctions, not even for the coronavirus.”

Then, on March 25, AEI senior fellow Danielle Pletka wrote an op-ed in The Dispatch titled, “Sorry, now is not the time to lift sanctions on Iran.” That piece also responds to the letter from 26 organizations calling for sanctions to be lifted. In late March, Sen. Bernie Sanders, Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ilhan Omar and others circulated a letter calling for immediate sanctions relief for Iran (that letter would be publicly released on March 31 with 34 congressional signatures). On March 25, Rubin wrote an article for The National Interest titled “Sorry, AOC: Donald Trump can't give Iran a sanctions pass for coronavirus.”

Like the FDD, AEI's support for sanctions stems from a larger push towards military escalation. On April 10, Gary Schmitt, “resident scholar in strategic studies and American institutions” for AEI, wrote a piece in The American Interest titled, “Don't slash the defense budget to pay for Covid-19.” He argued that any cuts would pose a security threat to the United States, in part because “Russia, China, and Iran have become more aggressive and more potent adversaries.” On April 2, Kenneth M. Pollack, a resident scholar at AEI, echoed FDD in speculating on whether the mass suffering caused by Covid-19 could hasten the regime's end: “While Covid-19 seems unlikely to be the trigger for the fall of the Islamic Republic, when the regime's history is finally written, it may very well be that we will look back on this crisis and say that it helped hasten its end.” Notably, Pollack was a major pusher of the Iraq war, who was cited by New York Times columnist Bill Keller as a reason the latter supported that war.

Amid an unprecedented global crisis, the self-declared “guardians of order” see an opening to push for more war, death and destruction. In the words of Taeb on Demand Progress, “It's pretty disgusting, because we're talking about a global pandemic that has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. We're talking about innocent people dying.”

Zarif, Lavrov dismiss ‘delusional’ U.S. plan for nuclear deal

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov have dismissed U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's “delusional” plan to keep Washington a participant state in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in order to extend the UN arms embargo on Iran.



In a phone talk on Tuesday, the two chief diplomats rejected the new U.S. scheme as “impractical”.

It came after U. Pompeo said he is preparing a legal argument that the U.S. would remain a participant in the JCPOA as part of an intricate strategy to pressure the UN Security Council to extend an arms embargo on Tehran.

According to Pompeo's plan, expected to be opposed by many of the U.S.'s European allies, Washington would, in essence, claim it legally remains a “participant state” in the nuclear accord only for the purposes of invoking a “snapback” that would restore the UN sanctions on Iran that were in place before the nuclear deal.

Russia has already told American and European officials it is eager to resume conventional arms sales to Iran.

During their phone conversation, Zarif and Lavrov also talked about the latest political developments in Afghanistan and the ongoing efforts to establish reconciliation and political consensus in that country.

Iran says deeply concerned as UN releases report on migrants held in U.S.

➔ “It is very difficult to keep the necessary physical distance in overcrowded detention facilities,” Felipe González Morales, the UN special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, said in statement. “Significantly reducing the number of detained migrants by releasing them into alternative settings can easily solve this.”

“None of those migrants are detained for criminal offenses, but are simply awaiting decisions on their immigration claims,” he added. “The authorities should assess the capacity of readily available alternatives measures in the country and elaborate a set of criteria to identify those in administrative detention that could be immediately released to alternative placements.”

Pointing to the U.S. government's long track record—particularly under President Donald Trump—of ignoring the human rights of migrants, González Morales said that “alternatives to widespread immigration detention in the U.S. would also ensure that migrants are not arbitrarily detained.”

Defense chief stresses readiness to counter modern threats

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami said the country needs to maintain a constant state of preparedness to deal with new threats in the modern age.



In comments during a visit to a hospital in Tehran, the defense minister urged that all experiences and achievements in the battle with the novel coronavirus should be well documented to devise plans for dealing with other threats.

“This virus resulted in multidimensional achievements for the country, and greatly broadened our experience (and readiness) for dealing with future modern threats,” the minister added.

Pointing to the far-reaching impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on cultural, economic, security and health issues, General Hatami said, “We must constantly update our preparedness in the face of emerging threats.”

The outbreak and consequences of the coronavirus may encourage the hostile countries to pursue their evil objectives against other nations, he warned, stressing the need to prepare the country for confrontation with similar threats.

In comments earlier in April, Head of Iran's Civil Defense Organization called for the formation of a fact-finding committee to look into the possible role of the U.S. government in the creation of coronavirus.

Brigadier General Gholam Reza Jalali said the U.S. government has the world's “biggest biological army” and may have been behind the creation of COVID-19.

The United States claims to be the world leader, but it has formulated a biological cooperation plan and has established 25 laboratories with biosafety level (BSL) 3 and 4 in various parts of the world, he added.

Zionist regime to regret West Bank occupation: advisor



POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Hossein Amir Abdollahian, a senior foreign policy advisor to the Iranian Parliament speaker, has said the Zionist regime will regret its partial occupation of the West Bank.

“The Zionists must not hesitate that in case of partial #WestBank occupation, they will face a new and shocking approach by the Resistance Front,” Amir Abdollahian wrote in his Twitter account on Tuesday morning.

He added, “IT WILL MAKE THEM REGRET. In the new Palestinian Resistance endeavor, the world will see a significant development.”

In a statement on Sunday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi strongly denounced the Zionist regime's move to expand its illegal settlements and annex parts of the occupied West Bank.

Mousavi described the annexation as

a violation of international law and 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.

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

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.

Iran's satellite launch was completely legal, says MP

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — A member of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee has said Iran's recent launching of a satellite into the orbit was within the framework of international conventions and treaties as well as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran nuclear agreement.

Rejecting the United States' efforts to extend sanctions on Iran, Hossein Naghavi Hosseini said the U.S. cannot refer to the JCPOA to criticize Iran because it has withdrawn from the internationally-endorsed deal, ISNA reported.

It came a day after Pompeo 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.

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.

Agricultural, foodstuff exports bring Iran \$5.8b of revenues in a year

➔ Watermelons, apples, tomatoes, potatoes, onions, and shallots were the top five exported products in the previous year in terms of weight, while in terms of value, pistachios, apples, tomatoes, pistachio kernels, and watermelons were the five major export products.



Shajari further pointed to the major imported items in terms of weight, saying: corn, barley, soybean meal, soybean, and untreated sugar were the top five imported items, while in terms of value livestock corn, rice, barley, and soybeans were the top imported products.

HSBC sees mounting credit losses after pandemic halves first-quarter profit

HSBC Holdings PLC on Tuesday warned of more earnings pain ahead after first-quarter profit nearly halved as it set aside a hefty \$3 billion (2.4 billion pounds) in bad loan provisions due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Europe's biggest bank said the outbreak would mean sustained pressure on its revenues as customer activity declined and lower interest rates squeezed margins, while noting increased fraudulent activity could lead to "potentially significant" credit losses.

The bleak outlook, shared by many lenders reporting earnings this season, underscored the scale of the problems facing the sector as it grapples with corporate borrowers in crisis, plunging stock and oil prices, as well as low interest rates.

HSBC's new Chief Executive Officer Noel Quinn faces additional hurdles as plans to cut costs through layoffs - part of a wider restructuring unveiled in February - have been put on hold due to the pandemic.

The bank increased its expected credit impairment charges for January-March by \$2.4 billion to \$3 billion - its highest quarterly level in nine years - and said total provisions for the year could range from \$7 billion to \$11 billion.

"No one really knows how the coronavirus will develop over the next three to six months and what scenarios will play out. It's most important for us to be prepared for all scenarios - the optimistic and the less optimistic," Quinn told Reuters.

"Only time will tell where in that range we will fall."

Profit before tax for the quarter tumbled 48% to \$3.2 billion, below an average analyst forecast of \$3.7 billion compiled by the bank. Revenue dropped 5% to \$13.7 billion.



The results were also hit by the slide in oil prices as well as "a significant charge related to a corporate exposure in Singapore", it said.

HSBC did not name the company, but the lender is among leading creditors to Singapore oil trader Hin Leong Trading (Pte) Ltd, which sources have said is under court-appointed supervision to restructure billions of dollars in debt following the collapse in the price of oil.

Hin Leong has declined to comment on its debt restructuring. HSBC's shares in London fell 1.4% on Tuesday morning, after its Hong Kong-listed shares (0005.HK) earlier rose 0.4%, lagging a climb of more than 1% in the benchmark Hang Seng Index .HSI. "I think the management team are doing OK in the circumstances, said Hugh Young, managing director at Aberdeen Asset Management Asia, one of HSBC's 20 biggest shareholders.

Global recession impact
HSBC, which along with other UK banks this month announced the suspension of dividend payouts after pressure from the regulator to conserve capital, said it would review the decision at the end of the fourth quarter.

Analysts, however, said the bank could look to permanently tweak its dividend payouts, long a source of attraction for the stock but a burden for the bank when times are tough.

"We see increasing scope for the current \$0.51 to be permanently rebased in 2021," analysts at Barclays said.

The London-headquartered bank, which generates the bulk of its profits in Asia, said it plans to reduce its operating costs to mitigate the fall in revenue which is set to lead to "materially lower" profitability in 2020 than last year.

In February, HSBC laid out plans to cut 35,000 jobs. While many of those redundancies have been paused to avoid disruption and leaving staff unable to find work elsewhere, Quinn has cut some top level jobs and reshuffled others as he tries to prune HSBC's complicated management structure.

The bank reiterated, however, that it will press ahead with plans to shift capital from underperforming businesses and reduce other costs.

HSBC's sharply higher loan loss provisions follows similar moves by U.S. lenders this month. The top four U.S. banks set aside \$14.2 billion in loan loss provisions, with sales and trading revenue from investment banking the only silver lining as frenzied markets worldwide drove up commissions.

Rival UBS (UBSG.S) was one of those benefitting most from that silver lining, and on Tuesday it posted a 40% increase in profits as ultra-rich clients shuffled portfolios to cope with the virus outbreak.

(source: Reuters)

Capital increase by companies listed on stock market up 75% in a year

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Capital increase by the companies listed on Iranian stock market has risen 75 percent during the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), according to an official with Iran's Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO).

Ali Beigzadeh, the SEO's director for supervising the primary market, said his department has issued capital-increase per-

mits for 146 companies in the past year, IRNA reported.

The past Iranian calendar year witnessed a very fruitful performance for the country's stock market.

As Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) Head Ali Sahraei has announced, the value of trades at the TSE, Iran's major stock exchange, jumped 2.6 folds, while Return on Investment (ROI) reached 180 percent in



the previous year.

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

The trend of growth is also continuing

in the current year, as TSE experienced the highest-ever weekly growth of index in the week ended on April 24.

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

Iran, Azerbaijan discuss transportation during pandemic lockdown

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran and Azerbaijan reviewed custom and transportation cooperation in an online meeting on Monday, discussing issues regarding the limitations and the lockdown applied by both countries due to the coronavirus outbreak, IRNA reported.

As reported, the Azeri side of the meeting was headed by the country's Deputy Chairman of the State Customs Committee Cavad Mustafa Gasimov.

In the meeting, the two sides discussed the compliance of cargo transportation through the two countries' border crossings with the quarantine regime applied amid the pandemic and they also explored the regulations regarding the vehicle traffic and the transfer of goods across the border.

They also discussed the technical issues related to the



transfer of cargos to their joint vehicle manufacturing plant AzKron which is operating in the Naftchala industrial zone in southern Baku.

As one of the biggest production units in Neftchala zone, AzKron is currently producing several models of passenger cars.

Azerbaijan has announced a one-month lockdown (ends on May 6) throughout the country, banning travel in the nation.

Having close cultural ties, Iran and Azerbaijan have broadened their relations in all areas in the past few years.

In addition to the automobile plant, establishing the North-South corridor, co-manufacturing heavy trucks, and establishing a joint pharmaceutical plant are some other projects in which the two neighbors are cooperating.

Rouhani calls for expansion of privatization program

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani stressed the need for the expansion of a privatization program based on which state-owned companies are offering their shares in the stock market, ISNA reported.

Speaking in a meeting of the government economic coordination headquarters, on Tuesday, Rouhani called for more government-owned companies and big enterprises to be listed on the stock market.

The president also stressed the importance of completing major semi-completed projects, saying: "The completion of semi-finished projects which have over 80 percent progress should be seriously pursued."

Emphasizing the need for supporting the production and industry sectors, Rouhani said: "In the current situation, it is necessary to provide foreign currency for basic goods, especially medicine and meet the needs of the people and the

production sector."

Further in the meeting, details of a program for selling government-owned companies' surplus assets were also discussed.

The government has envisioned various strategies for compensating the next year's budget deficit due to the fall in oil revenues.

Transferring government's assets, using forex reserves, selling Islamic bonds, and withdrawing 450 trillion rials (about \$10.714 billion) from National Development Fund (NDF) were among the strategies that have been approved by the country's Supreme Council of Economic Coordination.

Among the mentioned strategies, privatization can play a significant role in surging domestic production and generating revenue, something that has been under the spotlight in the country over the past decade.

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European stocks advance with earnings and oil prices in focus

European markets were higher Tuesday morning as investors reacted to falling oil prices and a host of corporate earnings.

The pan-European Stoxx 600 edged 0.6% higher in early trade, insurance stocks adding 2.1% to lead gains as most sectors and major bourses entered positive territory.

Global oil markets are focused on oil prices that continue to fall as the coronavirus has dented global demand for oil, sending prices tumbling.

Oil prices slid 12% during overnight trading, extending Monday's nearly 25% decline amid ongoing fears that storage around the world is rapidly filling.

Asia stocks have also been reacting to the oil price declines overnight with markets remaining flat.

The coronavirus pandemic remains the key news feature for markets. More than 3 million people are now reported to have been infected by the coronavirus around the world and over 210,800 have died, according to Johns Hopkins University. Follow our live updates on the pandemic here.

