

**Tehran urges U.S. to release Iranian scientist infected with COVID-19** **2****'Gateway of the Slaves': a millennia-old mudbrick town in southern Iran** **8****Axis of Resistance slam Germany for complying with U.S., Israeli dictates to ban Hezbollah** **10****Iranian association announces nominees for 2021 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award** **12**

Iran censures Germany for blacklisting Hezbollah

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PERSPECTIVE

Javad Heirannia
political analyst

How to maintain peace in Persian Gulf region

The presence of foreign forces in the Persian Gulf has caused regional security efforts to secure the interests of these powers.

The security policy of countries stems from how their ruling elites understand the concepts of "threats" and "security issues" and "how to deal with threats".

The security policy in the Persian Gulf has not gone its natural course throughout history and due to the presence of foreign countries in the region, the balance of natural forces has not been formed.

Former CIA agent Graham E. Fuller has confirmed this in his book "The Center of the Universe."

This has made regional struggles to be based on the interests of foreign countries. Suppose, for example, that Iran and Saudi Arabia decide to normalize relations tomorrow, will regional powers allow Riyadh to do so? On the other hand, does Saudi Arabia's understanding of Iran as a threat merely serve Riyadh's interests or Washington's?

This example illustrates how the presence of foreign powers in the region is effective and fundamental in how the regional actors perceive the concept of threat and the ways to deal with it.

To understand this issue better, we take a look at the common categories in security theories that fall into two sections.

The first one is based on a realistic approach that offers a narrow interpretation of security. In other words, in this approach, the issue of security is considered a "military" concept which means that the definition of security is based on "military threats."

In the realist approach, in addition to the narrow definition of security in the subject area, we see a limited interpretation of the purpose of the security reference. According to this view, "government" is the only source of security. Under the realistic approach, the three approaches of "collective defense" manifested in NATO, "collective security" manifested in the United Nations, "Concert Security" manifested in the nineteenth-century European concert can be identified. **→7**

Opposition to IMF's financial aid for Iran, an indication of U.S. unilateralism: expert

By Mahnaz Abdi

TEHRAN — Like most of the countries around the world, Iran is fighting with coronavirus pandemic and it has made the country facing some economic difficulties and limitations.

Such difficult condition has led Iran to ask the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for emergency loan to help it contain the pandemic.

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

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

The U.S. reaction was seriously blamed by the Iranian officials, as well as some foreign ones, as last week, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said that Germany, France and the United Kingdom, known as European trio, do not oppose the International Monetary Fund's loan to Iran which Tehran needs to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now, waiting for the IMF's response, Iran is urging the international body to take an impartial approach.

To know some expert opinion on the matter, the Tehran Times has conducted an interview with Dr. Somayyeh Sadat Miri Lavasani, a university professor who is an international economic law expert.

About the U.S. approach toward Iran's request, Dr. Lavasani is of the opinion that opposition to IMF's financial aid for Iran is an indication of the U.S. unilateralism.

"It is because of its unilateral approach

that the U.S. is trying to prevent Iran from access to the IMF's financial resources", she stressed.

This opposition is a violation of human rights, as it is not just opposing financial aid, it is in fact opposition to access to the medicine and healthcare facilities, something that puts the people's lives into danger, the expert explained.

Benefitting from the IMF aids is a right granted to the member countries since the establishment of the fund, Dr. Lavasani said, adding, "In many cases, for example in the case of Greece, the international fund has proved that it could come to help rapidly."

"Besides its financial aids, IMF also provides technical assistance to the countries in need. Such assistance is in fact some consultation aid that this fund provides for the members facing crisis", according to the expert. **→4**

Iran ranks third worldwide in coronavirus research projects

TEHRAN — Iranian researchers have so far conducted over 1,200 projects related to coronavirus, ranking the country third in terms of scientific findings on coronavirus in the world, deputy health minister Reza Malekzadeh has said.

Since coronavirus outbreak, all researchers joined hands to conduct a very significant research activity, so that, 1,200 research projects have been underway over the past month and a half, ISNA quoted Malekzadeh as saying on Friday.

By implementing research and development

projects on coronavirus, we will offer excellent scientific products shortly on the international scale, he added.

He went on to explain that most of the coronavirus research currently being conducted in the country is interventional schemes, and 35 schemes are finding effective treatments for COVID-19.

"In the technology sector, we have been able to support knowledge-based companies financially through the Innovation and Prosperity Fund, as well as the Ministry of Health," he highlighted, stating, Iran was one of the first countries to

produce the serology kits, and is capable of exporting it to other countries as well.

The pandemic used a large portion of the country's energy, budget and health care facilities, and medical centers have faced many economic problems, so that the government needs to support the health sector, in particular, he concluded.

The Iranian health ministry on Friday announced that the total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus has reached 95,646 of whom 6,091 have died and 76,318 (equaling 72 percent), have recovered.



©ISNA / Haniyeh Mojtahed

Coronavirus: teachers adapting to online classes

Teachers all around the country continue working with their students through distance learning and holding online classes amid the coronavirus outbreak.

As a result of rising concerns over the spread of coronavirus, schools were closed and this is an alternative way to bridge the gap in the learning process.

Meanwhile, Amoozesh (Education) channel of the state TV broadcast programs on a daily basis for students and this trend will continue even after the situation is back to normal.

Ex-WH official: It looks strange that U.S. can argue it is JCPOA party

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Professor Frank N. von Hippel, former assistant director for national security in the White House Office of Science and Technology, tells the Tehran Times that "it looks strange to me that the U.S. can cite the fact that it was a party to the JCPOA as a basis for

this initiative."

The comments by von Hippel comes as Mike Pompeo is arguing that the U.S. is a participant to the JCPOA and presented a draft resolution to some UN Security Council members to extend arms embargo against Iran which ends in October based on the JCPOA. **→2**

Mauro Berruto: Olympics medal achievable for Iran

By Masoud Hossein

TEHRAN — Ex-Italy volleyball coach Mauro Berruto believes that Iran National Team have a chance of winning an Olympic Games medal depending on how they prepare for the Games.

Born in Turin, Berruto graduated in philosophy and started his career in volley with CUS Torino Pallavolo in 1994 and was named Italy coach in 2010. A

year later, he achieved the silver medal in the European Championship. Under his leadership, Italy defeated Bulgaria to gain the bronze medal in the 2012 Olympic Games at London.

At the World League 2013 his team achieved bronze, while in the same year he led the Italian team to the second consecutive silver medal in the European Championships. **→11**

Coronavirus: Qazvin reopens historical bazaar as lockdown eases

TEHRAN — The historical bazaar of Sa'd-al Saltaneh, which is located in the city of Qazvin, west-central Iran, has recently been reopened as lockdown measures are relaxed in the country.

The 19th-century bazaar was reopened to the public on Wednesday, IRNA reported.

The country closed cultural heritage museums and historical sites in a preventive measure amid fears of coronavirus

outbreak back in February.

The bazaar is located adjacent to a beautifully restored Qajar-era caravanserai of the same name. The marketplace sales exquisitely crafted wares such as traditional personal ornaments, paintings, ceramics, carpets and potteries across its long, vaulted passageways and arcades. It also houses various galleries, workshops as well as coffee shops and restaurants, where visitors hangout. **→8**



ARTICLE

Mohammad Jafari
Tehran Times journalist

U.S.-Taliban fragile pact plus weak political leadership in Kabul to push Afghanistan towards fresh nightmare

It is obvious that the recently signed agreement between the United States and Taliban as well as the current political leaders in Kabul are not capable of bringing an end to the Afghans' decades-long problems, making the war-hit country's people feel afraid of upcoming days of more instability and insecurity.

Ronald E. Neumann, a former U.S. ambassador to Algeria, Bahrain and Afghanistan, explained in his article published by The Hill that how disastrous will be the situation in Afghanistan in future as the United State's agreement with Taliban was not a comprehensive peace deal and the political standoff in Kabul has been deteriorated.

"Peace negotiations are stalled. Taliban attacks are increasing. COVID-19 is spreading in Afghanistan. And Afghanistan's leaders are spending their time feuding over power and the division of ministerial spoils. The Afghan and America people deserve better. How did we get here, and what needs to be done?" Neumann stated.

America's agreement with the Taliban is not a peace agreement but, rather, an agreement for the withdrawal of American forces. Hope remains that this agreement could lead to the start of real peace negotiations — but even if they start, the road to peace will be long. The difficult U.S. negotiations contained a serious slip at the end. The agreement states that the Afghan government will release 5,000 Taliban prisoners in return for the release of 1,000. However, the Afghan government had agreed only to "best efforts" toward such a release. Moving from a pledge to work on the issue to a firm U.S. commitment appears to have lacked Afghan government consent and to have surprised Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. Since the prisoners are one of the few cards Ghani holds to leverage Taliban negotiations, it is not surprising that he refused. **→7**

Iran censures Germany for blacklisting Hezbollah

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** – Iran’s Foreign Ministry has strongly condemned the German government’s action in blacklisting the Lebanese Hezbollah, saying the move is in line with objectives of the Zionist regime of Israel and the United States.

“The German government’s decision disrespects the Lebanese government and people, because Hezbollah is an official and legitimate part of the country’s government and parliament and has always been an effective political party in stabilizing the country and is being supported by the Lebanese and regional people,” said Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi in a statement on Thursday.

He noted that certain European countries take decisions without considering realities in the West Asia region.

Hezbollah has been a strong force against terrorist groups such as Daesh in (ISIS).

Mousavi noted that the German government must be accountable for negative consequences of its decision on the fight against the terrorist groups in the region.

Germany announced on Thursday it has designated the Lebanese political group Hezbollah a terror organization, banning all of its activities in the country and ordering raids on sites police say are linked to the group.

Police told CNN a number of properties in Berlin, Bremen and North Rhine-Westphalia were searched early on Thursday. According to the police and the German Interior Ministry, four mosques and cultural associations were raided, as well as private homes of Hezbollah’s board members, treasurers and tax advisers.

U.S. attempts to present itself as JCPOA participant have no future: Russia

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia’s permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organizations, has said that the United States’ attempts to present itself as a participant to the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA, have no future.

“The US attempts to present itself as ‘JCPOA participant’ have no future. It is like common sense mockery. Those who invented this idea gave a bad advice to US authorities. Cynical approaches must have their own limits in order not to compromise national policy to the worst extent,” he tweeted on Thursday.

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 approved the pact.

Tehran urges U.S. to release Iranian scientist infected with COVID-19

(Press TV) — Iran’s Judiciary has urged the United States to immediately release Sirous Asgari, the Iranian scientist who has contracted the novel coronavirus in a prison in Louisiana.

Asgari, a professor of material sciences at Sharif University of Technology, has remained behind bars in the U.S. despite having been exonerated in a sanctions trial.

The scientist recently contracted the new coronavirus after he repeatedly drew attention to his fragile health and called for his release from the “dirty” and “overcrowded” jail facility, his lawyers told The Guardian.

In comments on Friday, Secretary of the Iranian Judiciary’s High Council for Human Rights said only the immediate release of Dr Asgari can allay concerns about his health.

“We are worried about the health conditions of all Iranians jailed in American prisons; however, the news of the infection of the Iranian thinker ... has added to our concerns,” Ali Baqeri Kani said.

“We are following up his release through relevant authorities, because concerns about his health can only be allayed if he is immediately released,” he noted.

He also pointed to the reports of dire conditions in U.S. prisons and said, “The Iranian scientist’s underlying respiratory illness has made concerns about Dr Asgari’s health even more serious.”

“Therefore, we ask the Iranian Foreign Ministry to expedite its efforts to have him released by using all its political, diplomatic, and legal capacities,” he added.

Asgari has repeatedly pleaded for his release since March, complaining about unsanitary detention conditions and overcrowding at the Louisiana facility, where he is being kept.

Coughing violently and suffering from a fever, Asgari told The Guardian in a phone call that the detention center was even taking in more inmates rather than releasing some as a precaution to stop further spread of the outbreak.

He also said the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) had refused to notify him about his positive test results, adding that he only learned about his infection from his lawyers and family members on Tuesday.

“It makes sense to send me to the hospital as soon as possible. I don’t trust them at all,” the 59-year-old said. “If something happens, they are not fast responders ... I prefer to leave this dirty place.”

Asgari was arrested in the United States in mid-2017. Back then, the FBI alleged the scientist had shared information about a project he had conducted on a sabbatical in the U.S. five years before with his students.

His wife, though, said in an interview in late March that the findings of the project had been published and made available on the Internet afterwards, which means there was nothing secret about the project. U.S. legal authorities then charged him with withholding information in the process of visa application, circumventing the sanctions, and transferring technology to Iran.

France, Germany, and UK should look to bridge the divide at UN as arms embargo on Iran ends in October: ECFR

In a commentary on its website on April 24, the European Council on Foreign Relations has suggest that France, Germany and Britain should tread carefully to save the 2015 Iran nuclear deal as the U.S., which exited the deal in April 2018 and imposed crippling sanctions on Iran, is trying to extend arms embargo against Tehran.

Under the nuclear deal – JCPOA – arms sanctions on Iran ends in October.

Following is the text of the commentary headlined “How Europe can avert a clash over the Iran arms embargo”:

On Saturday 18 April, U.S. secretary of state Mike Pompeo cautioned on Twitter that the “clock is ticking.” He was not referring to the desperately needed Covid-19 vaccine, but rather what in Pompeo’s world seems to be the primary existential threat to the United States: Iran. His countdown relates to Iran’s ability to import and export conventional arms, which is currently blocked by a United Nations embargo. But that embargo will expire in October, less than three weeks before the U.S. elections. The U.S. wants to extend it, and Pompeo has developed a contorted strategy to do so.

France, Germany, and the United Kingdom will have to decide whether to support the U.S. cause or oppose it. Neither option is ideal; either one could have disastrous consequences for the 2015 nuclear deal. The best course may be to let the embargo expire but simultaneously force stringent new conditions on conventional arms transfers.

Following the nuclear agreement reached between world powers and Iran in 2015, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2231. Per the resolution, previous UN restrictions on conventional arms sales to Iran would expire after five years – in October 2020. The end of the embargo is one of the few remaining benefits that Iran can point to under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action after the Trump administration left the deal and reimposed crippling sanctions in May 2018.

France, Germany, and the UK will together have an influence over where discussions lead at the UN Security Council on the issue. As parties to the nuclear deal, these countries have attempted to preserve the agreement, in the hope that Tehran and Washington can find a way back to the negotiating table. If the nuclear agreement can limp along until October, the leaders of these three will need to think carefully about how they manage the conventional arms embargo issue without derailing diplomacy on the more strategically significant nuclear file.

As part of its relentless maximum pressure campaign, the U.S. will no doubt seek to lobby the UN Security Council members to vote in favor of a resolution to extend the arms embargo against Iran. This is especially so after Iran’s successful launch of a military satellite this month, which Pompeo claims violates resolution 2231. The U.S. will face a showdown with Russia and China, which have traditionally protected Iran against such moves at the UN and would be the first countries to benefit from arms exports to Iran. Still,



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Russia and China are not guaranteed vetoes, meaning France and the UK, as veto-holding countries, will hold some sway over the final outcome.

After the uphill struggle to sustain the nuclear deal for almost four years since Donald Trump was elected on a promise to “dismantle the disastrous deal,” it is not in the European security interest to risk blowing up the agreement just days before the U.S. elections.

But either course could put the nuclear agreement at risk. One on hand, siding with the U.S. to keep the arms embargo in place will be seen by Tehran as the last straw. Iranian officials have been explicit that such an outcome would most likely lead to Iran withdrawing from the nuclear agreement and also the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

On the other hand, opposing the U.S. could lead to equally serious consequences. The U.S. is reportedly looking into a highly contested measure under resolution 2231 to unilaterally “snap back” sweeping UN sanctions – ironically, using a mechanism within the nuclear deal despite having already left it. The Trump administration plans to try this legal tactic if its efforts to extend the arms embargo fall short. Snapping back UN sanctions, too, could force Iran to withdraw from the nuclear deal or the NPT.

■ **It is far from clear how eager China and Russia will be to supply Iran with newer weapons**

On its own, the practical impact of lifting the UN conventional arms embargo is likely to be minimal. Moreover, the EU arms embargo on Iran introduced in 2007 remains in place until at least October 2023. After Brexit, the UK will most likely introduce its own restrictions.

It is unrealistic to think Iran will be flooded by new arms purchases given its access to global financial platforms has been cut off by U.S. unilateral sanctions. As the Covid-19 outbreak highlighted, U.S. sanctions have played a large role in blocking Iran’s access to and payment channels for even humanitarian goods that are in theory exempt. So it is unlikely that Iran could purchase a vast quantity of arms from Russia

EU says U.S. no longer a party to nuclear deal

By staff and agency

EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell has said that the United States can no longer be considered as a participating member of the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the JCPOA.

“It’s clear that in the statement by President Trump and the U.S. presidential memorandum of last May (May 218), they announced that he was ending his participation in JCPOA,” he said in an exclusive interview with RFE/RL on Thursday.

“And I also want to recall that the U.S. has not participated in any meetings of activities within the framework of this agreement since then. So it’s quite clear for us that the U.S. are no longer a participating



member in this agreement,” Borrell added.

The U.S. attempts to extend an arms embargo against Iran. The ban on selling conventional weapons to Iran under the Security Council’s Resolution 2231 that blessed the nuclear agreement will be lifted on October 18, 2020.

Iran had warned U.S. to leave its theater: IRGC Navy

POLITICAL

TEHRAN — Rear Admiral Ali Reza Tangsiri, the commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy, has said that Iran had warned the U.S. forces to leave its theater.

“They entered our area while it was announced to them that we wanted to conduct practice in this area. They seek to undermine security by taking such actions. So, we ordered them to leave the area,” he told Tasnim in an interview published on Friday.

He noted that the Iranian forces closely watch all the U.S. moves in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman.

U.S. Navy issued a statement on April 15 claiming that 11 Iranian IRGC boats had closed in on up to six U.S. naval vessels in the Persian Gulf “in dangerous and harassing approaches”.



The IRGC Navy issued a statement on April 19, calling the U.S. claims “fake”, likening them to some “Hollywood” scenarios.

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

Ayatollah Khamenei says flourishing talents is great job of teachers

POLITICAL

TEHRAN — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has said that flourishing talents of the youths in line with Islamic and revolutionary values is great job of teachers.

“The young generation who is educated on this path is a wealth so considera-

ble that no other valuable phenomenon equals it,” he said in a message issued on Friday on the occasion of Teachers’ Day.

He said, “I congratulate all the dear teachers in schools, universities and seminary schools on Teachers’ Day. This remark by Imam Khomeini that teaching is profession of the prophets

was not just a slogan but a statement from Quran.”

In Iran the Teachers’ Day is celebrated on the martyrdom anniversary of Morteza Motahari, a cleric, philosopher, lecturer, and politician who was assassinated on May 1, 1979.

Ayatollah Motahari was a popular

figure in the religious circles of Iran. He served in Tehran University as the head of the Department of Theology and Islamic Teachings. At the time of his assassination he was the president of the Constitutional Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran and a member of the Revolution Council.

Zarif, Hanif Atmar discuss political impasse in Afghanistan

POLITICAL

TEHRAN – Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif held a phone conversation with acting Afghan foreign minister Mohammad Hanif Atmar on Thursday, discussing political impasse in the country.

The officials also exchanged views on fighting the coronavirus and also bilateral relations.

Zarif held a separate phone talks with Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Thursday to discuss the latest developments in Afghanistan.

The Foreign Ministry website reported on Wednesday that Zarif held separate phone conversations with interim president Ashraf Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah to discuss the situation in the country.

Ex-WH official: It looks strange that U.S. can argue it is JCPOA party

I →

Following is the text of the interview with von Hippel: The U.S. is working to extend the issue of Iran’s arms sanction on Iran in the UN Security Council. Given that the U.S. has violated and withdrawn from the JCPOA, can it legally make such a request?

A: I am not a lawyer but it looks strange to me that the U.S. can cite the fact that it was a party to the JCPOA as a basis for this initiative. However, the U.S. is a member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the JCPOA-related

“As I understand the argument, the Trump Administration does not want Iran to buy conventional weapons.”

resolution that is due to expire this year is a UNSC resolution. If a new resolution is required to extend the arms embargo, then Russia or China could veto it. Apparently, the Trump administration is trying to use a part of the JCPOA under which any party could trigger a snapback of the sanctions.

■ The U.S., despite withdrawing from the JCPOA, is set to establish itself as a participant in the JCPOA. Why?

A: As I understand the argument, the Trump administration does not want Iran to buy conventional weapons. The rationale is that Iran would use these weapons to try to expand its area of influence in conflict areas in the Middle East, presumably including Syria, Iraq and Lebanon.

■ Do European countries want to activate the trigger mechanism and take Iran’s case to the UN Security Council?

A: This is the key question. I suppose that France, Germany or the UK, which are still members of the JCPOA, could do so. They probably are not enthusiastic about Iran

or China in ways that would present a high risk to Western countries or their partners in the Middle East.

Moreover, while China and Russia may try to sell low-quality weapons to Iran, it is far from clear how eager they will be to supply it with newer systems. Despite its close security partnership with Russia, Iran has faced hurdles in transferring sophisticated arms. For example, the Russian S-300 missile defence system took nearly a decade to deliver after the transfer was agreed. The S-300 system is not covered by the UN arms embargo, and yet Russia still dragged its feet on delivery. More recently, Moscow reportedly rejected Iran’s request to purchase the upgraded S-400 missile defense system.

Given these realities, European countries should be clear-eyed about the consequences of an expiring UN arms embargo. At the same time, they must dissuade the Trump administration from taking steps that could destroy the nuclear agreement altogether. Instead of getting tangled up in legal arguments over the embargo or snapping back broad sanctions, France, Germany, and the UK should look to bridge the divide at the Security Council.

A sensible option would be to allow the existing UN arms embargo to expire as planned in October. In advance of this, France, Germany, and the UK can formulate a new set of stringent conditions, or codes of conduct, to be agreed to by the UN Security Council for future arms sales to Iran. These will be enforced alongside existing embargos related to the proliferation of arms in the region. The remaining parties to the nuclear deal can present the rationale for these measures as being tied to Iran’s own non-compliance, making clear to Tehran that these restrictions will lift if it comes back into full compliance with the agreement.

Hawks in the U.S. administration are likely to push back. However, if the European countries can bring Russia and China on board, the U.S. may take a more rational course. The Trump administration has been willing to take some rare pragmatic steps on Iran, such as continuing to issue sanctions waivers to allow other countries to cooperate on Iran’s civil nuclear program without penalty. It is worth testing if the same is feasible on this issue, especially if the Trump administration can be presented with a “victory” that is easier and less politically costly than the risky and divisive snapback route.

The UK, France, and Germany should act pre-emptively before October to find a solution at the UN level. There is a risk that if the issue becomes contentious in the run-up to the U.S. elections, both the Trump administration and the Biden campaign will be forced to act hawkishly rather than pragmatically on this issue to appeal to voters. In taking steps to bridge the dispute over the arms embargo against Iran, European countries should protect their strategic interest to contain Iran’s nuclear program while refraining from action that damages the prospects for a much-needed diplomatic track between the U.S. and Iran after November, whether under a Trump or Biden presidency.



buying weapons but, at the same time, they would know that invoking the snapback provision would destroy their hopes to revive the JCPOA if we have a new U.S. President next January.

Netanyahu pushed U.S. to attack Iran with fabricated nuclear documents: investigation

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Iranian nuclear documents presented by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu were an Israeli fabrication designed to trigger U.S. into a war with Iran, according to an investigation.

U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal on May 8, 2018 partly based on Netanyahu's claim that Iran was determined to build nuclear weapons, the investigation said.

In April 2018, Netanyahu claimed publicly that Israel's Mossad spy agency had stolen Iran's entire nuclear archive from Tehran. "You may well know that Iran's leaders repeatedly deny ever pursuing nuclear weapons..." he declared. "Well, tonight, I'm here to tell you one thing: Iran lied. Big time."

However, an investigation of the supposed Iranian nuclear documents by The Grayzone reveals them to be the product of an Israeli disinformation operation that helped trigger the most serious threat of war since the conflict with Iran began nearly four decades ago.

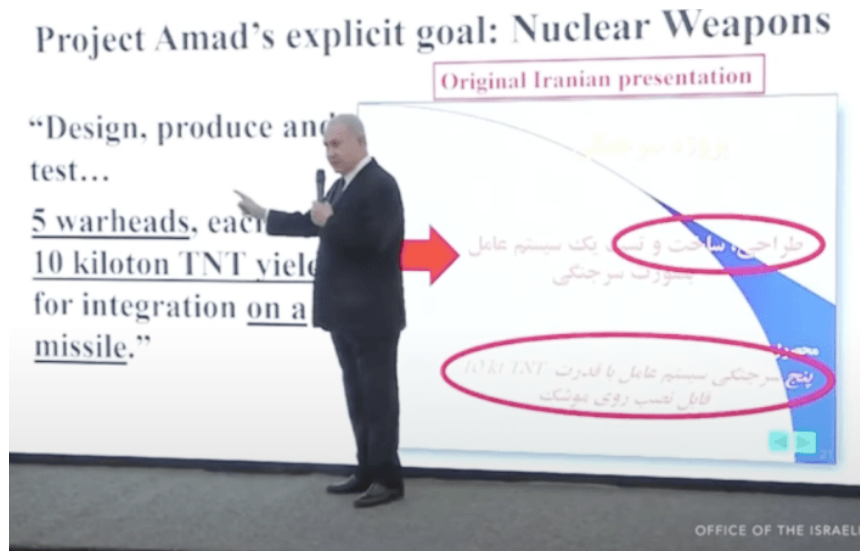
The following is an excerpt of an article published in The Grayzone on Wednesday:

This investigation found multiple indications that the story of Mossad's heist of 50,000 pages of secret nuclear files from Tehran was very likely an elaborate fiction and that the documents were fabricated by the Mossad itself.

According to the official Israeli version of events, the Iranians had gathered the nuclear documents from various locations and moved them to what Netanyahu himself described as "a dilapidated warehouse" in southern Tehran. Even assuming that Iran had secret documents demonstrating the development of nuclear weapons, the claim that top secret documents would be held in a nondescript and unguarded warehouse in central Tehran is so unlikely that it should have raised immediate alarm bells about the story's legitimacy.