Earnings in focus
HSBC, Europe's largest bank, said on Tuesday that its pretax profit fell 48% year-over-year to \$3.229 billion in the first quarter of 2020, while revenue dropped by 5% to \$13.686 billion.

Earnings elsewhere in Europe are also impacting sentiment, with reports from BP, Santander, UBS, No-

vartis and Carrefour, among others on Tuesday.

BP missed profit expectations to post a first-quarter underlying replacement cost profit, used as a proxy for net profit, of \$800 million. That compared with \$2.4 billion in the first quarter of 2019, reflecting a fall of 67%.

UBS reported Tuesday a 40% increase in profit for the first quarter of 2020 on the year before, with net profit attributable to shareholders coming in at \$1.6 billion.

Santander, the euro zone's second-largest bank by market value, reported an 82% year-on-year decline in first-quarter net profit on the back of higher provisions for expected credit losses from the coronavirus outbreak.

Biggest movers
In terms of individual share price action, Lufthansa stock jumped more than 7.5% in early trade after reports that the German state had agreed to grant the airline a rescue package worth around 9 billion euros.

Games Workshop shares added 7% after estimating that its pre-tax profit for the year ending May 31 2020 would be no less than £70 million (\$87 million).

At the other end of the European benchmark, German payment company Wirecard tumbled more than 16% after the release of a KPMG report into its accounting practices, which found no suspicious activity.

(Source: CNBC)

China construction resumes in sign of economic reopening

Chinese manufacturers of construction machinery have raised prices as sales take off, in an early sign of how economic activity is resuming after weeks of shutdown during the coronavirus epidemic.

Some of China's leading heavy equipment manufacturers have announced 5-10 percent price increases since sales hit a record high in March, when infrastructure construction rebounded.

The national lockdown pummeled the world's second-largest economy, with gross domestic product contracting 6.8 percent in the first quarter of this year. But manufacturers hope the uptick in equipment sales heralds a sustained recovery.

At Anhui Heli Co, a forklift truck maker in the central city of Hefei, workers have begun taking weekend shifts since March to meet growing demand. An executiv at Heli said sales were "very strong" as infrastructure investment "bounced back".

Sales of excavators rose 12 percent year on year in March following a 51 percent plunge in the previous month, according to official data.

Hengli Hydraulic Co, based in the eastern province of Jiangsu, reported a more than 50 percent jump in orders of high-pressure tanks, a key component of excavators, this month from a year earlier.

"This points to strong sales of construction machinery down the road," said a company official.

Makers of construction machinery have been quick to profit from the trend as nearly

a dozen excavator makers, led by industry leaders Sany and Zoomlion, raised prices.

"Our clients are so eager to start new construction that they don't mind paying extra," said an executive at Liugong Machinery, which this month raised prices by up to 10 percent on a range of products including loaders and excavators.

A Chinese excavator usage index compiled by CICC, an investment bank, was 13.7 percent up in March following a 22.4 percent drop in the first two months of this year.

CICC expects the figure to keep "beating expectations", as Beijing counts on infrastructure investment to bolster the economy.

Yet analysts warn the recovery could lose steam as local governments, the main financial backer of infrastructure projects, grapple with a shortage of capital.

Beijing has relaxed bank lending and boosted infrastructure bond issuance in a bid to revive investment. But it has stopped short of embarking on an all-out credit binge for fear of exacerbating China's already mounting debt pressure.

That has made the recovery in construction an unbalanced one, with a few well-off provinces reporting strong activity and poorer ones struggling to catch up.

"China's fixed investment is returning to the normal level of 2 percent growth from a 20 percent decline," said Larry Hu, an economist at Macquarie Group. "Don't expect a double-digit increase as Beijing isn't ready to launch a massive stimulus programme."

(Source: Financial Times)

German retailers seek full reopening from May 4

German retailers sought on Tuesday to persuade the government to let all stores operate normally from May 4, saying customers had not stormed back into the smaller shops that were allowed to reopen last week and were behaving prudently.

Stores of up to 800 square meters (8,600 square feet) were allowed to open again last week, along with car and bicycle dealers and bookstores, provided they adhere to strict social distancing and hygiene rules.

The national retailers association (HDE) has criticized the decision to only allow smaller stores to open, calling the move unfair for bigger chains, confusing for customers and saying both large and small shops were capable of respecting the rules.

"The reopening of stores with up to 800 square meters of sales area has been very responsible throughout," HDE



Chief Executive Stefan Genth said in a statement.

"There was no rush of customers to the stores, the customers

are behaving calmly and risk-consciously."

Germany's lockdown took effect on March 17 and the government says social distancing rules will remain in force until at least May 3.

Chancellor Angela Merkel has said she is worried that Germans are relaxing their social distancing efforts already and is resisting pressure from some regional states to press ahead with a further easing of restrictions.

The HDE called for nationwide rules instead of different regulations in different parts of the country, including on the issue of whether customers must wear face masks while shopping, adding that it should not be up to stores to uphold those rules.

"Retailers are not a substitute police force. The enforcement of the mask obligation is up to the state," Genth said.

(Source: Reuters)

Iran-Armenia power transmission project underway despite pandemic

ENERGY

TEHRAN — Armenia's Ambassador to Iran Artashes Toumanian said on Monday that the two countries' joint electricity transmission project is underway despite the coronavirus outbreak, IRNA reported.

"Iran-Armenia joint projects have not been shut down, and preparations have been underway to dispatch 60 people [from Iran] to Armenia for working on the third power transmission line between the two countries," Toumanian said in an online meeting on the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak in the region.

Iran and Armenia have been cooperating for years in gas and electricity swap, and two-way economic and political ties have grown in tandem with an increase in trade.

Back in July 2019, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in Tehran to expand economic cooperation, especially in the field of energy.

The MOU was signed by Iranian Energy



Minister Reza Ardakanian and Armenian Deputy Prime Minister Mher Grigoryan at the end of the 16th Iran-Armenia Joint Economic Committee meeting.

Based on the MOU, the two sides agreed to complete the construction of Iran's third electricity transmission line to Armenia by 2020 in order to increase the country's electricity exports to Armenia to over 1000 megawatts (MW).

The MOU also covered cooperation in a variety of areas including road and railway transportation, customs, standardization, establishing free trade zones as well as industry, mining and trade.

On the sidelines of the mentioned meeting, Ardakanian voiced Iran's readiness to increase gas exports to Armenia and in this regard the two sides agreed to take necessary measures in order to provide infrastructure in this due.

Iran and Armenia use a barter system to exchange gas for electricity and other basic goods.

Oil prices fall on brimming storage, bleak recovery prospects

Oil prices plunged for a second day in a row on Tuesday on concerns about dwindling global capacity to store more crude and fears that demand may be slow to recover even after countries ease restrictions to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

Brent crude fell 83 cents, or 4.1 percent, to \$19.16 a barrel at 0808 GMT, following a 6.8 percent slide on Monday.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was down \$2.57, or 20 percent, at \$10.21 a barrel. The contract plunged 25 percent on Monday.

Analysts said part of the WTI decline was due to retail investment vehicles like exchange-traded funds selling out of the front-month June contract and buying into months later to avert massive losses like last week, when WTI fell below zero.

The United States Oil Fund LP (USO), the largest oil-focused U.S. exchange-traded product, said it would further shift its holdings into later-dated contracts.

"The exodus in our view remains motivated by concerns over the saturation of storage capacity at Cushing and the associated risk of negative pricing," Harry Tchilinguirian, global oil strategist at BNP Paribas, told the Reuters Global Oil Forum.

Although the world economy may start to recover as more countries allow businesses to reopen, analysts say prospects for oil prices remains gloomy with so much crude

in storage and supply cuts still not deep enough to counter plummeting demand.

"While we expect oil demand to modestly recover from the April lows as countries ease some lockdown measures, demand will remain under severe pressure in the near term because of the COVID-19 pandemic," said UBS commodities analyst Giovanni Staunovo.

BP Chief Executive Bernard Looney told Reuters his firm expected global oil demand to drop by about 15 million barrels per day (bpd) in the second quarter due to coronavirus-related movement restrictions.

That is more than the 10 million bpd of cuts agreed by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Russia and other allied producers. The reductions are due to be implemented from May 1.

Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said on Tuesday oil markets would start balancing out once an output deal took effect, but no significant rise in prices was likely in the near future due to high levels of global storage.

Global storage onshore was estimated to be about 85 percent full as of last week, according to data from consultancy Kpler.

In a sign of the energy industry's desperation for places to store petroleum, oil traders are resorting to hiring expensive U.S. vessels to store gasoline or ship fuel overseas, shipping sources said.

(Source: Reuters)

Nigeria oil export plans delayed amid talks with majors on cuts: sources

Nigeria's state oil company has delayed publishing its future oil export plans as it negotiates with local companies and international majors about how to cut output in line with a global deal on production curbs, trading sources said.

Official selling prices (OSPs) for Nigerian oil, usually issued in the second or third week of each month, had still not been issued on Monday. The global supply deal, agreed by the OPEC+ group of oil producers, is due to go into effect on May 1.

Traders expect the May OSPs to fall below April's record lows published by Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).

Traders of Nigerian oil told Reuters that Nigeria, an OPEC member, had revised its May programs for oil cargoes and would also have to lower its output in June, based on the OPEC+ deal.

"May cargoes will get delayed and new June cargoes may be relatively few," one of the sources said.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Russia and other allied producers agreed to cut their combined output by 9.7 million barrels per day, or each reducing its production by more than 20%. The first round of cuts will run in May and June. Reductions will be less severe after that.

"The NNPC is working out the cuts for the international oil companies. That's why the program for June and OSP for May is yet

to come out," another trading source said.

The NNPC, which has not issued any public notice of delays or output cuts, needs to discuss reductions with companies working in the country, including oil majors Royal Dutch Shell, BP, Exxon Mobil, Eni and Chevron.

A source at an oil major operating in Nigeria said the discussions were ongoing, noting that agreement on precise output allocations for each company remained a hurdle.

"This hasn't been done before", the source added.

Two industry sources said talks ranged from a blanket percentage output cut for all players to focusing the output curbs more on offshore fields that are not run by a joint venture with NNPC.

Brent crude, the benchmark against which Nigerian oil trades on the global market, fell to its lowest in two decades last week before staging a modest recovery. Brent was trading around \$20 a barrel on Monday.

Traders said Nigeria's key crude grade Bonny Light was heard to be offered at as low as dated Brent minus \$5, compared with a premium of \$3 in more normal market conditions.

Surging inventories, as demand for oil has tumbled due to global measures to fight the coronavirus, have made it a challenge for some producers to find buyers for their oil.

(Source: Reuters)

Oil producers dig into savings amid fiscal deficits

Crude demand stymied by lockdowns due to Covid-19 outbreak

➔ However, the U.S. sanctions have eroded the country's dependence on oil exports, and the impact of the oil price shock will be minimal. Prior to re-imposition of U.S. sanctions in May 2018, Iran was exporting 2.5 million barrels a day. By most estimates today Iran exports less than 200,000 barrels a day.

Rouhani has said that Iran will not suffer as much as other countries from the oil price plunge as it is less reliant on crude exports. "The more countries rely on oil, the greater they suffer. But as our reliance on oil income has decreased, willingly or unwillingly, either by our own will or by the imposition of the enemy, our losses will certainly be less," Rouhani said during a television meeting.

Iran's budget for the present year (started March 20, 2020) has been planned with the expectation of export of one million barrels a day with an oil price of \$50. This aspect of the budget needs to be revisited due to the extraordinary circumstances created due to the novel coronavirus outbreak.

IMF has warned Iran could face an \$18 billion trade deficit in 2020 due to lack of exports, which could worsen if oil prices stay low.

Russia

Russian newspaper Vedomosti reported last week that a barrel of Russia's Urals oil, where price is determined by Brent, not WTI, was trading at \$8.48 a barrel, the lowest since 1998. The current Russian budget is calculated at an oil price of \$42 a barrel.

Two-thirds of Russia's export earnings and 40 percent of its budget is generated by oil sales.

Earlier this year the Russian Finance Ministry announced Russia could withstand prices as low as \$25 a barrel for up to 10 years by drawing on a \$150 billion National Wealth Fund to compensate for shortfalls of fiscal budget. Russia's NWF has risen to \$151.35 billion after the Finance Ministry channeled extra oil and gas revenues from 2019 to it, Reuters quoted the ministry in March.

Apart from low oil prices Russia has to deal with the sanctions imposed by the U.S. and EU five years ago with Moscow's annexation of Crimea in March 2014. The sanctions prohibit long-term financing for some major corporates and ban assistance to Russian oil and gas companies for Arctic, shale and offshore projects.

During an annual press conference last month Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said while there was "nothing good about [sanctions]" but "Our economic – I can say this with full responsibility – has been able to adapt to external shocks, while our national currency has actually become much more stable, even with possible energy price fluctuations."

Russia responded to sanctions in three ways: First tighten belt, cutting public spending and forcing banks and major corporations to clean up their balance sheets. Second, it spent trillions of roubles to create domestic substitutes for imported goods, while food imports from the EU were banned to stimulate local production. Third, some income from energy exports diverted to national wealth fund, thanks to the steady rise in oil prices since 2014 Russia saved up to \$124b in sovereign wealth fund (seven percent of GDP).

The results have been impressive. All the three levels of Russia's government ran a budget surplus in 2018 and 2019, and its total public debt is about 15 percent of GDP. The EU average is 80 percent.

Sanctions have hampered FDI from an annual average of \$54.5b between 2011 and 2013 to 19.2b between 2015 and 2018.

Saudi Arabia:

Saudi Arabia's fiscal revenues are projected to declined by 25 to 30 percent or about eight percent of the GDP this year impacting fiscal deficits, according to rating agency Moody's. IMF's latest World Economic Outlook report has forecast a negative 2.3 percent GDP growth for Saudi Arabia in 2020.