Even more problematic was the claim by a Mossad official to Israeli journalist Ronen Bergman that Mossad knew not only in what warehouse its commandos would find the documents but precisely which safes to break into with a blowtorch. The official told Bergman the Mossad team had been guided by an intelligence asset to the few safes in the warehouse contained the binders with the most important documents. Netanyahu bragged publicly that "very few" Iranians knew the location of the archive; the Mossad official told Bergman "only a handful of people" knew.

■ No proof of authenticity
Netanyahu's April 30 slide show presented a series of purported Iranian documents containing sensational revelations that he pointed to as proof of his insistence that Iran had lied about its interest in manufacturing nuclear weapons. The visual aides included a file supposedly dating back to early 2000 or before that



detailed various ways to achieve a plan to build five nuclear weapons by mid-2003. Another document that generated widespread media interest was an alleged report on a discussion among leading Iranian scientists of a purported mid-2003 decision by Iran's defense minister to separate an existing secret nuclear weapons program into overt and covert parts.

Left out of the media coverage of these "nuclear archive" documents was a simple fact that was highly inconvenient to Netanyahu: nothing about them offered a scintilla of evidence that they were genuine. For example, not one contained the official markings of the relevant Iranian agency.

What those documents do have in common is the mark of a rubber stamp for a filing system showing numbers for a "record", a "file" and a "ledger binder" — like the black binders that Netanyahu flashed to the cameras during his slide-show. But these could have easily been created by the Mossad and stamped on to the documents along with the appropriate Persian numbers.

Forensic confirmation of the documents' authenticity would have required access to the original documents. But as Netanyahu noted in his April 30, 2018 slide show, the "original Iranian materials" were kept "in a very safe place" — implying that no one would be allowed to have any such access.

■ Withholding access to outside experts

In fact, even the most pro-Israeli visitors to Tel Aviv have been denied access to the original documents. David Albright of the Institute for Science and International Security and Olli Heinonen of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies — both stalwart defenders of the official Israeli line on Iranian nuclear policy — reported in October 2018 that they had been given only a "slide deck" showing reproductions or excerpts of the documents.

When a team of six specialists from

Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs visited Israel in January 2019 for briefings on the archive, they too were offered only a cursory browse of the supposedly original documents. Harvard Professor Matthew Bunn recalled in an interview with this writer that the team had been shown one of the binders containing what were said to be original documents relating to Iran's relations with the IAEA and had "paged through a bit of it."

But they were shown no documents on Iran nuclear weapons work. As Bunn admitted, "We weren't attempting to do any forensic analysis of these documents."

Typically, it would be the job of the U.S. government and the IAEA to authenticate the documents. Oddly, the Belfer Center delegation reported that the U.S. government and the IAEA had each received only copies of the entire archive, not the original files. And the Israelis were in no hurry to provide the genuine articles: the IAEA did not receive a complete set of documents until November 2019, according to Bunn.

By then, Netanyahu had not only already accomplished the demolition of the Iran nuclear deal; he and Trump's ferociously hawkish CIA-director Mike Pompeo had maneuvered the president into a policy of imminent confrontation with Tehran.

■ The second coming of fake missile drawings

Among the documents Netanyahu flashed on the screen in his April 30, 2018 slide show was a schematic drawing of the missile reentry vehicle of an Iranian Shahab-3 missile, showing what was obviously supposed to represent a nuclear weapon inside.

This drawing was part of a set of eighteen technical drawings of the Shahab-3 reentry vehicle. These were found in a collection of documents secured over the course of several years between the Bush II and Obama administrations by an Iranian spy working for Germany's BND intelligence service. Or so the Israeli

official story went.

In 2013, however, a former senior German Foreign Office official named Karsten Voigt revealed to this writer that the documents had been initially provided to German intelligence by a member of the Mujaheddin E-Khalq (MEK).

The MEK is an exiled Iranian armed opposition organization that had operated under Saddam Hussein's regime as a proxy against Iran during the Iran-Iraq War. It went on to cooperate with the Israeli Mossad beginning in the 1990s, and enjoys a close relationship with Saudi Arabia as well. Today, numerous former U.S. officials are on the MEK's payroll, acting as de facto lobbyists for regime change in Iran.

Voigt recalled how senior BND officials warned him they did not consider the MEK source or the materials he provided to be credible. They were worried that the Bush administration intended to use the dodgy documents to justify an attack on Iran, just as it exploited the tall tales collected from Iraqi defector codenamed "Curveball" to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

The role of the MEK in passing the massive tranche of supposed secret Iranian nuclear documents to the BND and its hand-in-glove relationship with the Mossad leaves little room for doubt that the documents introduced to Western intelligence 2004 were, in fact, created by the Mossad.

For the Mossad, the MEK was a convenient unit for outsourcing negative press about Iran which it did not want attributed directly to Israeli intelligence. To enhance the MEK's credibility in the eyes of foreign media and intelligence agencies, Mossad passed the coordinates of Iran's Natanz nuclear facility to the MEK in 2002. Later, it provided to the MEK personal information such as the passport number and home telephone number of Iranian physics professor Mohsen Fakhri-zadh, whose name appeared in the nuclear documents, according to the co-authors of a best-selling Israeli book on the Mossad's covert operations.

By trotting out the same discredited technical drawing depicting the wrong Iranian missile reentry vehicle — a trick he had previously deployed to create the original case for accusing Iran of covert nuclear weapons development — the Israeli prime minister showed how confident he was in his ability to hoodwink Washington and the Western corporate media.

Netanyahu's multiple levels of deception have been remarkably successful, despite having relied on crude stunts that any diligent news organization should have seen through. Through his manipulation of foreign governments and media, he has been able to maneuver Donald Trump and the United States into a dangerous process of confrontation that has brought the U.S. to the precipice of military conflict with Iran.

Detained by ICE because he is Iranian?

Iranian professor Dr. Siros Asgari, unjustly arrested by the FBI in 2017, has now come down with COVID-19 in ICE custody and is at risk of dying.

Dr. Asgari is 59 years old and has a history of respiratory problems. He is a man who has never committed any crime and has, for years, been asking simply to return to his home in Iran. ICE must immediately release him to a medical facility where he can receive proper for the coronavirus care and then he must be allowed to return home to Iran.



Having received his PhD in 1997 from Drexel University in Pennsylvania, Dr. Asgari teaches at Sharif University of Technology in Iran. In 2017, he came to the U.S. to visit his daughters, but upon arriving, he was arrested by the FBI and charged with violating U.S. sanctions against Iran. After more than two years of legal battles, in November 2019 he was found NOT GUILTY but instead of being freed and allowed to go home to Iran, he has since been held in ICE custody.

Since his detention by ICE began, Dr. Asgari has been transferred to four different facilities. In just the last month, in the midst of the global pandemic, he was put on nine different flights before ending up at the Winn Correctional Center, a dirty, crowded facility in Louisiana that in December 2019 received attention when it pepper-sprayed migrants protesting for an end to their prolonged detention. Louisiana is one of the states hardest hit by the coronavirus.

There is an emergency lawsuit underway for Dr. Asgari and 16 other people who are severely at risk from COVID-19 because of medical vulnerabilities, but we are not waiting.

In ICE detention, Professor Asgari has been sharing living space with between 29 and 44 other detainees. They sleep on rusted metal beds in a room so humid that the bedsheets are constantly wet. There is only one shower, two toilets, and no access to clean clothes. Social distancing is impossible, as is access to the necessary sanitation.

Dr. Asgari has repeatedly raised concerns about ICE bringing new detainees into the close quarters of the facility. After ICE recently brought a new group to his pod, he reported a high fever.

"I can't believe this is happening. It's devastating," said Mehrnosh Yazdanyar, an attorney working with Asgari's family. "Every fear he had has been realized, one by one, ending up with him contracting COVID-19. This is an innocent man who hasn't committed any crimes. He shouldn't be behind bars. Why does the U.S. government continue to keep him in detention?"

ACT NOW. Demand that ICE allow Dr. Asgari to go to a proper medical facility and then to return to his home in Iran. There is no time to waste!

(Source: Codepink)

If Washington starts war, Tehran will decide its end, Rezaee warns

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Secretary of Iran's Expediency Council Mohsen Rezaee has said the Islamic Republic will fire missiles at American bases across the region if the U.S. takes military actions against Iran in the Persian Gulf.

In an interview with Al Jazeera aired on Thursday, Rezaee dismissed as part of a propaganda campaign the U.S. president's recent threat that the U.S. navy will fire at the IRGC boats in the Persian Gulf.



All American military bases across the region are under surveillance, he emphasized, warning the U.S. that if Iran's "national security" is put in jeopardy, those bases will be hit with missiles.

According to Tasnim, Iran will never start a war with the U.S., Rezaee underlined, but made it clear that if Washington wages a war, it will be Tehran which decides when to end it.

He further said that a UN arms embargo on Iran is going to end soon, stressing that after lifting of the embargo, nobody could prevent Iran from purchasing conventional weapons.

The stances adopted by the U.S. and the European Union on the removal of the arms embargo are not binding and Iran will not heed them, secretary of the Expediency Council stressed.

He also criticized certain Arab states for paying ransom to the U.S., saying those countries oppose whatever plan and initiative proposed by Iran and insist on hostility toward the Islamic Republic.

Tehran reaffirms support for Yemen's unity, territorial integrity

Iran's Foreign Ministry slams UK for huge arms exports to Saudi Arabia to pound Yemen

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Tehran has reaffirmed its support for Yemen's unity and territorial integrity, condemning Saudi Arabia for pushing Yemen on the brink of the worst humanitarian crisis, according to the Foreign Ministry website.

In a statement on Wednesday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi pointed to recent developments in southern Yemen, stressing, "On the basis of its principled policy, the Islamic Republic of Iran supports a united Yemen with the territorial integrity of that country being protected."

On the declaration of self-rule in Yemen's south, the Iranian diplomat said, "Such measures not only do not help the settlement of the existing problems in Yemen, but will also further complicate the situation in that country."

Mousavi then emphasized the necessity for a halt to the war on Yemen and lifting of the cruel blockade on Yemeni people, adding, "The only way for stability and calm in Yemen is unity among the Yemeni groups and holding inclusive political talks among various groups for the formation of a united and inclusive government."

The remarks came after the so-called Southern Transitional Council (STC) last week declared a state of emergency



and announced "self-administration rule" in Yemen's southern regions, including the port city of Aden — which has served as the seat of Yemen's former Riyadh-allied government during the Saudi-led war.

The declaration has raised concerns about escalation of tensions in the impoverished country.

Meanwhile, the Campaign Against the Arms Trade, a London-based group aimed at abolishing the international arms trade, has said leading UK arms dealer BAE Systems

has sold Saudi Arabia £15 billion (\$18.7 billion) worth of arms and services as Riyadh continues to wage a crippling war in Yemen now in its fifth year.

It found that the company made £2.5 billion from Saudi Arabia in 2019 alone and £15 billion between 2015 and 2019.

This makes the Saudi government BAE's third-largest client after the U.S. and UK, racking up earnings of £6.5 billion and £3.9 billion in 2019, respectively.

Osamah Alfakih, advocacy and communications director at Mwatana for Human Rights, told Anadolu Agency that UK-made weapons had been used by the Saudi and UAE-led coalition in "unlawful strikes" in Yemen.

Instead of playing a "positive role" in Yemen, the UK is fueling "armed conflict" with arms sales, Alfakih explained.

On Friday, Mousavi slammed the British government for exporting arms to Saudi Arabia, urging the UK to "stand on the rights side of history".

"As the atrocities of the aggression push #Yemen on the brink of the worst humanitarian crisis, coupled w/ COVID19, the British Gvt. has profited from the arms export to the KSA & left the blood of innocent Yemenis on its hands. The UK must stand on the right side of history!" he tweeted.

UAE aware of Iran's military, economic power: expert

'The UAE knows that Trump and Pompeo will one day leave and it's Iran which will remain'

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Director of the Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS) at Georgetown University has said the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is fully aware of Iran's economic and military power.

"The Emirates knows that Trump and Pompeo will one day leave [office] and it's Iran which will remain," said Mehran Kamrava in an interview with IRNA published on Friday.

The strength of Iran's economy, military

and human resources is not something the UAE would ignore, Kamrava said.

He further said Iran has been trying to reduce the tensions with regional countries, especially the Persian Gulf countries.

"Tehran, while trying to strengthen and deepen its relations with countries such as Oman and Qatar which have friendly relations with Iran, is trying to improve its relations with the UAE and Kuwait and reduce tensions with Riyadh," he remarked.



Opposition to IMF’s financial aid for Iran, an indication of U.S. unilateralism: expert

➔ “And under the coronavirus outbreak crisis, Iran is also in need of such assistance. The country’s economy is definitely hit by the pandemic and Iran requires some consultation aids both under the current condition and also after the pandemic is contained. So, the need for help is not just about now, while it’s important that what will happen to the countries in post-corona time”, she concluded.

Dr. Lavasani also suggested that while the IMF’s response to Iran’s request has not still come, Iran can ask for a loan from the countries that supply financial resources for the IMF. It is somehow an indirect aid from the fund.