Producing 13 percent of world output Saudi

Aramco is the world's largest oil producer. Since there is no way to audit any information coming out of Aramco, the world is left to guess the actual breakeven cost. According to IMF March 9 report, the fiscal breakeven price of Saudi crude is around \$80 per barrel.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's "Vision 2030" will need to be shelved for delays amid low oil prices, political instability in light of the recent crackdown by MBS amid a coup threat within the Saudi royal family and high unemployment amongst its youth.

Such instability does not encourage FDI and can put the Aramco IPO on hold for longer.

Founded in 1971 the Public Investment Fund (PIF) Saudi Arabia's SWF, with estimated assets of \$320 billion. Instead of bracing for a shock the Saudi SWF went on a spending spree recently. Last week it built a \$200 million stake in Norway's largest crude producer Equinor. In the past PIF has bought shares in Uber and Telsa, as well as European oil firms Royal Dutch Shell, Total and Eni.

Saudi Arabia's oil industry accounts for 70 percent of the country's export earnings and half of GDP. According to the Forbes magazine Saudi Arabia has approximately \$500 billion in the SWF and the Saudis have the cash to ride out the low oil prices. With oil at present price, hovering less than \$10 a barrel the kingdom is set to take a loss of \$40 billion annual from total revenues.

With over one million people employed in its oil industry, the government will have to increase spending from its SWF. Given the population's reliance on social programs, Saudi Arabia faces internal unrest if cuts run too deep.

Iraq

After Saudi Arabia, Iraq is OPEC's second largest exporter. With 90 percent of government spending coming from oil revenues, the Iraqi government employs nearly eight percent of the country's population.

Iraq does not have a SWF like many of its counterparts in West Asia. Essential public services like healthcare, education and policing, among others do not exist. If present situation persists one can expect return of more social unrest.

Norway

Producing two percent of global output, Norway does not plan output cuts because its oil production remains profitable despite the recent plunge, the country's Minister of Petroleum and Energy Tina Bru told private local broadcaster.

A number of Norwegian fields would be profitable even at \$10 per barrel, Bru said, adding unilateral action by Norway would not impact oil prices.

However, 10 exploration wells have been put on hold amid low oil prices.

Norway's \$930 billion SWF lost \$114 billion in the first quarter amid the virus outbreak, reports Reuters.

Other producers

Qatar has a fiscal surplus and its economy is dependent on liquefied natural gas exports, so less directly affected by oil prices, while the debt-burdened economies of small oil producers Oman and Bahrain are more vulnerable to price swings.

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said on Tuesday Mexico will take more austerity measures in the face of oil price collapse. He vowed no layoffs of government employees according to Reuters.

Africa's fastest growing economy Nigeria is also Africa's largest country with population of 205 million. With oil making nine percent of GDP, Nigeria has a break-even oil price of \$57. Oil accounts for over 90 percent of exports, a third of banking sector credit, and half of government revenues.

IMF expects unemployment will rise by 25 percent to approximately 25 million people in 2020, up from 20 million people in 2018.

Nigeria has a small SWF of approximately \$2 billion that will be used spending to keep figures falling in the red zone.

OPEC chief expects oil price to reach \$40 a barrel in second half of 2020

Oil prices will reach \$40 a barrel by the second half of this year, Anadolu Agency reported OPEC's president saying yesterday.

The official who also acts as Algeria's Energy Minister, Mohamed Arkab, added in an interview that oil prices will rise during the months of May and June to an average of \$35 a barrel, in parallel with the implementation of the output cut agreement.

Two weeks ago, OPEC producers and allies agreed to reduce oil production by 9.7 million barrels per day for two months starting in May in a bid to stabilize the oil market.

According to the agreement, a reduction of eight million barrels per day will be maintained from July until the end of 2020, followed by an agreement to reduce production by six million barrels per day in early 2021 until April 2022.

The Algerian energy minister and OPEC chief explained that the oil price recovery is encouraged by the loosening of lockdown measures imposed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, which will see demand for petrol increase.

(Source: middleeastmonitor.com)

Oman reveals oil production cut plans under OPEC+ deal

Oman will cut oil production from its six largest producing blocks by 23 percent from their October 2018 baseline levels of 883,000 bpd to adhere with the OPEC+ production cuts coming into effect for May and June.

The drop is equivalent to Oman cutting 201,000 bpd for the two months, with a production quota of 682,000 bpd. Under the previous OPEC+ agreement that expired in March, Oman's quota was 961,000 bpd. Oman is the largest producer in the Persian Gulf that is not a member of OPEC. It is, however, a member of the OPEC+ alliance.

The 23 members of the OPEC+ alliance agreed earlier this month to reduce production by 9.7 million bpd in May and June, followed by a 7.7 million bpd drop in 2H 2020 and 5.8 million bpd cut from January 2021 to the end of April 2022. The agreement is intended to counteract plummeting demand caused by the coronavirus pandemic.



The biggest reduction in volume is coming from Block 6, which is operated by semi-state-owned Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and responsible for the bulk of the sultanate's crude production. It is slashing 135,000 bpd to produce 453,000 bpd, according to an update on the OPEC website.

Meanwhile, Occidental Petroleum's Mukhaizna (Block 53) is reducing production to 88,000 bpd. The company's Block 9 will be producing 62,000 bpd, and Block 27's new level will be 6,000 bpd.

Daleel Petroleum's Block 5 will now be producing 39,000 bpd, down from 51,000 bpd in October 2018. CC Energy's Block 3 and Block 4 will now produce 30,000 bpd, combined.

Before the OPEC+ deal was struck, Oman's work program and budget had projected total production of 964,000 bpd in May and 965,000 bpd in June. At these levels, the sultanate had predicted a fiscal breakeven price of \$85.90/b to balance its books this year.

(Source: Platts)

The LNG Market Is "Imploding"

While everyone is understandably watching the meltdown in the crude oil market, the global market for natural gas is also cratering.

At least 20 cargoes of U.S. liquefied natural gas (LNG) have been cancelled by buyers in Asia and Europe, according to Reuters. The global pandemic and the unfolding economic crisis have slashed demand for gas worldwide. Cheniere Energy, one of the main exporters of U.S. LNG, has seen an estimated 10 cargoes cancelled by buyers halfway around the world, Reuters said.

The price for LNG in Asia was already crashing before the pandemic, owing to a substantial increase in supply last year. Prices for LNG in Asia for June delivery have recently traded at \$2/MMBtu, only slightly higher than Henry Hub prices in the U.S.

As recently as October, LNG prices in Asia traded at just under \$7/MMBtu.

The problem for American gas exporters is that after factoring in the cost of liquefaction and transportation, gas breakeven prices for delivering to Asia are around \$5.56/MMBtu, according to Reuters. But prices are trading at less than half of those levels.

Gas exports tend to be conducted under rigid contracts, but cargoes are now facing cancellation.

"The financial prospects for [LNG] ? once one of the globe's hottest energy commodities – seem to be imploding before our eyes," Clark Williams-Derry wrote in a new report for the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA). He noted that LNG prices in the fall of 2018 were at around \$12/MMBtu.


The oil majors have made large bets on LNG in recent years. Royal Dutch Shell spent more than \$50 billion to buy BG Group in 2015. The move back then was made with an eye on surging demand for natural gas. "We will now be able to shape a simpler, leaner, more competitive company, focusing on our core expertise in deep water and LNG," Shell's CEO Ben van Beurden said after closing on the acquisition of BG Group more than four years ago.

The deal remade Shell into one of the largest traders of LNG on the planet. Several other oil majors – Total SA, ExxonMobil and Chevron, for instance – have also made massive bets on LNG.

LNG is now arguably getting hit just as hard as crude oil from the pandemic and the global slowdown. A series of high-profile investment delays or cancellations have occurred in the past month. ExxonMobil, for instance, delayed a final investment decision on a large LNG export project in Mozambique in early April.


However, the industry faced troubled economics even before the current crisis. "[C]ompanies pinned the delays on the novel coronavirus, while ignoring the fact that LNG prices were already deflating long before the worst impacts of the pandemic were being felt," Clark Williams-Derry wrote in the IEEFA report. He wrote that what was striking was the fact that companies of varying sizes and corporate structures were cancelling decisions – speculative start-ups, but also state-owned giants and publicly-traded supermajors.

(Source: oilprice.com)



N.I.O.C
1399.423

Second Announcement
Call for public tender (First/Second publish)
One-Stage tender



National Iranian Drilling Company

Subject of Tender:

Tender No.	Description
FP/12-99/007	P/F GATE VALVE
FP/12-99/008	P/F RENHE

Tender descriptions:

The Tender holder	Registration No. through national electronic tendering system	Tender No. /Indent No.	Estimated value (Rial)
National Iranian Drilling Company	3,234,065	Tender No.:FP/12-99/007 Indent No.:08-22-9745218	11,350,000,000
	3,234,066	Tender No.:FP/12-99/008 Indent No.:08-22-9845059	7,801,699,092

Qualitative evaluation of tenderers

Method	Qualification process will be done in plain mode in offers opening session according to presentation of valid practice certificate / legal documents (certificate of corporation/ supply announcement up to latest changes) which should be related to tender subject.
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Purchasing & Submitting

Tender Document Distribution by Company	The distribution of the documents will be started one day after the publishing of second advertisement and ended on the following tenth day thereof 12 MAY 2020
	<p>Distribution Place</p> <p>Hall No.:113, 1st floor, Foreign Procurement Dept., National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN 061-34148660 Room No. 431, 4th floor, Oil central building No.8, Yaghma alley, Jomhori Islami st., Tehran - Iran</p> <p>Submitting Method</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt in the amount of 190,000 Iranian Rials under account number 4001114004020491 (Shaba No. IR 52010004001114004020491) in name of "NIDC Incomes Centralized Fund" issued by I.R. of Iran Central Bank. Submitting format Request for the purpose of receiving Tender Documents.
	<p>Closing date</p> <p>35Days after the last time of Purchasing 20 JUNE 2020</p>
Documents Receiving Method	<p>Address</p> <p>Hall No. 107, 1st floor, Tender Committee, Operation building, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN. Tel: +98-61-34148580 +98-61-34148569</p>

Tender Guarantee

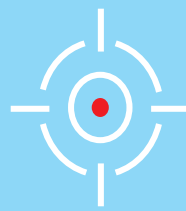
Value of guarantee	568,000,000 Rial / 3.866 Euro Regarding Tender No FP/12-99/007
Type of guarantee	391,000,000 Rial / 2.666 Euro Regarding Tender No FP/12-99/008
Duration of credit & quotation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that obtain activity license from the central bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt under account number 4001114006376636 (Shaba No. IR 35010004001114006376636) in name of "NIDC saving account" by the central bank of Islamic Republic of Iran.

(Foreign Procurement Dept.)
More of this & other tenders are accessible by click on: www.nidc.ir http://sapp.ir/nidc_pr
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Nationwide protests in late 2019, COVID-19-based lockdown, what is the next in Lebanon?

1 → In response to stalling economic growth and a shortage of dollars in the country, banks restricted the amount in dollars that people could withdraw from their own accounts. Businesses closed or drastically reduced their operations.

The economic situation was so desperate that in December, a man took his own life after his daughter asked him for 1,000 Lebanese pounds (then worth less than 50 cents) to buy food - money he did not have. In February, another man set himself on fire in front of his daughter's school to protest against the school administration's refusal to give him a copy of her transcript over unpaid fees.

The COVID-19 crisis and the resulting lockdown measures have only compounded the poverty and economic hardship that most Lebanese faced before the virus. The value of the Lebanese lira has continued to plummet, losing around half its value by April, and fuelling inflation, which the Finance Ministry estimated will reach 27 percent in 2020.

Social Affairs Minister Ramzi Moucharafieh admitted on April 14 that between 70-75 percent of Lebanese citizens now need financial assistance.

"We are dying of hunger," one man from Tripoli yelled during a protest earlier this month. "We want dignity," another said. A taxi driver set his car on fire when security forces fined him for breaking the lockdown rules. A street vendor threw his produce on the streets in frustration after the police suspended his business. A jobless construction worker who can no longer afford rent tried to sell his kidney.

More than a month into the lockdown, very little assistance has reached families in need as the government fumbles its way through the crisis.

The government announced plans to provide food assistance that it has not carried out; it has repeatedly delayed promised financial relief; and it has succumbed to political bickering and manoeuvring, at the expense of Lebanese citizens, as politicians have fought over how to distribute the meagre aid.

Local initiatives have sprung up to fill the gaps. Some groups are providing food, medicine, rent and clothing to families in need. But such initiatives do not have the resources to fulfill the government's obligation - and nor should they be expected to.

The Lebanese Food Bank, for example, funded entirely by donations, sends boxes containing basic food items and hygiene kits that can last a family of four for up to one month to 85 non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The government's mismanagement of the coronavirus relief plans has heightened the public's perception that it is ill-equipped to pull the country out of a dire recession that the IMF predicts will be the third-worst in the world in 2020.

And its actions so far have only reinforced that perception. The government has delayed top-level appointments to Lebanon's Central Bank and the financial sector. These appointments are key to addressing Lebanon's economic and financial crisis, yet sectarian squabbling and political party quotas have held up the process.

The government has resorted to populist rhetoric to reassure the public that their bank deposits will not be lost after a leaked draft of the government's economic rescue plan circulated on social media.

Prime Minister Hassan Diab assured citizens on April 16 that at least 98 percent of bank deposits will not be affected by any financial measures the government plans to take. Some economists argue that such promises are "misguided" and "out of touch with reality".

Despite its limited resources, under international human rights law, the Lebanese government is obligated to protect people's right to an adequate standard of living. This includes ensuring that everyone - in particular those



subject to lockdown - have access to food, water, healthcare and other basic needs.

In times of economic crisis, Lebanon must demonstrate that it has made every effort to mobilize all available resources, including international assistance, and allocate them in a way that maximizes respect for human rights and without discrimination, including by religion or sect.

Yet earlier this month, my organization, Human Rights Watch, warned that more than half of Lebanon's residents are at risk of going hungry due to the government's failure to implement a robust, coordinated plan to provide assistance to families who have lost their livelihoods.