ICCIMA calls for trilateral co-op among govt., employers, workers

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) pointed to bilaterally principle- trilateral communication and cooperation among the government, employers and workers- as an important solution for passing through the current economic hardships.



Workers, employers and the government must work together while each placed in their own roles to move towards the ultimate goal [economic development], Gholam-Hossein Shafe’i said in a statement on the occasion of the International Workers Day.

Labor day, also known as Workers’ Day or Labor Day is a celebration of laborers and the working classes that is promoted by the international labor movement which occurs every year on May Day (1 May), an ancient European spring festival.

Stocks fall further after Trump’s China tariff threat

World stocks pulled back further on Friday on grim U.S. economic data, mixed company results and President Donald Trump’s threat to impose new tariffs on China over the coronavirus crisis.

MSCI’s index of global stocks fell 0.5% after a tumble late Thursday broke a six-day winning streak for the index.

London-listed stocks fell as data showed the UK housing market was grinding to a halt, with the FTSE 100 down 2.2%, wiping out much of the strong gains earlier in the week.

British Airways operator IAG shed another 2.6% as details of its plans to cut staffing, including a quarter of its pilots, to weather the collapse in air travel caused by the coronavirus.

Trading volumes were thin with many European markets closed for a May 1 public holiday.

In Asia, with many markets closed, the benchmark Nikkei index fell 2.8%, with declines led by chip making firms. Australian shares fell 5%, their most in five weeks.

The negative sentiment was set by comments from Trump on Thursday that he was concerned about China’s role in the origin and spread of the novel coronavirus and that his hard-fought trade deal with China was now of secondary importance to the pandemic.



He threatened new tariffs on Beijing, as his administration crafted retaliatory measures over the outbreak.

Meanwhile, U.S. initial jobless claims totaled 3.84 million for the week ended April 25 and personal spending tumbled 7.5% in March, the biggest decline on record. All that came a day after figures showed the biggest quarterly contraction for the U.S. economy since the Great Recession.

The U.S. Federal Reserve widened a key program to help the economy, agreeing to lend to even larger firms, bringing the dollar under some selling pressure. The currency, which has so far been remarkably resilient, fell to two-week lows and is set for a 2% weekly loss. It has steadied somewhat this morning, however.

The dollar was down slightly against the Japanese yen, trading at 107.07 yen, though another metric of distress in the markets — the Australian dollar — fell by 1% to 0.6447, its weakest since Tuesday.

Oil prices rose, helped by major producers starting output cuts to offset a slump in fuel demand and by data showing U.S. crude inventories expanded less than expected.

Brent crude for July delivery, was up 22 cents, or 0.8%, at \$26.70 a barrel, after rising about 11% in April. It has still slumped around 60% this year. U.S. crude for June delivery rose 34 cents, or 1.8%, to \$19.18 a barrel. But U.S. oil fell for a fourth month in April and is down 70% this year.

(Source: Reuters)

SP Phase 11 development plan starts

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The wellhead jacket of South Pars gas field’s phase 11 of development was loaded from the yard of Naft Sazeh Qeshm (NSQ) on Thursday to be shipped toward its offshore designated spot in the Persian Gulf.

Loading the mentioned structure, development of phase 11 was started, Shana reported.

According to Hamidreza Masoudi, the managing director of Petropars Company, which is in charge of developing the phase, the installation of the 2,200-ton jacket will be completed by mid-June and drilling operations of the phase are expected to be started immediately.

As reported, once operational, the platform will drill 15 offshore wells in phase 11 of the massive gas field.

Masoudi expressed hope that the phase is going to become operational in the next Iranian calendar year 1400 (starts on March 2021).



The official noted that the operations are progressing based on schedules and Petropars is working on the project with

complete determination.

Petropars is developing the project after its partners, Total and CNPCI, pulled out of

the project due to the U.S. sanctions.

The project aims to generate 2 billion cubic feet of rich gas, and transfer it to existing South Pars refineries and use the refinery’s processing capacity.

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

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

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

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

TPO holds meeting to discuss new protocols for trade with Turkey



ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) hosted a meeting to explore new health and transportation protocols for trade with Turkey, the TPO portal reported.

According to TPO office of public relations, the meeting was attended by the organization’s head, Hamid Zadboum, along with representatives of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), Iran-Turkey Joint Economic Committee, as well as the ministries of health; transport and urban development; and foreign affairs.

The attendees discussed the implementation of health and transportation protocols for the facilitation of trade between Iran and Turkey and a joint decision was reached at the end.

It was stressed at the meeting that due to the impact of the coronavirus on the global trade, including bilateral trade between Iran and Turkey, it is essential that trade flows between the two countries continue across official borders while maintaining health supervision.

According to the TPO Asia-Pacific Office, rail transport between Iran and Turkey is currently ongoing, with 150 to 180 freight wagons crossing the Razi (Khoi) border daily.

The two sides have also begun negotiations to improve road transport and lifting restrictions for trucks under new health protocols.

Turkey was the major trade partner of Iran, after China and Iraq, in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19).

Uzbekistan lifts transit restrictions on Iranian trucks



ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The spokesman of Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced that Uzbekistan has lifted transit restrictions imposed on Iranian trucks due to the coronavirus concerns, ILNA reported.

“According to the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Tashkent, the transit restrictions for Iranian trucks in Uzbekistan have been lifted,” Rouhollah Latifi said on Thursday.

According to the official, the decision was made by the Uzbekistan Crisis Committee, based on which the transportation restrictions for Iran, Afghanistan, and Italy were lifted provided that strict observance of health standards be applied.

The maximum stay for foreign trucks in Uzbekistan for transit, export and import procedures is set to be 10 days, and drivers must leave the country before the end of this period, Latifi explained.

Turkmenistan closed its borders to all countries, both neighbors and non-neighbors, due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Coronavirus is affecting almost all countries and territories around the world. The virus was first reported in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year.

Iran and Uzbekistan have historical and cultural commonalities and hold many common stances with regard to regional and international issues.

Iran exports 10,000 tons of eggs in a month

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran exported 10,000 tons of eggs to the neighboring countries during the first month of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-April 19), Reza Torkashvand, the head of Producers of Egg-Laying Hens Union, said.

According to the official, the country’s aviculture farms are expected to export up to 80,000 tons of eggs in the current year (ends on March 20, 2021).

Iranian eggs are currently exported to Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, and Qatar, Torkashvand said.

Last year, nearly 1.1 million tons of eggs were produced in



the country, of which more than 41,000 tons were exported to target countries.

A total of 900,000 tons of eggs were produced in the preceding year of 1397 (ended on March 20, 2019), 90 percent of which were by industrial units and the rest by local farmers.

According to the Deputy Agriculture Minister Morteza Rezaei, Iran is the 10th biggest egg producer in the world and fifth in Asia.

Each Iranian person consumes an average of 200 eggs annually.

China exports outlook dims as U.S. and EU economies tank in first quarter of 2020

New economic data released by the United States and the European Union this week underscored the challenge facing China’s millions of exporters due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on its major trading partners.

The economies of both the U.S. and the European Union contracted in the first quarter, with the downturns expected to deepen in the second quarter.

This is already creating a huge demand shock for Chinese exporters, testing Beijing’s policy response to the unprecedented crisis, especially when it is expected to set an annual growth target at the meeting of the National People’s Congress on May 22.

The U.S. economy contracted at an annualized rate of 4.8 percent in the first quarter, according to U.S. government data released Wednesday. The U.S. has slipped to the third largest destination for Chinese exports after the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and the European Union, largely due to the impact of the trade war which began in July 2018.

The European Union economy shrank by 2.7 percent in the first quarter compared to a year earlier, according to Eurostat data released on Thursday.

Both the U.S. and European Union bought about one-third of China’s total export last year, respectively, despite Beijing’s ongoing efforts to diversify its foreign trading partners. U.S.-bound shipments from China plunged

25.2 percent in the first quarter compared to the year-earlier period, including a 20.8 percent fall in March. Sales to the EU dropped by 16 percent in the first three months.

Falling orders from developed countries are serving as a second wave demand shock even though China — the world’s top exporter, accounting for nearly 13 percent of the global total — has tried to resume production following the end of its coronavirus lockdown.

The pandemic is set to send global merchandise trade tumbling by at least 13 percent this year, and as much of 32 percent, the World Trade Organization predicted earlier this month.

Yu Chunhai, deputy dean of Renmin University’s school of economics, said the large declines in the European and American economies showed a global recession was drawing near.

“The major developed countries are showing inward-looking policymaking to fight the pandemic, all suggesting a far bigger blow to Chinese exporters than the first quarter decline,” he said. “China probably needs economic growth of more than 4 percent this year, mainly through a boost in domestic demand, to defend the bottom line of employment and so people’s livelihoods.”

China International Capital Corp (CICC), a leading investment bank, estimated that the U.S. economy could shrink by 28 percent in the second quarter as it struggles to balance pandemic controls with rebooting the economy.

“The market is worrying about the pace

of lockdown removal in Europe and the US and whether there will be a second outbreak,” CICC economists Zhang Mengyun and Yi Huan wrote in a research note.

Shrinking export orders are already putting great pressure on manufacturers in China, many of which have started to lay off workers.

The official manufacturing purchasing managers’ index (PMI) released on Thursday morning showed that export orders contracted at a faster rate in April, falling to 33.5 from 46.4 in March. The employment subindex slipped to 50.2 from 50.9 — still showing new hiring but at a slower pace.

CICC estimated that the decline in Chinese exports could accelerate to 20 percent in April from 6.6 percent in March, as its global activity tracker plunged more than 60 percent in the latest month.

TS Lombard, a London-based economic research house, sees the decline at 40 percent, while Japanese bank Nomura is bang in the middle, forecasting a 30 percent plunge.

“Weaker U.S. and EU growth in the second quarter will exert huge downward pressure on Chinese exports, considering major economies largely chose strict isolation and quarantine measures,” CICC economist Huan wrote on Thursday.

Beijing has taken a variety of steps to reduce corporate burdens, including cutting taxes, social security contributions, financing costs and rents. In the latest push to stabilize the trade sector, the 25-member Politburo has



now encouraged exporters try to sell their products domestically.

However, the official PMI showed that the current level of domestic orders would not absorb those initially bound for export. The survey’s outstanding orders subindex declined by 2.7 points to 43.6, showing orders in hand declined at a faster pace in April.

“It will take some time for orders to come back,” statistics bureau official Zhao Qinghe said on Thursday.

Zhang Jun, chief economist at Morgan Stanley Huaxin Securities, believed authorities should focus on helping exporters to save as many jobs as it can.

“Even if the virus was contained and developed economies started to reboot from May, there could be a third round of shocks as emerging markets could also be ripped,” he warned. “Given the uncertainties concerning the pandemic development, China needs to expand domestic demand by accelerating both new and traditional infrastructure projects.”

(Source: South China Morning Post)

Water projects inaugurated in western province

ENERGY TEHRAN — Some water projects were inaugurated in Ilam Province in the west of Iran on Thursday during a ceremony held via video conference and attended by President Hassan Rouhani and Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian.

Addressing the ceremony, Ardakanian said Energy Ministry has implemented 301,000 hectares of irrigation and drainage networks since President Hassan Rouhani took office in August 2017, the portal of Energy Ministry (known as Paven) reported.

The minister also said for every two

hectares of the mentioned networks, a direct job has been created for one person.

According to Ardakanian, the ministry has it on the agenda to bring 2.86 million hectares of land in the downstream of the country's dams under irrigation systems.

"The number has now reached 2.4 million, and it is hoped that by the Iranian calendar year of 1406 (begins on March 2027) all the mentioned networks would be implemented," he added.

Following a program called "A-B-Iran", the Iranian Energy Ministry is going to inaugurate 250 major water and electricity



projects worth 500 trillion rials (about \$11.9 billion) in several provinces across the country during the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2021).

■ Rouhani calls for private sector involvement in energy projects

During the inauguration ceremony, President Rouhani called on the Energy Ministry to pave the way for the private

sector to get more involved in the country's energy projects.

"We are now desalinating the seawater and bringing it to this region; the industrial sector itself is investing", Rouhani said.

It is important that the Energy Ministry directs the private sector into its projects where it is possible and when the government does not have the resources, Rouhani stressed.

As OPEC+ oil cuts go into force, Russia could make or break the deal

The OPEC+ supply accord goes into effect Friday, and Russia's performance could well determine whether it succeeds in speeding the oil market's recovery from the coronavirus crisis.

The deal calls for the 23-country OPEC+ alliance to cut an unprecedented 9.7 million bpd of crude production over May and June, tapering down to 7.7 million bpd for the rest of 2020 and then 5.8 million bpd for all of 2021 through the first quarter of 2022.

Given the precedent in previous OPEC+ agreements, compliance by Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf allies with their production quotas does not appear in doubt, and indeed they have signaled in the past week that they have already begun ramping down their output.

Russia, however, faces serious skepticism over its willingness to play ball, having consistently flouted its cuts in the past. Its quota is 8.5 million bpd, the same as Saudi Arabia's, which will require it to slash some 2 million bpd — or about one-fifth — of its recent crude production.

"Moscow has failed to deliver on pledged output cuts since the start of the OPEC+ alliance more than three years ago," Stephen Brennock, an analyst with brokerage PVM Oil Associates, said. "Put simply, Russia has turned cheating with quotas into an art form."

■ Massive blow

Failure to comply would undermine the OPEC+ alliance's ability to counteract the massive blow to global oil demand caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Saudi Arabia, which has papared over previous lackluster discipline by its OPEC+ counterparts by massively overcomplying with its quota, will likely want to see evidence of good conduct first before it might agree to similar deeper cuts, analysts say.

"The more Russia cuts, the more Saudi will cut and the more the rest of OPEC will respect quotas," Paul Sankey, managing director of Mizuho Securities, said.

The rhetoric so far from Russia indicates a more earnest effort this time.

Russian energy minister Alexander Novak said Wednesday that the country will lower its output 19 percent in May



compared to February's level.

Russia reported crude and condensate production of about 11.3 million bpd that month, so a 19 percent cut would come out to 9.15 million bpd. Subtracting out the condensate would put it close to its crude quota.

"The current parameters of the agreement fully meet Russia's interests from the point of view of the impact on the Russian economy and budget," Novak said at a governmental meeting earlier this month. "The heads of Russian oil companies fully support the parameters of the new deal and noted that the market today needs decisive measures to achieve balance."

Saudi energy minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, who has not been above naming and shaming countries that have violated their quotas, told reporters after the deal was signed that he will be keeping an eye on production figures.

"By June we will know who performed and who did not perform," he said.

■ Iraq struggling

Beyond Russia, Iraq, another serial quota buster, has had a difficult time selling the deal domestically, putting its commitment in doubt.

Once internal consumption, the Kurdistan Regional Government's share of production, and payments to international oil companies are factored in, its quota of 3.75 million bpd would leave about 1.75 million bpd to

generate revenues for the federal government, according to S&P Global Platts calculations. At current oil prices, 2020 revenues would come in less than a quarter of 2019 levels, squeezing an already strained budget.

Several members of parliament have objected to Iraq's agreed production cut, saying oil minister Thamir al-Ghadhban, as a member of a caretaker government, did not have the authority to commit the country to the OPEC+ deal.

Meanwhile, in Nigeria, yet another member that has consistently flouted its quota, oil officials have soberly acknowledged that lack of demand for its crude along with inadequate storage capacity means it will be forced to reduce its output involuntarily, never mind the OPEC+ deal.

State-owned Nigerian National Petroleum Corp. has slashed its May official selling prices to try and clear its glut of unsold crude, while also sharply cutting its June loadings.

■ When 100 percent isn't enough

Even with 100 percent compliance, OPEC+ is in for an uphill battle to lift prices. Officials have said they are banking on involuntary cuts by producers outside the group, along with purchases of oil for various countries' strategic petroleum reserves coordinated by the International Energy Agency, to take some 7 million bpd of supply off the market on top of the OPEC+ cuts.

That is still insufficient to offset the 20 million bpd or more of demand destruction wrought by the pandemic this quarter that many analysts project.

S&P Global Platts Analytics estimates that the market has seen about 2.1 million bpd of economically induced production losses — nowhere near the level needed to prevent crude storage tanks from overflowing in the next few weeks.

"Despite the forthcoming OPEC+ production cuts, more production needs to be cut, particularly in the US and Canada," Chris Midgley, S&P Global Platts' head of analytics, said. "Lower prices are still needed in the coming month or two to force supply to close the 15 million to 20 million bpd gap in balances."

(Source: Platts)

A breakthrough approaches for solar power

One of the few parts of the UK economy to have a good April was solar power.

The Met Office says it has probably been the sunniest April on record and the solar power industry reported its highest ever production of electricity (9.68GW) in the UK at 12:30 on Monday 20 April.

With 16 solar panels on his roof Brian McCallion, from Northern Ireland, has been one of those benefitting from the good weather.

"We have had them for about five years, and we save about £1,000 per year," says Mr McCallion, who lives in Strabane, just by the border.

"If they were more efficient we could save more," he says, "and maybe invest in batteries to store it."

That efficiency might be coming. There is a worldwide race, from San Francisco to Shenzhen, to make a more efficient solar cell.

Today's average commercial solar panel converts 17-19 percent of the light energy hitting it to electricity. This is up from 12 percent just 10 years ago. But what if we could boost this to 30 percent?

More efficient solar cells mean we could get much more than today's 2.4 percent of global electricity supply from the sun.

Solar is already the world's fastest growing energy technology. Ten years ago, there were only 20 gigawatts of installed solar capacity globally - one gigawatt being roughly the output of a single large power station. For context, New York City, with 8.4 million people uses about 12 gigawatt-hours of electricity a day.

By the end of last year, the world's installed solar power had jumped to about 600 gigawatts.

Even with the disruption caused by Covid-19, we will probably add 105 gigawatts of solar capacity worldwide this year, forecasts London-based research company, IHS Markit.

Most solar cells are made from wafer-thin slices of silicon crystals, 70 percent of which are made in China and Taiwan.

But wafer-based crystalline silicon is bumping pretty close to its theoretical maximum efficiency.



The Shockley-Queisser limit marks the maximum efficiency for a solar cell made from just one material, and for silicon this is about 32 percent.

However, combining six different materials into what is called a multi-junction cell can push efficiency as high as 47 percent.

Another way to break through this limit, is to use lenses to magnify the sunlight falling on the solar cell, an approach called concentrated solar.

But this is an expensive way to produce electricity, and is mainly useful on satellites.

"Not anything you would see on anybody's roof in the next decade," laughs Nancy Haegel, director of materials science at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Boulder, Colorado.

The fastest improving solar technology is called perovskites - named after Count Lev Alekseevich von Perovski, a 19th Century Russian mineralogist.

These have a particular crystal structure that is good for solar absorption. Thin films, around 300 nanometers (much thinner than a human hair) can be made inexpensively from solutions - allowing them to be easily applied as a coating to buildings, cars or even clothing.

Perovskites also work better than silicon at lower lighting intensities, on cloudy days or for indoors.

You can print them using an inkjet printer, says Konrad Wojciechowski, scientific director at Saule Technologies, based in Oxford and Warsaw. "Paint on a substrate, and you have a photovoltaic device," he says.

With such a cheap, flexible, and efficient material, you could apply it to street furniture to power free smartphone charging, public wifi, and air quality sensors, he explains.

He's been working with the Swedish construction firm Skanska to apply perovskite layers in building panels.

According to Max Hoerantner, co-founder of Swift Solar, a San Francisco start-up, there are only about 10 start-up firms in the world working on perovskite technology.

Oxford PV, a university spin-off, says it reached 28 percent efficiency with a commercial perovskite-based solar cell in late 2018, and will have an annual 250-megawatt production line running this year.

Both Oxford PV and Swift Solar make tandem solar cells - these are silicon panels which also have a thin perovskite film layer.

Since they're made from two materials, they get to break through the Shockley-Queisser limit.

The silicon absorbs the red band of the visible light spectrum, and the perovskite the blue bit, giving the tandem bigger efficiency than either material alone.

One challenge is when "you work with a material that's only been around since 2012, it's very hard to show it will last for 25 years," says Hoerantner.

Insolight, a Swiss startup, has taken a different tack - embedding a grid of hexagonal lenses in a solar panel's protective glass, thus concentrating light 200 times.

To follow the sun's motion, the cell array shifts horizontally by a few millimeters throughout the day. It is a bid to make concentrated solar cheap.

"The architecture of these conventional concentrated photovoltaic is very costly. What we've done is miniaturize the sun tracking mechanism and integrate it within the module," says Insolight's chief business officer David Schuppisser.

"We've done it in a cheaper way [that] you can deploy anywhere you can deploy a conventional solar panel," he says.

The Universidad Politécnica de Madrid's solar energy institute measured Insolight's current model as having an efficiency of 29 percent. It is now working on a module that is hoped to reach 32 percent efficiency.

Current silicon technology is not quite dead, though, and there are approaches to make tiny, quick wins in efficiency. One is to add an extra layer to a cell's back to reflect unabsorbed light back through it a second time. This improves efficiency by 1-2 percent.

Another is to add an outside layer, which lessens losses that occur where silicon touches the metal contacts. It's only a "small tweak", says Xiaojing Sun, a solar analyst Wood Mackenzie research - adding 0.5-1 percent in efficiency - but she says these changes mean manufacturers only need to make small alterations to their production lines.

From such small gains - to the use of concentrated solar and perovskites - solar tech is in a race to raise efficiency and push down costs.

"Spanning this magical number 30 percent, this is where the solar cell industry could really make a very big difference," says Swift Solar's Max Hoerantner.

(Source: BBC)

U.S. oil producers race to cut output as prices fall, storage fills

U.S. oil producers and refiners are starting to adapt to the massive shock caused by lockdowns imposed to contain the coronavirus, according to the latest weekly government data.

Producers are racing to cut output before the remaining storage space at tank farms and offshore becomes full, with tumbling wellhead prices forcing a brutal pace of adjustment (tmsnr.rs/2KOfMM8).

Total stocks of crude oil and petroleum products, excluding the strategic petroleum reserve, climbed by another 10 million barrels last week and have now risen by a total of 120 million barrels over the last six weeks.

But last week's inventory increase was much smaller than in any of the four previous weeks (26 million, 27 million, 33 million and 21 million barrels respectively) which suggests the margin of oversupply is shrinking.

Crude stocks rose by 9 million barrels last week, but again the increase was much smaller than in the four previous weeks (15 million, 19 million, 15 million and 14 million barrels respectively).

Crude storage around the country is now 61% full, but with capacity to store up to another 255 million barrels, according to estimates from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

■ Fuel demand

On the consumption side, the sudden slump in fuel use has bottomed out, and demand seems to have risen slightly last week, from very depressed levels earlier in April.

The total volume of petroleum products supplied to the domestic market averaged 15.8 million barrels per day (bpd) last week, the highest for four weeks, though still far below the 21.5 million bpd in mid-March.



Gasoline supplied to the domestic market averaged 5.9 million bpd last week, the highest for four weeks, but still far below the 9.7 million bpd in mid-March when U.S. lockdowns started to taking a sledgehammer to consumption.

Gasoline stocks fell by 4 million barrels last week, the first decline for five weeks, but distillate stocks continued to swell for the fourth week in a row, rising by another 5 million barrels.

■ Output falls

Perhaps the most important change is on the production side, where there are preliminary indications domestic crude producers have already cut output by as much as 1 million bpd.

Domestic crude output averaged 12.1 million bpd last week, down from 13.1 million bpd in the middle of March, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration ("Weekly Petroleum Status Report", EIA, April 29).

Domestic production numbers contained in the Weekly Petroleum Status Report are estimates and will eventually be superseded by authoritative data from industry surveys in the Petroleum Supply Monthly.

But the EIA's weekly estimates have proved to be a useful advance indicator for both the direction and magnitude of changes in domestic crude production.

Domestic production is likely falling as a result of reduced drilling and completions for new wells, natural decline rates from old wells and discontinued production from thousands of high-cost and/or low-output wells.

■ Stripper wells

Oil wells producing less than 100 bpd accounted for 2.9 million bpd in 2018, more than a quarter of U.S. output. Wells producing less than 15 bpd accounted for 0.8 million bpd, or almost 8% of U.S. output.

There were more than 400,000 wells producing less than 100 bpd and 275,000 producing less than 15 bpd ("The Distribution of U.S. Oil and Natural Gas Wells by Production Rate", EIA, Dec. 20, 2019).

Many of these "stripper" wells, so called because they strip the last barrels of oil from a field, are at the end of their life-cycle and vulnerable to a downturn in prices.

They require expensive electric pumps to lift the oil because there is little or no natural reservoir pressure left to bring crude to the surface. And they produce a lot of contaminated water which must be disposed of safely.

With benchmark futures prices below \$20 per barrel, and the prices actually paid to producers by pipeline companies and merchants at the wellhead even lower, many of these low-output high-cost wells are no longer economic.

In combination with fewer rigs and competition crews working on new wells, alongside natural decline rates from existing wells, the temporary or permanent closure of stripper wells should start to cut production significantly.

The EIA weekly estimates will be revised in the weeks ahead as more complete data become available. But they are the first sign the adaptation may have started.

(Source: Reuters)

Kazakhstan includes some giant oilfields in output cut

Kazakhstan is reducing production at certain giant, large and medium-sized oilfields to comply with the global output cut deal, the Central Asian nation's energy ministry said on Friday.

It did not name any particular fields. Kazakhstan's three giant fields, Tengiz, Kashagan and Karachaganak, are operated by groups of global energy majors. Kazakhstan has pledged to cut its output by 390,000 barrels per day in May and June.

Sources told Reuters this week Kazakhstan was close to a deal with the operators of Tengiz and Kashagan to reduce production by 22 percent from May, the first time those ventures would be involved in such an output cut.

The ministry said in a statement on Friday it used "non-discriminatory approach to all producers... taking into account the fair distribution of output reduction quotas between both large projects and mature oilfields whose output is in natural decline."

(Source: Reuters)

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

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

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U.S.-Taliban fragile pact plus weak political leadership in Kabul to push Afghanistan towards fresh nightmare

➔ Although some prisoners are being released — but not those the Taliban most want — the dispute has given the Taliban a pretext to refuse to start negotiations. The U.S. is left having to press our ally for more concessions and implore the Taliban to start talks. This may yet work. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, having made commendable progress to get this far, is working to get the negotiations going. But getting to actual peace remains a long way away. Even to get to this point, the U.S. had to give up its long-sought goal of having the Taliban agree to break ties with al Qaeda. Instead, we have only a paper promise that the Taliban will not let any movement organize attacks against America or its allies from Afghanistan — a weak promise at best.