For many Lebanese, the government's handling of the COVID-19 crisis was emblematic of the problems that they went out to demonstrate against in October.

The sectarian system that has prevailed since the war, whereby political parties dole out benefits to their supporters - which was somewhat navigable in good times - has stopped working for the majority. And all the flaws of that post-war system have burst onto centre stage as the government has proven itself unable to provide even the most basic needs for its population.

Decades of rule by the post-war ruling elite have only entrenched inequality, weakened state institutions, and left the country with few resources to withstand the current economic and public health crises.

Some Lebanese have already been taking to the streets - despite the lockdown measures - to protest against what has become an unbearable economic reality.

The majority of citizens are still at home but many have made it clear that once the threat of COVID-19 has lifted, they will return to the streets in a renewed fight against inequality, sectarianism and corruption.

Mass protests swept across Lebanon shortly after the government announced new tax measures on 17 October. In unprecedented scenes tens of thousands of peaceful protesters from different religious and class sectors of society assembled in cities across the country accusing the political leadership of corruption and calling for social and economic reforms.

Waving the Lebanese flag, the crowds chanted demands

for the "fall of the regime" many of them repeating the slogan "all of them means all of them" - a reference to key ruling figures from a variety of religious sects who have dominated the Lebanese political scene for decades, according to report by the Amnesty International.

Underlying frustration with the government and the political elite had been accumulating for years. Public anger has escalated in recent years over electricity and water shortages, as well as the government's failure to manage the country's waste and economic crises.

Despite government attempts to placate the protesters with announced reforms, demonstrations continued in Beirut, Tripoli, Zouk, Jal el Dib, Saïda, Nabatieh, Sour and Zahle. On the 13th day of the protests, Prime Minister Saad Hariri announced his resignation.

On 19 December 2019, former Minister of Education Hassan Diab was designated the new prime minister and tasked with forming a new cabinet.

On 21 January, Lebanon named Hassan Diab as its prime minister to lead the new cabinet of 20 members, after three months of mass protests.

Since 1997, successive governments maintained a pegged exchange rate between the Lebanese pound and United States dollar.

Forecasts for the Lebanese economy worsened over the 2010s and by 2019 GDP per capita reached its lowest since 2008 and the debt-to-GDP ratio reached its highest since 2008 at 151%. As a result, international credit rating agencies downgraded the rating of government bonds. The combination of an economic downturn in the import-dependent country with the continuation of its dollar peg saw an increase in the government's budget deficit and a reliance on using foreign exchange reserves from the nation's central bank to keep the currency peg.

A subsequent dollar shortage in late 2019 further affected the economy, as import businesses and citizens became unable to acquire dollars at the official rate and a black market emerged. The coalition government led by Saad Hariri responded with an austerity program of general tax increases and spending reductions, with the aim to reduce the government deficit while maintaining the peg against the U.S. dollar.

U.S. calls on Afghans to set aside disputes, focus on virus

The U.S. peace envoy to Afghanistan Sunday called on the country's feuding leaders to set their differences aside to combat the coronavirus pandemic and advance a stalled peace agreement signed with the Taliban earlier this year.

"The well-being of the Afghan people and the country itself depend on all parties devoting their full energies to fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, the shared enemy of all," Zalmay Khalilzad tweeted early Sunday.

He said Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah, who each declared himself the victor in September's election, should "put the interest of the country ahead of their own" during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which began last week.

He urged the government and the Taliban to carry out a prisoner exchange that was part of the U.S.-Taliban peace agreement signed in February. The agreement had called for the release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners and 1,000 government personnel held by the insurgents.

To date, Ghani has released 550 detainees based on age, vulnerability to the virus and time served. The Taliban have not said if those are among the prisoners referred to in the agreement. The Taliban have freed 60 prisoners.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahed said in a statement Sunday that the insurgent group was living up to its side of the agreement, and that it was willing to negotiate a country-wide cease-fire in intra-Afghan talks. Those negotiations were supposed to have begun within 10 days of the Feb. 29 deal but are still on hold because of the political bickering in Kabul.



The Taliban are continuing to attack security outposts, even as the U.S. and NATO proceed with a full troop withdrawal that is set to be completed next year.

The Taliban have carried out 2,804 attacks since the agreement was signed, Jawed Faisal, spokesman for the National Security Adviser's office, said Saturday. However, the Taliban have not attacked U.S. or NATO troops, who say they will continue to aid Afghan forces.

Afghanistan has meanwhile reported 1,463 infections and 47 deaths from the new coronavirus.

The virus causes mild to moderate symptoms in most patients, who recover within a few weeks. But it is highly contagious and can cause severe illness or death, particularly in older patients or those with underlying health problems.

Afghanistan's health care system has been heavily degraded by decades of war and would be ill-equipped to contain a major outbreak. Testing has been sporadic, in part because of local stigma surrounding the disease.

Shar Mohammad Ahmadi, 30, contracted the virus from a nephew who worked as a nurse at a hospital in the southern Kandahar province. When he went to the hospital to be tested, "people were laughing at us," he said.

"Everyone covered their faces and were making fun of us. It was very painful."

Ethiopia determined to resist against U.S. pressures amid Nile Dam negotiations

Ethiopia has announced that it will not take part in the next session of a series of meetings among Egypt, Sudan and the United States' representative as Addis Ababa has found that the draft put forward by the U.S. to end dispute over filling with water and operating the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam constructed over the Blue Nile River is merely biased and against the country's national interests.

Mehari Taddele Maru, a scholar of peace and security issues, explained in his article published by Al Jazeera that how undiplomatic and biased role the U.S. had been playing in talks over the dam issues between Ethiopia, the constructor of the dam, Sudan and Egypt.

He went on to say that in early February, officials from Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan announced in a joint statement that they had cleared the way for the filling and operation of a disputed mega-dam being built by the Ethiopian government on the Nile River. The statement, which came on the back of months of U.S.-led negotiations, caused many to believe the three northeast African countries may finally reach a deal on the multi-billion-dollar project.

This seemingly positive development, however, caused widespread concern in Ethiopia that its delegation is being pressured by the US to agree to a deal that is against the best interests of the country. As a result of this, on February 26, Addis Ababa announced that its delegation will skip the next round of talks in Washington.

Despite Ethiopia taking a step back from the negotiations, the U.S. continued its talks with the Sudanese and Egyptian delegations and put forward a draft agreement for all three countries to sign. Furthermore, US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, who has been acting as President Donald Trump's point man on the negotiations, issued a statement in which he imposed three demands on Ethiopia: that it signs the draft agreement after finalizing consultations, that it does not test or fill the dam before signing the agreement and that it recognizes the need "to implement all necessary dam safety measures in accordance with international standards before filling begins". In response, Ethiopia accused the US of being "undiplomatic" and said as the owner of the dam it would commence the filling, "in accordance with the principles of equitable and reasonable utilization and the causing

of no significant harm".

While all parties still say they are willing to continue negotiations, the fate of this decade-old project, dubbed The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), once again appears to be undetermined.

Addis Ababa and Cairo had been at loggerheads since Ethiopia started constructing the dam in 2011, prompting Egyptian fears that filling the huge reservoir too quickly could lower the Nile's flow and affect Egypt's water supply. Despite years of wrangling that even saw Egypt threaten military action against the dam, Ethiopia refused to give up on this massive development venture and appeared to hold the whip hand in negotiations for years.

But Addis Ababa's fortunes turned in 2018, when the U.S. Department of the Treasury (DoT) stepped in after Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi put in a request to his ally, U.S. President Donald Trump.

In its efforts to resolve the dispute, the DoT chose to act as a representative of Cairo's interests rather than an impartial and honest broker, leaving Ethiopia isolated. This, of course, did not come as a surprise to anyone who had been paying attention to the Trump administration's policies and alliances in the Middle East.

Today, Egypt is a primary member of a Saudi-led anti-Iran bloc in the Middle East that is tightly locked in a strategic alliance with the U.S. and Israel. Even though Ethiopia is also a U.S. ally, it does not hold the same significance for Washington. Since taking office, Trump repeatedly demonstrated his willingness to openly support one U.S. ally against another in regional conflicts to further his own interests - he, for example, swiftly backed Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates against Qatar during the 2017 GCC rift, despite Doha also being a long-time American ally and host to a large U.S. military base. As Ethiopia carries much less weight than Egypt in the prism of Trump's foreign policy ambitions, it was clear from the very beginning that Washington's involvement in the negotiations over GERD would disproportionately benefit Cairo.

The quagmire in which Ethiopia now finds itself is rooted in Addis Ababa's failure to recognize this geopolitical reality. So why did Ethiopia's government allow an administration that was obviously going to be biased against it to lead the negotiations?

Egypt has long been trying to internationalize this

dispute, based on the belief that the involvement of regional and global powers would limit Ethiopia's ability to fill and operate the dam as it pleases. It had been partially successful in this quest, with several nations expressing their interest in GERD negotiations. Also, beyond Egypt's efforts, many regional and global powers, such as the EU, Turkey, Israel and the Persian Gulf states, already had an interest in following the negotiations closely, as they all have long-standing geostrategic interests in the region. Even Russia's President Vladimir Putin recently extended an offer of arbitration.



Until the US came on the stage, Ethiopia successfully managed to stop any outside power from taking a direct role in negotiations - it, for example, rejected President Putin's offer of mediation.

However, when an offer of mediation came from the Trump administration, Ethiopia's government changed course, perhaps as a result of its frequently criticized excessive reliance on its sponsors in the West.

As a consequence of this catastrophic lapse of judgment, the negotiations which were once between Ethiopia and Egypt-Sudan, suddenly turned into negotiations between Ethiopia and Egypt-U.S., where Sudan takes on the role of arbiter and intermediary.

Given Washington's global reach and power, this is an uncomfortable position for Addis Ababa to sustain. The only way for the Ethiopian government to get out of this quagmire is to change course once again, stop bending over backwards to please the West, and instead start listening to the wishes and interests of its people. The Ethiopians are mobilizing themselves in firm opposition to Mnuchin's pronouncements and in support of the fair sharing of the Nile waters. The Ethiopian government can and should use this strong public reaction to stand firm in its rejection of Mnuchin's plan and to re-establish itself as the dominant party in the negotiations. Such a stance would also likely increase the public support for the current leadership and prevent it from backsliding in the planned elections in August 2020.

But this does not mean Ethiopia should not allow any outside party to help mediate the negotiations over GERD. Involvement of honest and impartial brokers can help peacefully and swiftly resolve this long-standing dispute to the satisfaction of all involved parties.

Second Announcement			
Call for public tender (First/Second publish) - Retender			
Two- Stages (semi compressed) tender			
Subject of Tender: DRILL COLLAR			
 N.I.O.C 1399.464		 National Iranian Drilling Company	
Tender descriptions:			
The Tender holder	Registration No. through national electronic tendering system	Tender No. /Indent No.	Estimated value)Rial(
National Iranian Drilling Company	2,234,149	Tender No.: FP/17-98/203-2 Indent No.:48-22-9822022	29, 590, 172, 875
• Qualitative evaluation of tenderers			
Method	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Based on minimum scoring (50) made in award criterion reflected in the tenderers pre-qualification forms		
• Purchasing & Submitting			
Tender Document Distribution by Company	The distribution of the documents will be started one day after the publishing of second advertisement and ended on the following tenth day thereof.		
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Submitting Method	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt in the amount of 190,000 Iranian Rials under account number 4001114004020491(Shaba No. IR 520100004001114004020491) in name of "NIDC Incomes Centralized Fund" issued by I.R. of Iran Central Bank. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Submitting format Request for the purpose of receiving Tender Documents.		
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Value of guarantee	1,480,000,000 Rial / 10,274 Euro		
Type of guarantee	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that obtain activity license from the central bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt under account number 4001114006376636 (Shaba No. IR 350100004001114006376636) in name of "NIDC saving account" by the central bank of Islamic Republic of Iran.		
Duration of credit & quotation	Tender Guarantee and quotation should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum for one time in initial validity duration.		
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More of this & other tenders are accessible by click on: www.nidc.ir http://sapp.ir/nidc_pr			
تهران تایمز نوبت دوم ۹۹/۲/۱۰			

Iran's national museum unveils part of Samanid-era Quran manuscript

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — The National Museum of Iran unveiled a manuscript of the 29th juz (part) of a Samanid-era (819–999 CE) holy Quran on Monday.

The 154-page illuminated manuscript is written in Kufic, which is a style of Arabic script that gained prominence early on as a preferred script for Quran transcription and architectural decoration.



The book, which is preserved in the museum, can be visited online, as the museums are on lockdown due to coronavirus outbreak in the country.

The museum plans to unveil some of its precious manuscripts during the holy month of Ramadan.

Earlier last week, it unveiled a manuscript of Persian poet Sadi's major work *Gulistan* from the Qajar era (1789–1925).

Poppy flowers plain on agenda for national heritage list

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — Poppy flowers plain in Malard county, southwest of Tehran, is planned to be inscribed on the national heritage list, a provincial tourism chief has said.

Hundreds of hectares of the plain is covered in red poppy flowers in late April and early May for approximately two or three weeks, which makes it an eye-catching, must-see landscape in the region, Hamid Karimi said on Monday, IRNA reported.



He also noted that the national registration of the plain can introduce this tourist attraction to travelers as well as help tourism development in the region.

The oldest and perhaps most beautiful evidence of flower bouquets in Iran is found the stone carvings of the UNESCO-registered Persepolis. Over 2500 years old, the stone carvings show Darius I (550–486 BC), holding the scepter of authority in one hand and a lotus flower with two buds in his right hand, symbol of royalty.

Ancient relics of Iran: Seated statue of a Mesopotamian prince

(Part 1/2)

(Louvre museum) — This near life-size seated statue of a Mesopotamian ruler was found at Susa in Iran where, according to the inscription he had carved on it, the Elamite king Shutruk-Nahunte took it in the twelfth century BC as part of the spoils of war.

■ **Statue of a Mesopotamian ruler found at Susa in Iran** "I am Shutruk-Nahunte, son of Halludush-Inshushinak, king of Anshan and Susa, who enlarged the kingdom, master, ruler of the land of Elam. Inshushinak my god having granted me this, I destroyed Eshnunna; I took away the statue and brought it to the land of Elam. I offered it to Inshushinak, my God."



■ **A traditional seated statue**

The statue of this ruler, seated with hands joined in prayer, would have been made to be placed in a temple, where it would pay continuous homage to the ruler's guardian deity. It remains faithful to the traditional conventions established centuries earlier. The prince is dressed in a robe which leaves bare his left arm and shoulder, the emphatic modeling of which contrasts with the geometrical rendering of the lower part of the body, shrouded in the almost cubic form of the garment, with pleats indicated in a formulaic manner. This emphasis on the figure's vigorous musculature is a convention intended to emphasize the ruler's strength and power. The extremely simple garment is nothing more than a draped length of fabric, with no fringe, similar to the dress of Hammurabi on the stele inscribed with the code which bears his name. The beard is divided into eight long locks.

Labyrinthine bazaar may equal an endless charm for you!



Sometimes called "a city within another", the Bazaar of Isfahan, like any other of its counterparts, is a maze of lanes, madrasahs, caravanserais and *timchehs* (domed halls or arcaded centers of a single trade, such as carpet vendors or coppersmiths).

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — One of Iran's most historic and fascinating traditional marketplaces, the sprawling covered Bazaar of Isfahan (locally known as Bazaar-e Bozorg) is situated in a city of the same name.

The Bazaar of Isfahan links the UNESCO-registered Imam Square (originally known as Meydan-e Naqsh-e Jahan) with the Jameh Mosque of Isfahan. Its charms may never end for enthusiasts of Persian culture seeing numerous craftspeople boasting skills in the mazing arcades producing handicrafts with copper, woods, ceramics, and wool.

Sometimes called "a city within another", the bazaar is a maze of lanes, madrasahs, caravanserais and *timchehs* (domed halls or arcaded centers of a single trade, such as carpet vendors or coppersmiths). It can be entered at dozens

of points, but the main entrance is via the Qeysarieh Portal at the northern end of Naqsh-e Jahan Square.

At its busiest in the mornings, the bazaar's arched passageways are topped by a series of small perforated domes, each spilling shafts of light onto the commerce below. While the oldest parts of the bazaar (those around the mosque) are more than a thousand years old, most of what can be seen today was built during Shah Abbas' ambitious expansions of the early 1600s.

Cool in summer and warm in winter, it's easy to lose half a day wandering the bustling lanes of the bazaar, sniffing the heaps of layered spices and dishes of dried dates, watching shoppers finger colored lengths of material, and pausing to admire the rows of red and white teapots in the many crockery shops.

From another point of view, bazaars

are also synonyms of foods, with their unmissable colorful stalls of vegetables, herbs, and spices. Yet, most of these ingredients might be mysterious to a foreign eye. Teahouses help punctuate the walk and a traditional restaurant is the perfect place for lunch.

Browsing through a traditional bazaar, may provide one new experiences and fresh points of view on the ancient land. Such excursion can be made either in person or by "off-the-beaten-track" tours. Not only it's an opportunity to discover dozens of unique local ingredients, but it's also a chance to taste street foods and delicacies, in some traditional bakery known only by locals and shopkeepers.

People watching and even mingling with them in the bazaars is one of the best ways to take the pulse of the country. Bazaars have traditionally been major

economic and social centers in any Iranian city.

Soaked in a rich history, Isfahan was once a crossroad of international trade and diplomacy in Iran and now it is one of Iran's top tourist destinations for good reasons. The city is filled with many architectural wonders such as unmatched Islamic buildings, bazaars, museums, Persian gardens and tree-lined boulevards.

Many international travelers to the central Iranian city believe that it equals an endless charm by embracing so many diverse monuments, landscapes, and above all; hospitable people. The historical core of Isfahan is a masterpiece of Safavid-era architecture popularly known as "half of the world" meaning seeing it is relevant to seeing the whole world.

Iran's tourism incurs \$1.2b loss due to coronavirus in 2 months: expert

➔ Earlier this month, the Iranian government announced it will bail out those which are grappling with fiscal problems by offering loans with a 12-percent interest rate. The Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts also suggested a rescue package for tourism businesses.

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

coronavirus concerns.

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

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



An interior view of Nasir al-Molk Mosque, one of the top tourist destinations in Shiraz, southern Iran.

Restoration of Iran's royal equestrian relief nears completion

Sassanid king (r. 303 BC–309), will be completed within the next week.

The bas-relief is one of those rock-carved imageries dotted below massive rock-hewn tombs at Naqsh-e Rostam, the Achaemenid necropolis situated near the UNESCO-registered Persepolis in southern Iran.

"Restoration of the bas-relief is carried out with a protective approach and based on the theoretical principals of restoration, and for this purpose, new materials for stone restoration have been used," CHTN quoted Mostafa Rakhshandekhou who leads the restoration project, as saying on Monday.

The restoration project started in December 2019 and will come to an end by May 4, he said.

One of the wonders of the ancient world, Naqsh-e Rostam

embraces four tombs are where Persian Achaemenid kings are laid to rest, believed to be those of Darius II, Artaxerxes I, Darius I and Xerxes I (from left to right facing the cliff), although some historians are still debating this.

There are gorgeous bas-relief carvings above the tomb chambers that are similar to those at Persepolis, with the kings standing on thrones supported by figures representing the subject nations below. There also two similar graves situated on the premises of Persepolis probably belong to Artaxerxes II and Artaxerxes III.

Beneath the funerary chambers are dotted with seven Sassanian era (224–651) bas-reliefs cut into the cliff depict vivid scenes of imperial conquests and royal ceremonies; signboards below each relief give a detailed description in English.

Historical city of Sirvan to undergo restoration

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — The historical city of Sirvan in the western Iranian province of Ilam will undergo some rehabilitation works, provincial tourism chief Abdolmalek Shanbehzadeh announced on Tuesday, CHTN reported.

The restoration project aims at preserving, protecting, and strengthening the city's historical sites, which have been damaged over the past years, he added.

The historical city of Sirvan, which is estimated to date from Sassanid era (224–651), was inscribed on Iran's National Heritage List in 2001.

The under-the-radar province is making its best to grow into a major travel destination for both domestic and international holidaymakers, sightseers, history buffs and nature lovers.

The province registered some 580,000



Knowledge-based firms making headway in fighting COVID-19

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Five science and technology parks affiliated to the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology described their activities in dealing with and treating coronavirus, the most important of which is the production of herbal medicines and diagnostic kits.

A video conference was held on Monday evening with President Hassan Rouhani, Science Minister Mansour Gholami, Vice President for Science and Technology Sourena Sattari, and managers of knowledge-based companies at science and technology parks.

Disinfectant tunnels

Abbas Zare, head of the Science and Technology Park of Tehran University, stated that building disinfectant tunnels for individuals and an environmental disinfectant sprayer are among the measures taken by the innovative companies.

Although coronavirus is a crisis, it turned to be a good opportunity for technology companies to present their projects with government support.

Zare stated that in the Science and Technology Park of Tehran University, in order to deal with coronavirus epidemic, 20 companies have presented 11 products.

CT scan systems

Reza Qanbari, head of Khorasan Razavi province's Science and Technology Park, also explained "We have been able to provide 75 percent of daily alcohol and disinfectants in the province."

He also continued "one of the companies



located in this park has reached the technical knowledge of producing CT scan systems and we can produce 3 devices per week. Also, the production of ventilators has been achieved with the support of the Vice President of Science and Technology.

Herbal medicine

Masoumeh Khan Ahmadi, caretaker of Kermanshah province's Science and Technology Park, also stated that There are 300

innovative cores in this park that have created jobs for 1,800 people.

She further said "In order to counter the pandemic, we have produced industrial masks and disinfectant, and in the current situation, 385 new job opportunities have been created, which has increased the possibility of production surge."

Regarding the production of herbal medicine for the treatment of coronavirus, she

said that "The 100 percent herbal medicine has successfully passed the stage of testing on animals and is in the stage of trial on humans. So far, 400 people have been tested, and 200 coronavirus patients have fully recovered."

Khan Ahmadi stated that this medicine will be very valuable and effective. Also, one of its main compounds is the colchicum and 100 percent herbal.

Detection kits

Mohammad Rafiei, the director of the Science and Technology Park of Markazi province, also stated in the production of kits, production of 2,500 waterproof scrubs and N95 masks are among the effective measures of these companies.

He continued that the production of contactless thermometers and 5,000 liters of disinfectant are also among the products.

Regarding diagnostic kits, Rafiei said that these kits are of PCR type, and the final stages of the operation are waiting to be licensed.

"Our researchers have been able to produce essence oils from medicinal plants to disinfect crowded places. All tests have been performed. Since the outbreak of the disease, 5,000 air and surface disinfectant sprays have been produced daily, which is used extensively by the citizens," he concluded.

The Iranian health ministry on Tuesday announced that the total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus has reached 92,584 of whom 5,877 have died and 72,439, have recovered.

Iranian newborn, 106-year-old man beat coronavirus



SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — An 800-gram infant and a 106-year-old man could survive coronavirus and raise hope among the Iranian people. The man, who was infected with the coronavirus, recovered from a hospital in Qom province after 14 days and returned home.

Several patients over the age of 80 have been treated in Qom.

The 800-gram baby boy, Arsalan, who tested positive with his mother, was able to defeat the virus, and the baby now weighs 1,200 grams.

About forty days ago, the baby was born in Yazd province, but was well treated by healthcare professionals.



UK hits coal-free record for power generation amid coronavirus lockdown

Britain has gone without coal power for 18 days in a row — the longest period since the industrial revolution.

The milestone was recorded as demand for power fell almost 20 per cent compared to the same period last year, as the majority of businesses remain closed due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The result is a cut in the UK's CO2 emissions of around one-third, according to analysis by climate website Carbon Brief.

While the UK's remaining coal-fired power stations have been offline, renewable sources of energy have been the largest source of domestically-produced electricity, contributing 37 per cent, while gas contributed 32 per cent and nuclear 22 per cent.

The remaining 9 per cent has been imported from France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

Coal has contributed less and less to the power mix in Britain as plants have been brought offline, with the country on course to exit coal-fired power by 2025.

Coal usage typically drops off in warmer months, and since last summer, the largest contribution coal has made to the UK's energy was at the end of January, when it made up 6.9 per cent of the power mix.

As recently as 2015, on many days of the year, coal contributed more than 50 per cent of the power used by the grid, and it still made up 25 per cent of the total power mix in 2016, according to records kept by Drax Electric Insights.

The first coal-free day was recorded in 2017, and until this month's record, the previous longest period without coal was in May 2019 when coal power contributed nothing to the grid for two weeks.

Overall, coal contributed just 2.1 per cent of the country's total power mix in 2019.

Dr Jonathan Marshall, head of analysis at the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit said: "Today's record coal-free run is another remarkable milestone in the decline of coal power in the UK, and it won't be the last."

"No longer are there questions around the

ability of grid operators to keep the system going. Instead, attention is turning to rapidly learning as much as possible from conditions where low-carbon power dominates.

"Analysts have suggested that the coronavirus crisis will accelerate the energy transition, as systems with renewables contributing most to power output offer valuable practice in managing the grid of the future."

He added: "It is now just a couple of years until the end of coal in the UK, with gas set to play a mere bit-part in power generation by the end of the decade. It is moments like these that can provide valuable insights into keeping the lights on as we move towards a net zero economy."

The world's first coal-fired power station, the Edison Electric Light Station, opened in London in 1882 and coal remained a constant source of power until 2017 — a period of 135 years.

The opening of the Edison Electric Light Station at Holborn viaduct came two years

after the world's first hydroelectric power generation scheme, which was developed in 1878 at Craggside in Northumberland, by William Armstrong. It was not strictly a commercial venture, primarily being used to light his own house, but Armstrong was an early advocate for renewable energy and even hypothesised about future solar power generation.

He believed coal "was used wastefully and extravagantly in all its applications", and as early as 1863 he predicted Britain would cease to use coal within two centuries.

After the closure of two plants in March 2020, just three coal-fired power plants remain in Great Britain: Drax, Ratcliffe and West Burton, and also one, Kilroot, in Northern Ireland.

All are due to cease making contributions to the grid within five years. Meanwhile, the decision to allow the UK's first new deep coal mine in 30 years, in Cumbria, has been attacked as being incompatible with the country's climate targets.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Precipitation forecast to reach above normal in next 3 months

The country is predicted to receive above normal rainfall over the next three months (February 20-May 21), head of the climatological research institute affiliated to Iran's Meteorological Organization (IMO) has said.

The whole country will meet normal and above normal rainfalls, the northern parts will receive above normal rainfall while southern provinces will receive normal to lower-than-normal rainfall, IRNA quoted Iman Babaeian as saying on Sunday.

This month, northern and eastern provinces will receive rain above normal averages, while in the first month of spring precipitation will be at normal amounts across the country, he noted, adding, during the second month of spring rainfall will reach its peak.

بارش‌های کشور در سه ماه پیش‌رو بیش از نرمال است

رئیس پژوهشکده اقلیم‌شناسی سازمان هواشناسی گفت: پیش‌بینی‌ها نشان می‌دهد میزان بارش در کشور در سه ماهه پیش‌رو (اسفند ۹۷، فروردین و اردیبهشت ۹۸) در حد نرمال و متمایل به بیش از نرمال خواهد بود.

ایمان باباییان روز یکشنبه در گفت‌وگو با خبرنگار ایرنا افزود: مجموع بارش‌ها در سطح کشور نرمال و متمایل به بیشتر از نرمال است اما در نیمه شمالی، بیشتر از نرمال و در نیمه جنوبی در محدوده نرمال تا کمتر از نرمال خواهد بود.