The Taliban are continuing the war. As two recent reports by the Afghan Analysts Network have documented, after a week of lowered attacks during the so-called reduction in violence period, Taliban attacks have steadily increased. U.S. and NATO airstrikes have responded to some of the Taliban attacks and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper have insisted that troop withdrawal beyond the first phase is “conditional” and could be halted. But the conditions have not been spelled out in public, so America’s resolve is unclear. And the Taliban continue to attack.

Taliban attacks, propaganda that proclaims they are winning, and their demand for more prisoner releases all suggest that



the Taliban feel no urgency about serious negotiations. They may yet get serious if they believe they cannot win militarily — but that, in turn, depends on both the clarity of American purpose and the strength of the Afghan government in Kabul. And strength in Kabul is conspicuously lacking. While America has made many mistakes in Afghanistan, the current political crisis is an Afghan problem.

President Ghani and his chief rival, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, took power in 2014 in the National Unity Government. Neither really liked the arrangement but each promised electoral reform to ensure a better future. Years of squabbling, reinforced by parlia-

mentary maneuvering, were far more about trying to weigh the process in favor of one side or the other than about real reform. The parliamentary elections of 2018 had somewhat reduced fraud but were an administrative disaster. The long postponed presidential elections on Sept. 28, 2019, led to more squabbling and disputed votes.

The Afghan constitution requires a runoff if no candidate wins over 50 percent of the votes. President Ghani claimed victory with 50.64 percent of the vote. This tally, which Abdullah disputes, is far less than a clear mandate in an election with the lowest voter turnout, estimated at between 20 and 25 percent of registered voters, of any Afghan

election to date.

The result is a continued political standoff. Ghani and Abdullah both have declared victory while negotiating a solution for weeks. The outline of a settlement — Abdullah heading peace negotiations and getting 40 percent of the ministries — seems agreed to in principle but there is a stand-off over the details. When they do reach agreement, it is likely to be no more than a pause before the squabbles resume as each side tries to undercut the other.

Nothing that is in contention is about policy or the good of Afghanistan. The argument between the two leaders, urged on by hungry supporters who want a piece of the spoils, is about power. Meanwhile, governance is in doubt and the country is beleaguered on every side.

Late in February, the U.S. and Taliban negotiators signed a historic agreement in Qatar that was supposed to end 19 years of war in Afghanistan and allow President Donald Trump to begin the promised withdrawal of American troops.

The four-page pact spells out a timetable for the United States to withdraw its 13,000 troops from Afghanistan; in exchange, the Taliban agreed to sever its ties with al-Qaida, the terrorist group that launched the 9/11 attacks against the U.S.

The agreement was supposed to set the stage for further negotiations between Afghanistan’s government and the Taliban, a militant group that once ruled Afghanistan.

Drug cartels plotting to gain more dominance in the coronavirus-hit world!

Big drug cartels, which have been somehow key players in various fields of economy and politics worldwide in the current and previous centuries, have now rolled up their sleeves to take even more power-sharing as the world nations are engaged in fight against COVID-19 pandemic.

Nicola Morfini, a senior lecturer in the department of Politics and Sociology at IPADE Business School in Mexico City, has warned in his article published by Al Jazeera that the Latin America’s established drug cartels are to turn the novel coronavirus-based crisis into an opportunity to broaden their dominance over more percentage of the global economy and politics.

“The year 2020 has been terrible for people across the world, but it has been particularly bad for Latin America. The ongoing COVID-19 crisis caused further suffering in a region already plagued by political uncertainty, corruption, and violence. The pandemic, coupled with sudden slumps in oil prices, significant regional currencies, and imports from China and the United States, created a perfect storm which devastated both the general population and the private sector,” he explained.

However, it is not just the legal businesses that are feeling the heat. The pandemic has hit the illegal drug trade, too. But rather than allowing their industry to collapse, the drug cartels will likely do what they do best: adapt.

In Mexico, the biggest drug hub in the Americas, we know that some of the most influential drug cartels are already experiencing problems in their supply chains. The Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion, for example, is struggling to maintain its routes in the Pacific Ocean. The Union Tepito, meanwhile, is having similar problems in the Gulf of Mexico. This is due to the reduction of air and naval traffic, which makes it easier for the authorities to track illegal cargo. On top of this, the COVID-19 lockdown measures implemented in the U.S. are hindering the cartels’ ability to move drugs over the U.S.-Mexico border.

The crisis is harming not only international drug traffickers but also other sectors of the narco economy. As state-imposed lockdowns force people to stay at home, the cartels will soon find themselves unable to stage kidnappings for ransom. Meanwhile, the fact that most businesses are shut will mean they will not be able to make much money from extortion. Furthermore, the declining oil and gas prices and the tanking economy will make petrol



smuggling, another important income source for the cartels, significantly less profitable.

The question at this point is how drug cartels will react to this situation, and how will this affect the already sky-high levels of criminal violence in the region.

Big Mexican cartels, such as Jalisco Nueva Generacion, have the financial capacity to withstand this crisis, so they are unlikely to increase violence, at least in the short term. At the moment, they are even distributing humanitarian aid packages to struggling civilians in an effort to increase their political capital.

The situation, however, is different for smaller criminal groups, with fewer resources, who depend mostly on extortion for their survival. These gangs, which do not have the necessary capital to peacefully ride out the crisis, might shift to other activities, such as cattle theft or looting of small companies, and could become more violent as they try to make up for their lost income.

If the crisis endures over a long period, causing food shortages and healthcare crises, criminal gangs can also exploit the population’s collective frustration and fan the flames of unrest for their own benefit. As they occasionally did in the past, they can orchestrate mob assaults on large private companies in order to force these companies to seek their protection and pay for it.

There are also concerns that the cartels will shift their focus to the medical market, and start producing and smuggling medicines that are used in the treatment of COVID-19 in an effort to turn crisis into opportunity. However, once again, the cartels’ ability to tap into the medical market depends a lot on their individual power and size.

Stronger cartels, with better laboratories and technical skills, will be able to infiltrate the medical market, but smaller ones will not be able to produce complex drugs and will instead try to survive by adopting more primitive and violent strategies.

Although it is impossible to foresee if the combination of a health crisis and an economic downturn will lead to an immediate increase in generalized violence, it is clear that if this situation continues, it will substantially shift the existing balance between the cartels, creating brand-new criminal geographies and business models.

Today, a significant portion of Mexican cartels’ revenue comes from the U.S. methamphetamine market, which is estimated to have an annual retail value of approximately \$5bn. In the last five years, Mexican cartels have increasingly upped the production of synthetic drugs and trafficking to the US to keep up with the increased demand across the border.

Mexican cartels import ephedrine and benzyl methyl ketone (BMK) - precursors of crystal meth - from China, transform it into methamphetamine on Mexican soil, and then ship the drug to the U.S. The coronavirus lockdown in China, however, has caused Chinese companies to operate at 50 percent capacity, severely affecting the cartels’ ability to import the chemicals they need to produce meth. This has led to an unprecedented increase in meth prices. As prices skyrocket, Mexican and U.S. meth users will likely look for substitutes.

Crystal meth can be substituted with crack cocaine, which comes from Colombia. Due to this shift, the logistics of the drug supply chain in South America will play a fundamental role in sustaining Mexican

cartels during the current crisis.

In South America, the global lockdown is unlikely to affect the consolidated drug routes between Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia. The borders of these countries are largely covered by jungle and are extremely porous. Drug couriers and laboratories should be able to continue with business as usual. In the short term, the cartels will easily preserve their routes and providers in South America, as these organizations are well-armed and well-equipped. However, in the long run, cash shortages might compromise the capacity of these cartels to maintain control over their territories and foot soldiers.

Drug trafficking in Venezuela is also unlikely to stop anytime soon. The country is a huge drug hub, annually shipping an estimated 250 metric tons of cocaine to North America. The already struggling Venezuelan regime is currently crumbling due to increased pressure from the U.S., as well as the drop in oil prices caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

As the drug supply chain in South America is unlikely to be disrupted by the COVID-19 lockdowns, in the face of the ongoing crisis, the future of the drug market in the Americas will depend on the capacity of the Mexican cartels to deliver the product across the northern border, and the demand of drugs in the U.S.

The next few months will be crucial for the entire illegal drug industry in Latin America. While small criminal groups are likely to increase their violent activities to survive, there is also a chance that established cartels will use the crisis as an opportunity to attack and annihilate smaller competitors, causing a further increase in violence.

Meanwhile, the increasing difficulty in obtaining chemicals from China may encourage Latin American cartels to create new synthetic drugs using replacement materials, which could result in new social and health risks for populations and the emergence of new trafficking routes and providers. Additionally, the likely decrease in the consumption of various illicit substances due to the coronavirus pandemic might push the cartels to infiltrate new sectors. Should this occur, governments and security forces would have a hard time preventing the cartels from taking over the medical market.

The drug cartels will not miss a chance to profit from this crisis. However, there is still time for regional governments to take action. The extensive use of intelligence services is necessary now to predict and prevent the emergence of new criminal enterprises in the future.

How to maintain peace in Persian Gulf region

➔ Other categories of regional security approaches that have a broader view of security include the three general approaches of “shared security”, “comprehensive or all-encompassing security”, and “cooperation-based security.” This category has a broad view of security, and non-governmental actors are targeted by the security authorities and on the other hand, security is not purely military.

The model pursued by the Arab Gulf states is based on a realistic approach to security, which is a narrow interpretation of it.

In this model, the Arab states of the Persian Gulf are focused on “external balancing” and mainly have security agreements with countries such as the United States, France, Britain, and Turkey, and have recognized NATO’s presence on the basis of the “Istanbul Cooperation Initiative”.

Needless to say, the plan relies on foreign powers on the one hand and military and government-centered understanding of security on the other. That is, while arms purchases provide advanced military equipment to these countries, they misunderstand the concept of real security that should protect people.



In other words, when the military expenditures of these countries are compared with the level of their economic and political development, we see a kind of imbalance. This issue is noted in the United Nations Human Development Report on Arab countries.

Based on this, it can be seen that regional security campaigns, do not protect people and just provide artificial stability by providing security for the ruling elites.

Meanwhile, Iran has presented various security plans. The “Regional Dialogue Forum” and the “Non-Aggression Pact” are among the security plans for the Persian Gulf region, which have been elaborated in detail by the government of Hassan Rouhani and the Iranian Foreign Minister Dr. Zarif.

Following these plans, Iran presented the “Hormuz Peace Endeavour (HOPE)” to the United Nations, which has theoretically distanced itself from the idealism of past plans and has moved towards a kind of realism based on regional relations.

Iran has repeatedly stated that regional security should only be provided by regional countries and that extra-regional powers should leave the region, however, The Islamic Republic defines a mechanism for this issue based on the “Hormuz Peace Endeavour (HOPE).”

It should be noted that security plans should take into account the realities and concerns of all countries, and there should be a serious effort to make them operational.

Therefore, relying on projects that do not include the interests of all the regional countries is purely useless and will increase mistrust.

Although the Hormuz Peace Endeavour (HOPE) is based on regional reality, it has not yet been accepted by key actors in the region, including Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council.

In contrast, countries such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates have increased insecurity in the region by participating in the U.S.-European coalition. This complexity further serves the interests of extra-regional powers, and the countries of the region will not benefit from it in the long run.

Accordingly, Iran has always stated that foreign countries should leave the region, and the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran announced on Wednesday that “the United States should know this Gulf is called the Persian Gulf and not the Gulf of New York or Washington.”

How the regional countries can withdraw from military and security agreements with foreign powers when they mistrust each other? The answer is that they should create an atmosphere of mutual trust in the region and do not consider one other as a threat.

■ But what is the mechanism for this?

The Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) model, proposed before the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), could be a good model.

In fact, the 1975 Helsinki Accords led to the formation of the Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and later the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The Helsinki Accord was the beginning of a process in which NATO members and Warsaw, along with neutral European countries, could sit together without preconditions and discuss their security concerns.

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe is based on principles such as respect for sovereignty, avoiding the use of force, respect for borders and territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes and avoiding interference in the internal affairs of other countries. It allowed members to sit around a table and discuss security concerns and find the necessary solutions.

If we want to adopt the CSCE model, we need to hold a number of meetings in which all the parties can discuss their security issues as well as their solutions.

Finally, some measures must be taken in order to build trust between the members such as holding meetings or establishing organizations to find solutions for the regional disputes. Ultimately, when mutual trust is built, a mechanism can be used to sign arms control agreements. This will fundamentally help the security and stability of the region.

The result of this action can be a temporary process or a permanent organization that has specific agendas and there is frequent contact between the members.

Members of this security framework must first ensure that issues are not resolved through war and that they must not interfere in each other’s internal affairs. The security framework should be based on the “Security Complex” model proposed by Barry Buzan, which focuses solely on the security of the Persian Gulf and members will not apply it for other security issues.