وی اظهار داشت: بارش‌ها در اسفندماه ۹۷ در نیمه شمالی و شرقی بیشتر از نرمال است، در فروردین ماه ۹۸ نیز بارش‌ها در محدوده نرمال و برای اردیبهشت بیشتر از نرمال پیش‌بینی شده است.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“hemi-”

■ **Meaning:** half

■ **For example:** Damage to the corresponding part of the right **hemisphere** had no effect on speech.

PHRASAL VERB

Hear from

■ **Meaning:** to receive news or information from someone

■ **For example:** Police want to hear from anyone who has any information.

IDIOM

Build bridges

■ **Explanation:** help opposing groups to cooperate and understand each other better

■ **For example:** A mediator is trying to build bridges between the local community and the owners of the new plant.

Iran donates 20,000 COVID-19 diagnostic kits to Afghanistan

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Iran has provided 20,000 diagnostic kits to be sent to Afghanistan in a bid to help the neighboring country in the fight against the pandemic.

The diagnostic kits have been delivered to Afghanistan's ambassador in Tehran and will be sent to Afghanistan on Wednesday, Fars news agency quoted an Afghan health official as saying.

Afghanistan's health ministry has announced that the number of people diagnosed with the novel coronavirus passed 1,800 on Tuesday.

Traditional Iranian food for Ramadan

Food is part of Ramadan's traditions; family and friends gather to share and enjoy the two meals that are served: Iftar celebrated at sunset when Muslims break their fast, and Suhoor consumed early in the morning before the day starts. Fasting has an important role in teaching patience, compassion and gratitude. It also reminds people about those suffering from poverty and hunger.

A traditional Iftar menu includes a variety of dishes. But whether an Iftar is simple or big, sharing food with the needy during this holy month is an important aspect of the feast and Muslims are encouraged to help the poor.

At the end of the day, family members gather around Iftar table and wait for the Maghreb Adhan that marks the end of the fast.

Muslims break their fast by eating 1 or 3 dates as was the practice of Prophet Mohammed who broke his fast with three dates and water. From a nutritional point of view, dates are an excellent source of fibers, natural sugar, iron and magnesium. They help restoring blood sugar after long hours of fasting.

Refreshing juices like flixweed juice, lemon and saffron juice are very commonly consumed either before or after the meal to replace fluids lost during the day.

It is advised to eat slowly after fasting the whole day. Eating quickly after being deprived of it for an entire day, may result in indigestion and other gastric problems. Liquids like juices and soups allow the stomach some time to process and ensure proper functioning.

Fresh vegetables are a must-have for Iftar as they are a very important source of fibers, vitamins and minerals needed after a long day without food. They also help in reducing bloating and constipation which are common problems among fasting people. Salads loaded with a rich combination of fresh vegetables and olive oil are usually used during Ramadan.

It is very important to drink 8 glasses of water to hydrate the body, and better distribute them in small quantities between Iftar and Sahar to avoid bloating. Better avoid salty and spicy food which increase thirst, and consume more fresh vegetables and fruits.

A traditional Iftar gathers delicious main courses — such as stews, stuffed vegetables and many others — which provide a balance of starchy foods, vegetables and proteins (meat/ chicken/ fish/ dairy products/ beans). A number of side dishes or meze are also usually served.

For instance, Halim is a very popular food in Iran during Ramadan, it is made of barley, shredded meat (beef, lamb, chicken or turkey) and spices. This dish is cooked for several hours, which results in a paste-like consistency, blending the flavors of spices, meat, barley, and wheat.

Ash Reshteh is one of the best traditional Persian stews. Think of it as not a stew but a heavy mixture of vegetables, fried onion, meat, nuts, beans, Persian noodle, and lots of other things.

Soups are very healthy options to start the Iftar as they replenish the body fluids and warm the stomach, hence preparing it to receive other foods. Lentil, vegetable, chicken, and vermicelli soups are usually served during Ramadan.

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Iraqi Oil Guards

(August 18, 2003)

The American-led administration in Iraq is going to bring in another six-and-half thousand guards to protect the country's oil. Most of the guards will be Iraqis. There were reports this weekend of two attacks on a pipeline to Turkey and another on a water main in Baghdad, which cut supplies to thousands of people. This report from Valerie Jones:

The **breach** in the water **pipeline** was a matter of **frustration** — a large area of Baghdad without water for twenty hours. But the fires burning in the oil pipeline to Turkey are a more **crucial setback** for hopes of rebuilding the country. Local oil officials are blaming **sabotage** and with the pipeline once again shut down, Iraq is losing seven million dollars a day in **oil revenue**.

Now thousands more guards are being **recruited** to join more than five thousand Iraqis already watching the pipeline. But it **stretches** for around a thousand kilometres and protecting the whole length won't be an easy task; and unless Iraq can ensure a **constant supply** of its oil, customers may **go elsewhere**.

Words

breach: formal word for break; here, break in supply

pipeline: large pipe through which oil or gas flows over long distances

frustration: feeling angry or irritated because something is not possible

crucial setback: event that delays something important

sabotage: planned action that stops something from being successful; during the French revolution workers used to throw wooden shoes or 'sabots' into machinery to stop it working

oil revenue: money from sales of oil

recruited: found for work in a particular job

stretches: covers that distance

constant supply: amount provided that stays the same over a period of time

go elsewhere: buy from another place

(Source: BBC)

U.S. politicians ‘telling barefaced lies’ over coronavirus pandemic: China

Beijing has accused U.S. politicians of “telling barefaced lies” over the coronavirus pandemic that has swept the globe, after President Donald Trump threatened to seek damages from China for the outbreak.

“They have only one objective: shirk their responsibility for their own poor epidemic prevention and control measures, and divert public attention,” said foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang at a press briefing Tuesday.

U.S. President Donald Trump said Monday that China could have stopped the coronavirus before it swept the globe and that his administration was conducting “serious investigations” into what happened.

Trump’s criticism was the latest from his administration to target China’s handling of the coronavirus outbreak, which emerged late last year in the Chinese city of Wuhan and has grown into a global pandemic.

Last week, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the United States “strongly believed” Beijing failed to report the outbreak in a timely manner and covered up how dangerous the respiratory illness caused by the virus was.

“We’re doing very serious investigations... We are not happy with China,” Trump said at a White House briefing. “There are a lot of ways you can hold them accountable.”

“We believe it could have been stopped at the source. It could have been stopped quickly and it wouldn’t have spread all over the world.”

“Attempts to shift the blame on China will not denigrate China’s efforts in responding to the virus,” Geng Shuang said.

The coronavirus outbreak has killed more than 210,000 people around the world, including more than 56,000 in the United States, according to a Reuters tally.

(Source; AFP)

U.S. ready to recognize Israeli ‘sovereignty’ in occupied Palestinian lands

The United States says it is “prepared to recognize Israeli actions to extend Israeli sovereignty” in the occupied lands belonging to Palestinians.

“As we have made consistently clear, we are prepared to recognize Israeli actions to extend Israeli sovereignty and the application of Israeli law to areas of the West Bank that the vision foresees as being part of the State of Israel,” a State Department spokesperson said Monday.

She further claimed that the step would be in the context of the Israeli regime “agreeing to negotiate with the Palestinians along the lines set forth in President [Donald] Trump’s vision.”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said earlier that the so-called peace proposal announced by Trump in January was a promise to recognize Israel’s authority over West Bank.

Global coronavirus cases pass three million as lockdowns begin to ease

Global confirmed coronavirus cases surpassed 3 million, as the United States neared 1 million cases, according to a Reuters tally.

It comes as many countries are taking steps to ease lockdown measures that have brought the world to a standstill over the past eight weeks, Reuters reported.

The first 41 cases were confirmed in Wuhan, China, on Jan. 10. The 3 million confirmed infections in less than four months are comparable in number with the roughly 3-5 million cases of severe illness caused by seasonal influenza around the world each year, according to the World Health Organisation.

An average of 82,000 cases have been reported per day in the past week. Over a quarter of all cases are in the United States, and over 43% have been recorded in Europe.

The death toll from the virus stood at more than 205,000 as of Monday, and almost one in seven reported cases of the disease has been fatal.

The true mortality rate is likely to be substantially lower as the tally of infections does not include many mild or asymptomatic and unconfirmed cases.

Some severely affected countries in Europe, including Italy, France and Spain, have recorded a drop in daily case numbers over recent weeks, but still recorded 2,000-5,000 new infections per day in the past week.

Total cases rose 2.5% on Sunday, the lowest daily rate in almost two months, and down from a peak in late March when the total was rising by more than 10% a day.

The United States has reported an average of more than 30,000 new cases a day in the past week, and now represents around a third of all new cases.

Israeli military drone captured by Palestinian group

The Palestinian resistance group, Hamas, says it has captured an Israeli military drone flying over the Gaza Strip.

According to Palestinian media, the drone was “shot down” by Hamas forces east of the city of Dir al-Balah.

The Israeli military claims the unmanned aerial vehicle captured by Hamas is a “Skylark” that has “crashed” during an “operation” over the Gaza Strip, Press TV reported

It further claimed that the UAV crashed due to “technical error”, but it ruled out the possibility that potentially sensitive information would be leaked from the drone.

Along with the drone seizure, a high level of Israeli military vehicle traffic was also reported along the Gaza border.

The Israeli regime regularly uses drones for reconnaissance and assassination operations, involving violation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese airspace.

Hamas has confiscated Israeli drones several times, either after they crashed due to technical problems or in the wake of shooting them down.

Haftar dismisses UN unity pact, vows to form own govt.

Russia ‘surprised’ by Haftar’s Libya power grab

By staff & agencies

Libya’s renegade military commander Khalifa Haftar has dismissed a 2015 United Nations-brokered unity accord for the war-ravaged country as “a thing of the past,” vowing to establish a new government under his rule.

“The General Command of the Armed Forces accepts the will of the people despite the burden of that trust, multiplicity of obligations, and the magnitude of responsibilities before God, our people, and conscience, and history,” Haftar declared in a televised address on Monday, pledging that his Libyan National Army (LNA) rebel forces will take over control of the divided country.

“The political agreement destroyed the country. We will work to create the conditions for building permanent civic institutions,” he said, referring to the UN-sponsored pact that recognized the Government of National Accord (GNA) in the capital, Tripoli.

According to Press TV, Haftar did not clarify whether an elected parliament based in the country’s eastern city of Tobruk — which has until now been protected by his LNA militants — supported the new effort, or what its future role would be.

Addressing what he referred to as “free



Libyans,” he said, “We have followed up your response to our call to you to announce the fall of the Political Agreement, which has destroyed the country and led it to the abyss, and to authorize those you consider eligible to lead this stage.”

The foreign-backed military strongman did not explain how he had obtained any

popular mandate.

The development came just days after forces loyal to the internationally-recognized GNA announced yet another offensive against Haftar’s LNA on the southern outskirts of Tripoli, following a series of recent victories that liberated several strategic cities from the rebel militants.

■ **Russia ‘surprised’ by Haftar**

Russia described a power grab by Libya’s eastern-based military leader Khalifa Haftar, whom Moscow supports, as “surprising”, state news agency RIA reported on Tuesday, citing a foreign ministry source.

“It’s surprising,” said the source.

Most important was for the military and political decisions reached at a conference in Berlin in January to be implemented by Libyans themselves, with the assistance of the international community, the source said, Reuters reported.

“We support the continuation of the political process. There is no military solution to the conflict.”

Libya has been split since 2014 between areas controlled by the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli and the northwest, and territory held by eastern-based forces in Benghazi.

The conflict escalated sharply this month, with fierce fighting on several different fronts in the west of the country despite urgent calls from the U.N. and aid agencies for a truce to tackle the coronavirus crisis.

Haftar is supported by Russia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt. The GNA is backed by Turkey.

Japanese destroyer leaves for West Asia despite virus concerns

A Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyer left Yokosuka base in Kanagawa Prefecture, for an anti-piracy patrol off the West Asia (Middle East) and African coasts.

The destroyer Onami, with a crew of about 200, departed amid mounting concerns over coronavirus, which is raging around the world.

The Onami may have to withdraw from the mission if an outbreak occurs on board, which has all of what the government calls the Three Cs that must be avoided — closed spaces, crowded places and close-contact settings, Japan times reported.

“It’s extremely important to exercise maximum care to prevent infection and accomplish our duty,” Vice Adm. Hiroyuki Kasui, commander in chief of the Self-Defense Fleet, told the crew before the departure.

The Onami will operate in the Gulf of Aden, which sits between Yemen and Somalia. It will be dispatched for about six months.

The vessel was supplied with 4,000 face masks, government officials said, adding that additional masks will be provided if necessary.

The officials also said an additional 2,500 masks were



given to the MSDF destroyer Takanami, engaged in an information collection mission to help secure the safety of Japan-linked ships in the Gulf of Oman and other waters.

The dispatched MSDF ships make port about once every two weeks to resupply. But Djibouti, where Japan has a foothold, restricts the entry of foreigners. In Djibouti or other coastal countries, it is likely that MSDF crew members will not be allowed to disembark and go into town.

“Disembarkation is the biggest pleasure for those who

live in the cramped conditions of a ship,” a former MSDF destroyer crew member said. “It would be stressful if there is no disembarkation for a month or longer.”

Any crew member suspected of catching coronavirus would be isolated in a treatment room. In the case of the Onami, a crew member would be flown to a medical institution in a nearby coastal country on a ship-based helicopter if necessary.

“We are trying to confirm whether medical institutions in coastal countries friendly to us have enough capacity” to accept MSDF members if they become infected, a Defense Ministry executive said. If such capacity is lost, it would be difficult for an MSDF ship to carry out its mission if an outbreak occurs aboard.

The spread of coronavirus could exacerbate poverty in Somalia and elsewhere, possibly leading to increased pirate activity. In addition, tensions between Iran and the United States are again becoming strained.