Following this mechanism could, in the long run, put an end to the presence of foreign countries in the regional security and defeat projects such as Iranophobia that aims at plundering the region’s resources. Mutual perception of threats and a common approach to how to deal with them is one of the main prerequisites for this mechanism.

Pakistani parliament’s speaker tests positive for COVID-19

The speaker of Pakistan’s National Assembly said that he had tested positive for COVID-19, after hosting an Iftar dinner to celebrate Ramadan, and meeting Prime Minister Imran Khan and other high officials earlier in the week.

It is not immediately known if Khan will be tested, but he was checked in April, and tested negative, after meeting with the head of Pakistan’s biggest charity organization, who was subsequently confirmed to have caught the disease.

Faisal Edhi had met Khan in the prime minister’s office.

The National Assembly, the lower house of parliament, is currently in recess, though opposition parties have been calling for

it to convene to discuss the government’s handling of the coronavirus outbreak in the country, where the number of cases has risen to 16,817, including 385 deaths.

The decision on whether to convene rested with Speaker of the Assembly, Asad Qaiser, who on Thursday night revealed he had tested positive in the capital, Islamabad.

“I have quarantined myself at home,” Qaiser, who is also a close aide to Khan, said on Twitter. Qaiser met with the prime minister on Monday, and has met several other leading figures during the past few days.

The speaker had hosted an Iftar, the evening meal to break fast during

Ramadan, attended by politicians and dignitaries on Monday.

Daily detection of the virus has hit record highs on each of the last three days as the country ramps up its testing. On Thursday, 990 people tested positive. Daily testing is still around 8,000 in the country, which has over 207 million people.

The government says infections are well below projections and that it plans to further ease precautionary curbs after already opening dozens of industries and commercial activities, as well as mosque congregations.

Qaiser is the second high official to be infected in Pakistan after the Governor of the southern province of Sindh, Imran

Ismail, tested positive on Monday.

Pakistan’s government agreed to allow mosque congregations after senior clerics and religious leaders threatened to violate restrictions during Ramadan.

The two sides worked out safety protocols for the mosque gatherings, but a social research organization earlier this week reported that protocols were not being followed.

Prominent doctors pleaded with the government to reconsider the decision, warning that mosque congregations, which are typically larger in Ramadan, could lead to a spike in infections, with hospitals already nearing capacity.

(Source: Reuters)

Coronavirus: Qazvin reopens historical bazaar as lockdown eases

➔ 1 Once the capital of the Persian Empire under Sa-favids from 1548-98, Qazvin is currently a major tourist destination with wonderfully restored historical sites, some quirky museums and a handful of decent eating options. Famed for carpets and seedless grapes.



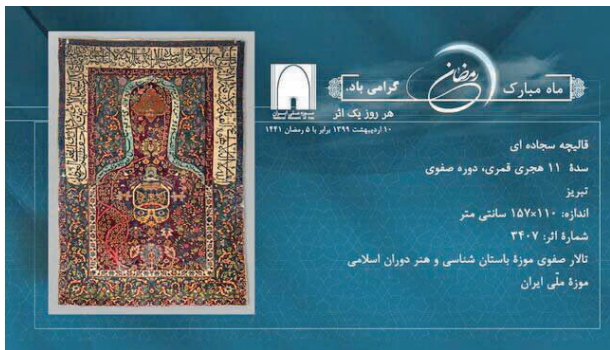
Walking along the narrow, labyrinthine alleys of a bazaar yields a unique opportunity to listen to the stories behind this Iranian heritage. From another point of view, bazaars are also synonyms of foods, with their unmissable colorful stalls of vegetables, herbs, and spices. Yet, most of these ingredients might be mysterious to a foreign eye.

People watching and even mingling with them in a bazaar 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.

Iran's national museum unveils Safavid-era prayer rug

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — The National Museum of Iran unveiled a priceless Safavid-era (1501–1736) prayer rug on Wednesday.

The rug was a part of the dowry of one of the daughters of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, who ruled Iran from 1848 to 1896 when he was assassinated.



The hand-woven altar design rug, is decorated with plant motifs and some verses of holy Quran on its sides.

The rug, 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 treasures during the holy month of Ramadan.

Earlier last month, it unveiled a manuscript of Persian poet Sadi's major work Gulistan from the Qajar era (1789–1925) as well as a manuscript of the 29th juz (part) of a Samanid-era (819–999 CE) holy Quran.

Iran is a rich country for its cultural heritage

By Paolo Patricians

(Part 1/3)

Iran is a rich country for its cultural heritage, and splendid landscapes, ancient traditions and new customs. Democracy and theocracy reign in tandem. Everything must be given a second look during the journey to discover the most amazing and fascinating land I have ever visited.

The Iran we see in the media is not Iran. Western media has made theirs culture threatening, without ever showing the human and kind side, hospitality and spontaneity.



I found the sincere, curious and kind-hearted people. They still observe small courtesies and social subtleties that refer to a bygone era.

The list of cities to visit includes Tehran, Isfahan, Yazd, Shiraz e Tabriz along with less visited places in the Persian Gulf, the border between Iran and Iraq where some of the battles between the two countries took place and where the Iranians go on pilgrimage to commemorate and pay their respect to the martyrs who fell in the war.

There is so much to see in Tehran: museums that they guard ancient treasures, galleries with avant-garde art, royal palaces from past eras, parks and cafés around Tajrish Square, the beating heart of the city at night.

The Persians have a saying about the city of Isfahan - "Esfahan nesf-e-jahan" - which translates to "Isfahan is half the world". The city experienced its most flourishing period as the capital of the empire Safavid in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

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

'Gateway of the Slaves': a millennia-old mudbrick town in southern Iran

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — Thanks to the shifting of sand dunes, foundations of forgotten buildings and relics across the globe are uncovered time after time.

One of such historical gems is Dahane-ye Gholaman, or, according to German scholar of Persian and Elamite studies Walther Hinz, "Gateway of the Slaves."

The archeological site, which was discovered in 1960 by Umberto Scerrato of the Italian archeological mission, is situated on a terrace at the foot of the desert plateau that surrounds the Hamun-e Helmand basin, near an artificial corridor that serves as the entrance into the basin and for which the site is named.

The site is located some two km straight south of the village of Qal'a-ye Now ("New fortress") ca. 30 km southeast of Zabol in Sistan-Baluchestan province.

That this vast depression, though scoured by wind and choked with sand, was formerly fertile and inhabited is clear from traces of villages and agricultural works discovered in 1964.

According to the Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies, the excavations, directed by Scerrato, were begun in 1962 and continued to the end of 1966 under the sponsorship of the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO). They revealed an urban settlement of considerable proportions, certainly far more extensive than the architectural remains that have been uncovered. It is a unique survival from the Achaemenid period and is notable not only for its size but also for its internal differentiation by function, reflected in the presence of large public buildings and an extensive residential area.

It is thus by far the most significant example of a provincial capital located at a distance from the imperial center. The other Achaemenid settlement of the region, which is located in the eastern, Afghan part of the province and was excavated by Roman Ghirshman, did not share the same characteristics, though the comparative study of the ceramics from the two sites does reveal some obvious similarities.

The dimensions of the inhabited area that have been uncovered are noteworthy: a length of 1.5 km from east to west and a width of 300-800 m. Archeological investigations have revealed that the city was established according to a generally unified plan and also have made it possible to identify at least two principal phases of construction. The excavated buildings, constructed of mud brick and pisé on a flat terrace below the desert floor, are distinguished by an absence of stratigraphy.

The entire complex suggests an urban foundation laid out according to a well-defined plan and literally built in the wilderness, inhabited for a brief period (a century or a century and a half), and then abandoned as a result of the natural forces that have always determined the survival and migration of urban settlements in the arid regions of Sistan: the instability of the delta and the inevitable resulting shifts in the system of irrigation channels, the sometimes disastrous



flooding of the Helmand, and the salinization of the soil.

In particular, some minor fluctuations of the deltaic system are attested from the beginning of the sub-Atlantic phase (ca. 500 BC): "[T]he water input must have been reduced and channeled through the actual delta, possibly one of the reasons why the Achaemenian settlement of Dahane-ye Gholaman was abandoned."

The residential quarter, which seems to have extended over about 100 ha, is divided into two parts by a spur of the terrace. On the western side the buildings are aligned along an ancient canal, the course of which can still be traced; it must have intersected another canal running north-south, dividing the eastern part of the town.

On the south at the eastern end of the excavated area, not far from the artificial corridor for which the site is named, stands a sort of massive natural tower called Qabr-e Zardosht ("Tomb of Zoroaster"), with a rectangular room hollowed out of its interior, now lacking its southern side.

The Persian word "Gholam" translates to "slave". Also, "Dahane-ye" means "a strait" so that, according to narratives, the town was called Dahane-ye Gholaman because of being in the vicinity of a natural strait of the same name where slave traders imported African slaves.

A combination of excavation and surface survey permitted recovery of the plans of seven large structures, each with a large central courtyard, sometimes with porticoes, as well as several residential quarters in which the standard plan was that of a closed quadrangle without courtyard but with a corridor around a central square or circular structure in which there were several additional small rooms.

Dahane-ye Gholaman, was in all probability the capital founded by the Persians when they first settled in the region of Hamun-e Helmand: the Zarin of the earliest Achaemenid period.

As for the importance of Dahane-ye Gholaman for the history of Achaemenid Persia, it can be said that it is the sole large provincial capital surviving from the empire and that excavations there have brought to light a combination of "imperial" elements, identified in the public buildings, and local elements, noticeable especially in the valuable documentation of domestic architecture.

Together these elements, both unique and distinctive, ensure the fundamental importance of the site for understanding the origins and

evolution of urban settlement on the Persian plateau in the Achaemenid period.

Recovered archaeological records and evidence, including residential, public, and administrative-religious structures, indicate pre-planned and intense urbanization. Unfortunately, the pottery from Dahane-ye Gholaman has not been paid the attention it is due, even though pottery from the site has been studied.

The studies show that innovation and demands on the pottery industry created local types of beakers, jars, jugs, and bowls and so on. Research on the pottery characteristics shows that the potters of this site were skilled in controlling the kiln temperature and were able to produce high quality wares, while various forms were commonly in use at the site.

■ Why Dahane-ye Gholaman?

As mentioned before, the Persian word "Gholam" translates to "slave". Also, "Dahane-ye" means "a strait" so that, according to narratives, the town was called Dahane-ye Gholaman because of being in the vicinity of a natural strait of the same name where slave traders imported African slaves.

■ What is the best time to go?

Sistan-Baluchestan province has typically a hot and dry climate. The best time to visit the Dahane-ye Gholaman in terms of weather is from late February until late April, and late October until early December. During this period the weather is quite mild, with an average temperature of around 21 degrees Celsius. In these months the temperature does not exceed 24 °C.

Iran raises annual tourism budget by 39%

TOURISM **TEHRAN**— Iran's national budget bill proposed for the current fiscal year (started March 20), has allocated 15.326 trillion rials (about \$360 million at the official dollar rate of 42,000 rials) to the tourism sector, an increase of 39 percent year on year.

The budget for expanding infrastructures and facilities has been increased by 63 percent to reach 885 billion rials (about \$21 million). CHTN quoted tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan as saying on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, the budget for promoting handicrafts and creating jobs has jumped to 200 billion rials (about \$4.7 million), showing 41 percent rise year on year.

The country plans to develop the travel industry as a strong alternative for petrodollars despite falling oil prices and tough U.S. sanctions against the national economy.

Last December, President Hassan Rouhani submitted the administration's draft of the national budget bill for the year 1399 to the Majlis. The proposed budget amounted to about 1.988 quadrillion rials (about \$473.5 billion), with a 14-percent



rise from the last year's approved budget.

Iran expects to reap a bonanza from its numerous tourist spots, including 24 ones placed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, the Islamic Republic is expecting to increase the number of tourism arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million by 2025.

The 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).

East Azarbaijan historical tomb, mosques being restored

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — Historical sites of Pir-e Khamush Tomb, Jameh Mosque of Marand and Pibala or Bazaar Mosque in Marand county, northwestern East Azarbaijan province, are under restoration, provincial tourism chief has said.

The restoration projects are scheduled to be completed by the end of the current Iranian calendar year 1399, which ends on March 20, 2021, Ahmad Hamzeadeh said on Thursday, CHTN reported.

Pir-e Khamush Tomb dates back to Seljuq era (1037–1194). Seljuq, also spelled, Seljuq, was a ruling military family of the Oguz (Ghuzz) Turkic tribes that invaded southwestern Asia in the 11th century and eventually founded an empire that included Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, and most of Iran. Their advance marked the beginning of Turkish power in the Middle East.

Jameh Mosque of Marand is estimated to date back to the Ilkhanate times (1256–1335/1353). Hulegu, a grandson of Genghis Khan, was given the task of capturing Iran by the paramount Mongol chieftain Mongke. Hulegu



set out in about 1253 with a Mongol army of about 130,000. He founded the Il-Khanid dynasty in 1256, and by 1258 he had captured Baghdad and all of Iran. The Il-Khans consolidated their position in Iran and reunited the region as a political and territorial entity after several centuries of fragmented rule by petty dynasties.

Pibala or Bazaar Mosque was built during the Qajar period (1789–1925). Local people believe that it is built on the tomb of the wife of Prophet Noah (AS).