At a news conference, Defense Minister Taro Kono said his ministry is examining various scenarios to consider how to respond if infection occurs on any of the MSDF ships operating in the region.

Latin America to see sharp increase in hunger, poverty: FAO



Hunger and poverty are set to spike in Latin America and the Caribbean as the impact of the novel coronavirus ravages the region’s economies and disrupts supply chains, according to a report by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Most countries across Latin America have been forced to shutter their economies, dashing hopes for growth and sending forecasts for unemployment spiraling upward.

The UN agency said there should still be plenty of food available in both regional and international reserves but warned hobbled supply chains could complicate access to those stores, especially for the poor.

“Sanitary measures to prevent the spread of the virus have direct consequences on the functioning of food systems,” the FAO said in the document, which was delivered to the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. The virus arrived later in Latin America than in Europe or Asia, but the region has already confirmed 150,000 cases of coronavirus and more than 7,200 deaths to date.

According to the FAO, a third of the

population of Latin America and the Caribbean already live in a precarious state of “food insecurity.”

Those populations are especially vulnerable and countries need to prioritize access to food and aid to the poor as the crisis intensifies, the agency warned in the document.

“It is critical that governments declare food and agriculture as strategic and of national public interest ... so that this health crisis doesn’t turn into a food crisis,” the report said.

The UN agency said the global pandemic could hit both supply and demand. It warned many in Latin America would see their purchasing power wiped out, while local farmers might have more trouble accessing labor, farm inputs like fertilizer and capital.

Food prices are also likely to waver, the organization said, as supply chains are disrupted globally, forcing countries to tap new sources of food.

In 2018, the countries with the highest rates of hunger were Haiti (49.3%), Venezuela (21.2%), Nicaragua (17%), Bolivia (17.1%) and Guatemala (15.2%), the agency said.

EU sees new Brexit talks ‘at an impasse’



Halted when the epidemic started, the EU’s tortuous Brexit talks with Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s government were renewed a week ago but have quickly hit snags, the sources said.

“We are at an impasse,” said one diplomat following the negotiations aimed at agreeing new trading terms between Britain and the 27 member states of the bloc from 2021 when London’s current, status-quo transition period after Brexit ends, Daily Star reported.

“There are plenty of minor technical details where we could find solutions. But on the fundamental goals each side is trying to achieve - the differences are enormous. Things cannot move without a political push. And it’s missing.”

After last week’s talks, chief EU negotiator Michel Barnier warned that London had to budge to bridge gaps for a deal to be sealed in the little time available.

Johnson’s spokesman countered on Monday that the London team was ready to keep talking “but that doesn’t make us any more likely to agree to the EU’s pro-

posals in areas where they are not taking into account the UK’s status as an independent state.”

“Clearly there will need to be political movement on the EU’s side to move negotiations forward, particularly on fisheries and level playing field issues in order to help find a balanced solution.”

More negotiations are due to take place by early June.

EU officials note there is still time for London and Brussels to meet a deadline at the end of that month to agree on extending negotiations beyond the end of the year.

But Johnson, who had a life-threatening bout of COVID-19 and is under fire at home for his handling of the outbreak - has ruled that out.

“Maybe we should just believe him when he says he won’t extend the transition period,” said an EU official involved in the negotiations. “In which case, we are a bit puzzled as to what comes next ... The tight schedule is even more tricky now with coronavirus, there is no space to waste time.”

South Korea says Kim may be trying to avoid coronavirus

Kim Jong Un may have missed a key holiday on April 15 because of concerns over the coronavirus, not because he is ill, South Korea’s minister for North Korean affairs said on Tuesday.

North Korean leader Kim’s absence from public ceremonies on the birth anniversary of his grandfather and founder of the country, Kim Il Sung, was unprecedented, and he has not been seen in public since. That has led to

days of speculation over his health, Reuters reported.

South Korean officials emphasise they have detected no unusual movements in North Korea and have cautioned against reports that Kim may be ill.

North Korea has said it has no confirmed cases of the coronavirus, but given the fact that the country has taken stringent steps to head off an outbreak, Kim’s absence from the ceremonies is

not particularly unusual, Unification Minister Kim Yeon-chul, who oversees North Korea engagement, told lawmakers.

“It is true that he had never missed the anniversary for Kim Il Sung’s birthday since he took power, but many anniversary events including celebrations and a banquet had been cancelled because of coronavirus concerns,” Kim Yeon-chul said at a parliamentary hearing.

Iran submits bid to host 2027 AFC Asian Cup

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran has officially submitted its bid for hosting the AFC Asian Cup in 2027, the spokesman of the national federation confirmed on Sunday.

“The Cheetahs are preparing to host the Asian big teams in 2027,” Amir Mahdi Alavi tweeted.

Iran has already hosted the Asian Cup two times in 1968 and 1976.

The Persians have won the Asian Cup three times and always considered as one of the Asian great teams. Iran will have a difficult task to win the bid since the host country should have eight standard stadiums.

Iran has submitted its candidacy to host the 2019 AFC Asian Cup but the UAE won the rights to host the event.

Recently, the AFC had extended the deadline to lodge expression of interest by

three months from March 31 to June 30 in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

«The AFC had hoped to announce the tournament hosts as soon as possible to give them more time to prepare for the quadrennial continental championship, which was expanded to 24 teams for the 2019 edition in the United Arab Emirates,» the AFC said.

The host city will be decided at the OCA General Assembly meeting in Sanya, China, on November 29 when the 45 member nations are next scheduled to meet.

India, Qatar and Saudi Arabia have already submitted their bids for 2027 AFC Asian Cup.

Uzbekistan, Jordan and Iraq have also expressed interest in hosting the competition in the past and could still file a bid before the deadline.

China will host the 2023 AFC Asian Cup.



Bahrain national team coach Helio Sousa reminisces on his first season



It was a very strange time for Portuguese coach Helio Sousa in March 2019 who was handed the role of Bahrain national team head coach as he did not receive a warm welcome from the country's fans as they believed he lacked experiences.

Fast forward to four months later and the team featured in their first tournament under Sousa and they topped their group in the 2019 West Asian Championship after securing wins over Jordan and Kuwait and playing to a draw against Saudi Arabia. They eventually beat host Iraq and won their debut regional title.

Sousa believes that he had “a good group of players who have proven they can get good results” even though he would have preferred to have been given more time to prepare before the tournament.

“I quickly got to know all of them at the training camp we had in Portugal in July right before the tournament,” Sousa said.

“I didn’t have enough time to assess their capabilities fully, but we managed to win the West Asian title after less than two months working with them. That’s a big achievement in itself.”

Bahrain continued their top form into Asian qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, most memorable being their 1-0 victory over Iran who were 23rd in the

FIFA World Rankings in October 2019.

That victory moved Bahrain up to second place in Group C behind front-runners Iraq and Sousa said: “We’ve improved the players’ defensive performances and they’ve shown themselves to be very responsive to our methods. They implemented what we asked them to do, particularly against Iran, when we had our best performance of the qualifiers.”

Bahrain’s three remaining Group C games are against Cambodia, IR Iran and Hong Kong. “There are nine points up for grabs and we’ll do whatever it takes to try and get all nine. Everyone in the squad has assumed their share of responsibility, and they work hard for the national team,” the 50-year-old explained.

“We’re experiencing something unique right now but we must think about the next stage. It’s a great time for me and my team.

“The players were great despite all the circumstances we went through because they are semi-professional.”

“We’ve managed to achieve a lot in recent months but we’re still looking for more. We’ve worked very hard to make Bahrain competitive in all tournaments,” Sousa concluded.

(Source: futaa.com)

Next year’s Olympics will be cancelled if pandemic not over: Games chief



The postponed Tokyo 2020 Olympics will have to be cancelled if the coronavirus pandemic isn’t brought under control by next year, the organizing committee’s president said in comments published Tuesday.

The pandemic has already forced a year-long delay of the Games -- which are now scheduled to open on July 23, 2021 -- but Tokyo 2020 president Yoshiro Mori said no further postponement was possible.

In an interview with Japan’s Nikkan Sports daily, Mori was categorical when asked if the Olympics could be delayed until 2022 if the pandemic remains a threat next year, replying: “No.” “In that case, it’s cancelled,” Mori said. Mori noted the Games had been cancelled previously only during wartime, and compared the battle against coronavirus to “fighting an invisible enemy.”

If the virus is successfully contained, “we’ll hold the Olympics in peace next summer”, he added. “Mankind is betting on it.”

Masa Takaya, a Tokyo 2020 spokesman, declined to comment on a possible cancellation of the Games, telling reporters that Mori’s remarks were based on “the chairman’s own thoughts.”

Japanese organizers and the International Olympic Committee, under heavy pressure from athletes and international sports federations, agreed in March to a

year-long postponement of the Games.

Organizers and Japanese officials have said the delayed Olympics will be a chance to showcase the world’s triumph over the coronavirus, but questions have arisen about whether even a year’s postponement is sufficient.

On Tuesday, the head of Japan Medical Association warned it would be “exceedingly difficult” to hold the Games next year if a vaccine has not been found.

“I would not say that they should not be held, but it would be exceedingly difficult,” Yoshitake Yokokura told reporters at a briefing. And last week a Japanese medical expert who has criticized the country’s response to the coronavirus warned that he was “very pessimistic” that the postponed Olympics can be held in 2021.

“To be honest with you I don’t think the Olympics is likely to be held next year,” said Kentaro Iwata, a professor of infectious diseases at Kobe University, at a briefing.

But Tokyo 2020 spokesman Takaya countered that even medical experts said it was too early to make a judgment on such a possibility. In the interview, Mori also said organizers were considering holding joint opening and closing ceremonies for the Olympics and the Paralympics in an effort to cut costs.

(Source: AFP)

Free agent Beitashour hungry for another shot in MLS

After making 24 starts at right-back for LAFC in 2019, Steven Beitashour entered free agency.

With nine years in MLS, 247 appearances and Supporters’ Shield wins with three different teams under his belt, you would figure someone somewhere in the world would give him a chance to contribute. And they probably would have. But the world seemed completely disinterested in the idea. Beitashour, a member of the Iranian national team, had offers from two countries at the beginning of the year.

“I had some offers overseas in Iran and China, and it’s crazy because before those things happened, crazy events that you’d never imagine occurred. So both just kind of ended,” Beitashour said.

COVID-19 had just begun to take hold of China and Iran was recoiling from the death of its most prominent general. Neither felt safe for Beitashour and his family. So he began to look toward joining his fifth MLS team. We know where we are with that.

Clearly the free agency of a professional soccer player is infinitely microscopic in the scheme of all these events, but anyone in a situation where massive global events repeatedly cut in front of them with every move would have to stop and ask for at least a split second: Is it me?

“You know, I’m not gonna lie it definitely felt that way a bit. But I try to be positive in everything that I’ve done in my career and in life in general. I’m trying to kind of focus on anything that I can and I’m trying to



spend time with my son and my wife and try to look at as a blessing,” Beitashour said. “Typically when you have to work you miss a lot of your child’s growth and development when they’re younger, because every day, every week they’re learning something new. To spend so much time with them is pretty amazing.”

With the world on hold, the question for Beitashour became one of how to stay in shape and how to stay as sharp as possible on the ball until some normalcy returned and a team came calling. This is where being

in the league for nine years with multiple teams has its benefits. Initially, anyway.

When the offseason started, Beitashour took pieces of Toronto FC’s and LAFC’s offseason workouts and mashed them together until it became unsafe to go out every day. Now he spends a lot of time on the Peloton. His local gym let him borrow some weights until quarantine ends. He’s taken up yoga for the first time as well. It may not be ideal, but he’s found a way to keep his fitness from the relative safety of his garage.

As far as getting the ball at his feet goes, Steven may not be the Beitashour getting the most touches.

“Right now, essentially I’m just kicking the ball around with my son watching him just dribble, which is honestly the greatest thing,” Beitashour said. “He’s 13 months and when we go outside he does dribbles on the street and I just get some touches where I can.”

For all the positives Beitashour has been able to find in isolation, there’s still the same anxiety the rest of us have. He said, of course, that he hopes everyone is staying safe, healthy and taking care of each other. But, like all of us, he’ll be happy when he can get back to soccer.

“I was pretty much in isolation anyway since the season ended. So if anyone’s going crazy, it’s definitely me,” he said. “I’m ready to get back on the field. And I’m still competitive, so I want to play, I want to win. That’s definitely what drives my head.”

(Source: MLSsoccer.com)

Behrouz Ataei nominated for Iran volleyball hotseat: report

TASNIM — Iran U-21 volleyball coach Behrouz Ataei has been reportedly nominated for taking charge of senior volleyball team.

Ataei inspired Iran to win 2019 FIVB U21 World Championship for the first time.

Now, the 50-year-old coach is a candidate to replace Igor Kolakovic.

Islamic Republic of Iran Volleyball Federation (IRIVF) has officially terminated the contract with Kolakovic last week.

The coach’s current contract runs until September but the two parties reached an agreement to bring an end to their cooperation following cancellation of the FIVB Volleyball Nations League and 2020 Olympic Games due to coronavirus outbreak.

Appeal Committee confirms Persepolis win over Sepahan

PLDC — Iran Football Federation’s Appeal Committee has confirmed Persepolis’s 3-0 win over Sepahan.

The Appeal Committee is responsible for the handling of appeals against decisions of the Disciplinary Commission.

Persepolis were awarded a 3-0 win over Sepahan after the latter failed to show up for the match in Iran Professional League Matchday 20 in late February.

The hectic match was scheduled in Isfahan’s Naghsh-e Jahan Stadium but the host arrived in stadium one hour after the kick-off time.

Sepahan said they intended to play but the fans don’t let them to leave the hotel but the Football Federation of Iran Disciplinary Committee said there were “no obstacles” holding up the team bus.

Sepahan lodged a complaint against the result but the Appeal Committee has approved the previous decision.

With this three points, IPL leaders Persepolis moved 10 points clear at the top and take a big step closer to winning the title for the fourth time in a row.

Footballers should be booked for spitting

Players should be given yellow cards should they spit on the field when football resumes, says Fifa’s medical committee chairman Michel D’Hooghe.

The Government confirmed talks with the Premier League are ongoing to get the 2019-20 season “up and running as soon as possible” as top-flight players begin to return to training grounds.

Arsenal and West Ham allowed players back to their respective training bases on Monday, while Tottenham’s players will return to training today.

And those players who spit after returning to the pitch should be punished as they risk spreading Covid-19, D’Hooghe told The Daily Telegraph.

The Belgian doctor acknowledged that spitting “is a common practice in football and it is not very hygienic”.

Speaking to the paper, he said: “This is one of the reasons why we have to be very careful before we start again. I am not pessimistic but I am rather skeptical at the moment.

D’Hooghe said football administrators would need to consider punishment via a card due to the need to protect players and staff near the pitch.

Weekly meetings will now be taking place between medical officials from the major sports governing bodies and representatives of Public Health England.

(Source: Standard)

FIFA’s Infantino suspected of intervening to stop probe: report

FIFA president Gianni Infantino is suspected of having intervened with Switzerland’s attorney general to try to get an investigation dropped, a Swiss newspaper alleged on Monday.

The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) launched an investigation in early 2016, shortly after Infantino was elected president of world football’s governing body, about his awarding of a television rights contract to an offshore company in his previous role as UEFA’s legal affairs director.

According to the Tribune de Geneve newspaper, Infantino was “worried” about this investigation and wrote to his childhood friend, Rinaldo Arnold, who had become a senior prosecutor in Switzerland’s Haut-Valais region where they grew up.

“I will try to explain to the OAG that it is in my interests that everything should be cleared up as soon as possible, that it be clearly stated that I have nothing to do with this matter,” he wrote in an email cited by the newspaper.

Arnold, who had helped to set up a first meeting between Infantino and Attorney General Michael Lauber, replied: “What is important is the meeting in two weeks’ time. If you like, I can come with you again.”

The meeting took place on April 22, 2016, the newspaper said, adding that what happened during it remains “a mystery”, and the OAG “refuses to speak about it”.

The OAG declined to comment on the Tribune de Geneve article when contacted by AFP.

FIFA said later on Monday “the email referred to in the article was obviously obtained by hacking, which is an illegal and criminal act.”

“Not only Mr Infantino had no reason to lie in that email, the email never said Mr Infantino wanted to ‘clear his name’,” FIFA added.

The Zurich-based federation has always indicated that the meetings between Infantino and the OAG were intended to show that FIFA was “ready to engage with the Swiss justice system”.

In November 2017, “after a third informal meeting” between Infantino and Lauber, the OAG closed the investigation into the contract signed by Infantino at UEFA, European football’s governing body.

(Source: Eurosport)

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

The result of negligence is regret and the consequence of far-sightedness and determination is soundness.

Imam Ali (AS)

Iranian animation “Malakout” competing in Humboldt festival

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian director Farnush Abedi's short animated movie “Malakout” will be competing in the Humboldt Film Festival running in the U.S. city of Arcata, California, the organizers have announced.



A scene from “Malakout” by Iranian director Farnush Abedi.

The horror film is about a pianist, who has lost one of his hands and can't play the piano anymore. Doctors decide to transplant a dead criminal's hand to his body. The pianist with his new hand starts killing people.

Due to COVID-19, the festival is being held online. The animation received an honorable mention at the Silk Road International Film Festival in Dublin, Ireland in February. “Malakout” will also be competing in the 50th Annual USA Film Festival taking place in Dallas in May/June 2020.

Bus-stop art gallery lifts spirits in lockdown London

LONDON (Reuters) — A London bus stop has been transformed into a children's art gallery by a local resident who wanted to brighten the drudgery of lockdown life, creating a colorful community hub amid the anxiety and isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A hand-written sign with an Instagram handle encourages kids and adults alike to contribute submissions, with the wall of the bus stop covered in drawings depicting things such as a unicorn, flowers and rainbows, which have come to symbolize positivity and solidarity with Britain's health workers during the outbreak.



Sarah Lamarr and her 4 year old daughter, Rosie, who started a “Bus stop gallery” pose for a photograph at a bus stop with art work following the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), London, Britain, April 27, 2020. (Reuters/Hannah McKay)

Sarah Lamarr, a part time teacher and mother of 4-year-old Rosie, started the gallery when she woke up the day after Britain's coronavirus lockdown began and realized she would be stuck inside indefinitely with only a bland bus stop to look at.

“I just wanted to do something to brighten it up so I didn't have to look at a grey bus stop for the next however-long,” she told Reuters.

Lamarr said she felt like the protagonist of Alfred Hitchcock's 1954 thriller Rear Window, which stars James Stewart as an injured photographer who watches his neighbors after he is confined to his flat with a broken leg.

“If you have a bus stop near you I would really encourage anyone to do the same because it's just a really lovely thing to have in your community,” she said.

“If you are stuck in a first floor, second floor flat with no garden with kids, it's just a great thing to watch out the window.”

One picture of flowers was accompanied with a message saying “Let's focus on the positive” while another drawing of a Superman costume said “Thank You Heroes” and listed roles which frontline workers are continuing to carry out.

Art Bureau organizes online festival of naqqali

A R T TEHRAN — Iran's Art Bureau has organized an international online festival of naqqali, a dramatic style of storytelling dedicated to stories from Ferdowsi's Shahnameh and other epic Persian stories.

Interested applicants including children, young adults and adults can take part in the festival in two sections of naqqali and the recitation of Shahnameh.

Each individual can submit one video of his/her presentation to the secretariat of the festival before May 14.

The videos must be no less than five minutes and no more than 20 minutes.

The works will be judged by the juries at the Dramatic Art center of the bureau and winners will be announced on May 24.

Shahnameh narrates stories of legendary Iranian kings and heroes.

Also known as the “Book of Kings” in English, the Shahnameh is based mainly on the Khwatey-namak, a history of the kings of Persia in Pahlavi (Middle Persian) from mythical times down to the 7th century.

For nearly 1000 years, Shahnameh has remained one of the most popular works in the Persian-speaking world.

The Shahnameh, in which the Persian national epic found its final and enduring form, was completed in 1010.

The Shahnameh millennium was accepted on UNESCO's 2010 calendar of events.



Samereh Maftun performs a naqqali in an undated photo. (Shahnamehpajuan/Mojdeh Shahriar).

Iranian, Turkish artists join to hold online exhibit

A R T TEHRAN — A number of Iranian and Turkish artists have teamed up to hold a group online exhibit under the title “Existence”.

The works available on the Instagram page existence_group reflect the personal thoughts of an artist in the world of today.

“Existence endeavors to present our life experiences and our artistic choices despite our differences in time and place taking into consideration the geographical, political, and cultural barriers and borders to display an astonishing common experience,” reads part of the statement of the online show.

Adel Barazandeh, Azar Khatabakhsh, Ensieh Akbarzadeh, Fereshteh Motamed, Homa Bazrafshan and Nilufar Naderi are among the Iranian artists.

Nassim Bajalnlu, Hamid Binandeh, Farbod Morshedzadeh and Foad Bonakdar are the organizing team.

Derya Kazan, Serhat Alparslan, Batikan Bostanci and Fatih Dulger are among the Turkish artists.

Nowadays since many countries are engaged in the battle with the coronavirus crisis, the artists, musicians and many others have teamed up to hold online programs to entertain and encourage people during the home quarantine period.

Per Olov Enquist, celebrated Swedish author, dies aged 85

LONDON (The Guardian) — Swedish author Per Olov Enquist, described as “a giant among European writers” by his publisher, has died at the age of 85.

The author's family told Swedish media that he died on Saturday night after a long illness. The much-celebrated novelist, playwright and poet, known by his initials PO, was winner of the Nordic Council's literary prize and the Swedish Academy's Nordic prize. His historical novel “The Visit of the Royal Physician” — set in the backstabbing world of the 18th-century Danish courts, where the mad king Christian VII's queen, the English princess Caroline Mathilde, falls in love with the court physician — won him the August prize, Sweden's most prestigious literary award after the Nobel. It also made him the only Swedish author to take the Independent foreign fiction prize, the precursor to the International Booker, in 2001.

Enquist drew heavily on his own experiences in his writing, whether it was his oppressive childhood in a strictly religious home, his time as a college athlete, work as a journalist and his destructive alcoholism. Born in 1934 in Hjoegbole in Sweden's far north, his books — including “The Crystal Eye” (1961), “The Parable Book” (2013), “The Magnetist's Fifth Winter” (1964) and “The March of the Musicians” (1978) — have been translated into a dozen languages.

He also helped write the screenplay for the film Pelle the Conqueror, which won an Oscar for best foreign language film.

Håkan Bravinger, literary director at his Swedish publisher Norstedts, said Enquist's importance to Swedish literature cannot be overstated.

“Few have, like him, inspired other writers, renewed the documentary novel, revitalized Swedish drama and touched readers for more than half a century,” he wrote.

Christopher MacLehose, who published Enquist in the UK, called him “a giant



Per Olov Enquist in his home in Stockholm in 2011. (AFP/Getty Images/Soren Andersson)

among European writers”.

“He was a novelist of immense stature and range; he was also all his life a playwright; and he was a spellbinding speaker at literary events,” said MacLehose, calling Enquist “the kindest, most charming, most curious and witty of men.”

Enquist won a second August award for his 2008 autobiography “A Different Life”, its name a homage to “A Life by August Strindberg”, the father of modern Swedish literature. The process of writing “A Different Life”, Enquist said, allowed him to work through and leave behind painful memories of sleeping in a bed meant for his stillborn brother, of the void left by a father who died when he was not yet a year old, and of a strict mother who pushed him to invent sins to confess.

Known for his Gregory Peck-like frown and silver crown in his later years, Enquist broke free from his family, attending Uppsala University, where he discovered journalism and writing. He just missed qualifying for the Rome Olympics in the high jump in 1960.

Enquist's transition to adulthood was scarred by depression, self-doubt and existential questions. “I think I wanted to be a writer all my life and I didn't give up,” he told AFP in a 2011 interview, even though “it wasn't so easy to survive” much of the time.

Michelle Obama documentary “Becoming” to premiere on Netflix

NEW YORK (AP) — A documentary portrait of Michelle Obama titled “Becoming” will premiere on Netflix next week, the streaming company announced Monday.

The film, described as “an intimate look into the life of former first lady Michelle Obama” chronicles her 34-city book tour in 2018-2019 for her best-selling memoir “Becoming.” Obama's promotional tour, managed by the concert promoter Live Nation, had the scale of a rock tour, with a string of dates at sold-out arenas.

The film will debut May 6 on Netflix. In a statement, Obama said the experience of the tour “drove home the idea that what we share in common is deep and real and can't be messed with.”

“We processed the past and imagined a better future. In talking about the idea of ‘becoming,’ many of us dared to say our hopes out loud,” said Obama. “I treasure the memories and that sense of connection now more than ever, as we struggle together to weather this pandemic, as we care for our loved ones, tend to our communities, and try to keep up with work and school while coping with huge amounts of loss, confusion, and uncertainty.”

“Becoming” has sold more than 11 million copies and been translated into more than 20 languages. The former first lady's popularity has made her a potentially pivotal figure in the 2020 presidential campaign. Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic nominee, recently said that he'd pick her as a running mate “in a heartbeat,” before adding that he didn't think she had any desire to be part of presidential politics again.

Nadia Hallgren, a veteran documentary cinematographer making her feature directorial debut in “Becoming”, trailed Obama on the book tour from city to city. “She moves quickly and I had to learn to move with her,” said Hallgren.



This May 11, 2019 file photo shows former first lady Michelle Obama during “Becoming: An Intimate Conversation with Michelle Obama,” in Atlanta. (AP/Paul R. Giunta)

“Becoming” is the latest release from Higher Ground Productions, the production company created by Barack and Michelle Obama. Their exclusive multi-film deal with Netflix has already proven fruitful. Their first film, “American Factory”, by Julia Reichert and Steven Bognar, earlier this year won the Academy Award for best documentary. (The Obamas did not attend the Oscars, nor received a statuette.) Higher Ground was also behind the acclaimed recently released documentary “Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution,” by James Lebrecht and Nicole Newnham.

The former first lady acknowledged the timing is difficult for a film about community, and that social distancing doesn't come naturally to her: “I'm a hugger,” she said. During the pandemic, Obama has read children's books to kids stuck at home in an online series titled “Mondays with Michelle Obama.” “I'm here for you,” she said in her statement. “And I know you are here for one another.”

“Empathy is our lifeline here. It's what will get us to the other side,” said Obama. “Let's use it to redirect our attention toward what matters most, reconsider our priorities, and find ways to better remake the world in the image of our hopes.”

Karlovy Vary film festival rolls up red carpet, cancels 2020 edition

PRAGUE (Reuters) — The Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, central and Eastern Europe's leading cinema event, has cancelled this summer's lineup due to the coronavirus pandemic, its president said on Tuesday.

Organizers instead plan to offer some selections originally scheduled for the event in movie theaters across the Czech Republic after the government reopens cinema houses on May 25. They also plan to host the festival's industry program online.

“Seeking reduced or alternative options would go against the festival's main purpose, which is to bring together spectators and filmmakers to experience films collectively,” President Jiri Bartoska said in a video message.



The event in the spa town some 150 km (100 miles) from Prague, where backpackers mix with celebrities at screenings around town, had been set to take place from July 3 to July 11. The festival is scheduled to return in 2021.

The Karlovy Vary festival was founded in 1946 and in recent years has attracted A-list stars such as Julianne Moore, Robert De Niro, Richard Gere and Robert Pattinson.

Organizers also said they had joined the 10-day “We Are One: A Global Film Festival” that will feature content curated by the Berlin, Cannes, Venice, Sundance, Toronto and Tribeca film festivals, among others, starting on May 29.