Qajar-era public bathhouse undergoes urgent restoration

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — Qajar-era (1789–1925) Khajegan public bathhouse in Semirom, central Isfahan province, underwent urgent restoration, provincial tourism chief Saied Soleimanian said on Thursday, CHTN reported.

The restoration project aimed to repair and strengthen bathhouse's ceiling and walls, which were damaged by recent heavy rains, he added.

Located in south of Isfahan province, the small city of Semirom dates back to 700 BC. It is full of natural sights including waterfalls, caves and springs as well as historical sites such as Khanali Watermill, Jame Mosque of Semirom and early Islamic era cemetery.

Bathhouses or 'hammams' in Iran were not only places for bathing and cleaning up. They had a social concept for people who gathered at these places weekly.

It was a place where people talked with each other about their daily life, and shared humors and news. There are still bathhouses in Iranian cities but they do not have their social function anymore since most people have bathrooms in their homes due to modern lifestyle.

Persian literature is full of proverbs, narrations and folk stories about bathhouses, which indicate the importance of the place in past time. Bathhouses were also known as a gathering place for women, to meet with each other and chat for long hours.



Some \$4.7m allotted to counter desert locust outbreak

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — A total budget of 200 billion rials (nearly \$4.7 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) has been allocated to fight desert locust swarms in southern parts of the country, head of Disaster Management Organization, has stated.

Following the influx of locusts into southern parts of the country and the damage brought to the agricultural and horticultural sectors, Disaster Management Organization recently proposed the allocation of funds to deal with these pests, Esmail Najjar stated.

The budget has been approved by the Planning and Budget Organization, so it will soon be provided to the related organizations to fight against the locust plague, he explained.

The locust affects the food supply cycle by causing damage to agriculture and horticulture, for this reason, it is important to prevent their invasion and to control the situation in the southern regions of the country, which are most affected by the crisis, he concluded.

Last year, desert locusts penetrated the provinces of Bushehr, Fars, Hormozgan, Kerman, Khuzestan, and Sistan-Baluchestan, which resulted in major losses on over 500,000



hectares of farmlands and gardens.

FAO explains that desert locust infestations are normally present in southeast Iran during the spring. Local breeding coincides with seasonal rains that often occur from about February or March until April or May. In warmer years, rains that occur during the winter can lead to late winter and early spring breeding.

By June, vegetation is usually dry again and any adults that were produced during the spring move east towards the Indo-Pakistan summer breeding areas. Most of the spring breeding occurs along a 450 km stretch of coastal plains on the Arabian Sea from Jask (Hormozgan) and the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman in the west to Chabahar and Gwadar (Sistan-Baluchestan) near the Pakistan border in the east.

The most important area along the coast is the Vashnum Plains near Chabahar. If rains fall and temperatures are warm, breeding may also occur in the interior, namely the Jaz Murian Basin from Kahnij to Iranshahr, and in the Zaboli, Suran, and Saravan valleys that lead to Panjgur, Pakistan. Desert Locust adults rarely cross the mountains to the north of these areas.



WHO representative visits face mask production center in Tehran

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The World Health Organization (WHO) representative to Iran, Christoph Hamelmann, visited a face mask production center in Tehran on Wednesday.

WHO has earlier sent an aircraft carrying tons of medical supplies and test kits along with a medical team to Iran in early March.

Also, it delivered a shipment of emergency medical supplies and medicine to Iran as part of COVID-19 response measures on March 24.

The Iranian health ministry on Friday announced that the total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus has reached 95,646 of whom 6,091 have died and 76,318 (equaling 72 percent), have recovered.



Clean air in Europe during lockdown ‘leads to 11,000 fewer deaths’

The improvement in air quality over the past month of the coronavirus lockdown has led to 11,000 fewer deaths from pollution in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, a study has revealed.

Sharp falls in road traffic and industrial emissions have also resulted in 1.3m fewer days of work absence, 6,000 fewer children developing asthma, 1,900 avoided emergency room visits and 600 fewer preterm births, according to the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

While the pandemic continues to take a terrible toll – more than 220,000 deaths worldwide since the start of the year – the authors of the report say the response has offered a glimpse of the cleaner, healthier environment that is possible if the world shifts away from polluting fossil fuel industries.

Compared with the same period last year, levels of nitrogen dioxide have fallen by 40% while tiny particulate matter – known as PM2.5 – is down 10%, which means that people without Covid-19 can breathe easier. These two forms of pollution, which weaken the heart and res-

piratory system, are together normally responsible for about 470,000 deaths in Europe each year.

The new research estimates how this is likely to have fallen using statistical models that combine data for air quality, weather conditions, emissions, population and disease prevalence.

They found the highest number of avoided pollution deaths in Germany (2,083), followed by the UK (1,752), Italy (1,490), France (1,230) and Spain (1,083). By disease, almost 40% of the fatality reductions were related to heart failure, 17% from lung ailments such as bronchitis and emphysema, and 13% each from strokes and cancer. The others were infections and diabetes.

The overall calculation of 11,000 avoided deaths is the most likely estimate from a series of computer analyses with results ranging as high as 20,000 and as low as 7,000.

Worldwide, the number of avoided pollution deaths will be much higher because this study focuses on one continent and one month, rather than going back to the start of the

global pandemic in Wuhan six months ago. The world's two most populous and polluted nations – China and India – have experienced some of the sharpest falls in air pollution.

The study does not include deaths from coronavirus itself. Scientists believe air pollution increases the malignancy of the disease and some studies suggest the virus can attach to particulate matter, but the researchers behind the latest model said they did not have sufficient data to include this in their models.

The lead author of the analysis, Lauri Myllyvirta, said the fall in air pollution had reduced pressure on health services at an important time and shown how much of a difference air quality improvements can make. But he was wary of framing this as a benefit.

“I am very conflicted about all of this. People are dying. The measures we have been forced to take are causing a lot of economic and other distress, but this is an unprecedented experiment in reducing fossil fuel consumption so of course people working on air pollution are paying attention,” he said.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Camera traps picture Asiatic cheetah, Persian leopards in Semnan

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

“Cameras have recently captured photos of an Asiatic cheetah and three Persian leopards around watering troughs,” he said. All are mature and physically healthy, which is so precious, Abdous further highlighted, Mehr reported on Wednesday. Referring to ten camera traps installed in the area by the environmentalists to determine the exact distribution of the species, he said that Asiatic cheetah and Persian leopard are two invaluable species which are endangered despite being among umbrella and flagship species.

تصویر برداری همزمان از سه پلنگ و یک یوزپلنگ در شاهرود

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

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

مدیرکل محیط زیست استان سمنان گفت: نصب ده دوربین تله‌ای توسط یکی از عکاسان و دوستداران طبیعت در توران همچنین ثبت تصویر یک قلاهد یوزپلنگ آسیایی را نیز به دنبال داشت، تاکید کرد: پویایی جمعیت جانوران وحشی در یک زیست بوم در گرو حفظ گونه‌های شاخص آن زیست بوم به‌خصوص گونه‌های چتر و پرچم است و پلنگ به عنوان گونه چتر و یوزپلنگ به عنوان گونه پرچم در این پارک ملی نقش بسزایی در پویایی جمعیت سایر گونه‌ها به‌خصوص طعمه‌های خود دارند.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-ish”

■ **Meaning:** sort of or similar to

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

PHRASAL VERB

Pick somebody/something out

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

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

IDIOM

Dab hand at something

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

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

Health tips for Ramadan

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, is a month of blessing marked by prayer, fasting, and charity. It is the most sacred month of the year for Muslims. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) has said, “When the month of Ramadan starts, the gates of heaven are opened and the gates of Hell are closed and the devils are chained.”



The holy month of Ramadan started April 27, in Iran, and the world's 1.6 billion Muslims observe it by fasting every day from dawn to sunset.

As Ramadan is falling on hot summer and spring days for some years now long fasting hours may cause difficulties.

However, the Iranian-Islamic traditional medicine has provided us with some useful tips which both help to rid the body from waste material built up in body for several months by giving it a complete break from food and move towards a healthier life.

■ Breaking fast with date and lukewarm water

Due to the effects of fasting on emptying of the digestive tract particularly during long summer days the Iftar meal- when people end their fast at sunset- should not be heavy and filled with foods and drinks. It is better to break the fast with some lukewarm boiled water and dates and then have a light meal 20 to 30 minutes later.

This way the date and the lukewarm water would enter the digestive system and by producing saliva, stomach acid, and digestive juice in the gastrointestinal tract it would prepare us for a proper meal.

■ Timing to start eating

Those who might not be able to wait for 20 to 30 minutes due to great sense of hunger can reduce the time to 10 minutes and those with strong digestive system can start eating right away, though generally many have poor digestive systems and need to wait a little longer.

■ No Zulbia and Bamiyeh

It is strongly recommended to avoid consuming Zulbia and Bamiyeh (traditional deep fried sweets) in any case.

■ Eat lightly

Those who start eating since the sunset right before going to bed might lose appetite for Suhur -the meal consumed early in the morning by Muslims before fasting- which is an important meal and skipping it might cause problems.

■ Wake up early for Suhur

It's better to wake up early for Suhur (an hour or an hour and a half before the call for prayer) so that one would get hungrier and staying up until the true dawn would be great, therefore one would not feel full.

■ Let the body decide

If you do not feel eating right after the sunset (such as people with sanguine temperament) it's fine. Let your body decide the right time to eat.

The digestive tract has been empty for about two-thirds of the day and need to be dealt with cautiously. Besides don't forget to consume adequate amounts of fruits, milk, wheat and its derivatives, rice, and meat.

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Mostar Bridge

(August 22, 2003)

A special ceremony has taken place in the Bosnian town of Mostar to mark the laying of the keystone of the town's famous old bridge. The bridge is listed as a World Heritage site but it was destroyed ten years ago during the Bosnian war. It is costing twenty million dollars to rebuild the bridge and some nearby buildings. This report from Nick Hawton.

As hundreds of people watched from the river-bank, a **crane** slowly lowered the final **stone slab** into place, bringing together the two sides of the single arched bridge - an emotional moment for many of those present.

When the 16th century construction was destroyed by Bosnian Croat forces in November 1993, it seemed to **symbolize** the complete **disintegration** in relations between Bosnia's Muslims, Croats and Serbs and the country's descent into **all-out war**. Mostar itself saw bitter fighting between Muslim and Croat.

Since the war the rebuilding of the 'Stari Most' or 'Old Bridge', has been seen as a **priority**, helping to **demonstrate** how much the country has moved on from those dark days. The bridge's **reconstruction** and that of surrounding buildings is costing around twenty million dollars, money provided by a World Bank **loan** and donations from countries such as Turkey, the Netherlands and Croatia. Work will not be complete until the New Year and it will be spring 2004 before it is finally reopened to the public.

■ Words

crane: large machine that moves heavy things by lifting them into the air

stone slab: a thick, flat piece of stone

symbolize: be thought of as a symbol, represent

disintegration: falling apart, breaking into many small pieces

all-out war: total, complete war

priority: one of the most important things to do

demonstrate: show (quite a formal word)

reconstruction: building up again

loan: amount of money that is borrowed from someone

(Source: BBC)



Every action has a reaction. We have one planet; one .chance

U.S. report slams Saudi Arabia for beoutQ-related piracy acts

Saudi Arabia has been placed on a "Priority Watch List" for the second year running, in a report published by the United States, mostly due to extensive piracy carried out through its beoutQ channel system in the kingdom.

The report, published on Thursday by the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), identifies Saudi Arabia as one of only 10 countries that fail to protect and enforce intellectual property (IP) around the world. Other countries include China, India and Indonesia.

The USTR has also ordered an "Out-of-Cycle Review" into Saudi Arabia and Malaysia.

The review is a USTR tool which allows the government to increase its efforts to try and solve the identified IP issues.

"The United States continues to remain concerned about reportedly high levels of online piracy in Saudi Arabia, particularly through illicit streaming devices (ISDs), which right holders report are widely available and generally unregulated in Saudi Arabia," the report said.

"The United States encourages Saudi Arabia to increase IP enforcement actions and IP awareness campaigns particularly targeted at reducing online piracy and to combat the perception spurred by beoutQ's activity that pirating copyrighted material is permissible."

Qatar-based sport network beIN Media Group, which holds exclusive rights to broadcast international tournaments to the MENA region, has long claimed beoutQ is stealing its signal and broadcasting it as its own.

Last year, FIFA, football's world governing body, said it will take legal action against beoutQ for illegally broadcasting World Cup matches in the Middle East.

The U.S. government report follows only a few months after the European Commission also published a significant report in which it singled out Saudi Arabia for "causing considerable harm to EU businesses" following the unprecedented theft of European sport programmes by Saudi-based beoutQ and Arabsat1.

(Source: al Jazeera)

'Destructive policies': Turkey slams UAE over West Asia, Africa

Turkey's Foreign Ministry accused the United Arab Emirates of pursuing "destructive policies" in northern Africa and the West Asia (Middle East) and called on the Emiratis to abandon what it called a "hostile attitude" towards Ankara.

The comments from Turkey followed a statement from the UAE that called on all Libyan parties to commit to the United Nations-supervised political process to end the war, but also saluted the army led by renegade military commander Khalifa Haftar and rejected Turkish military intervention on behalf of the country's UN-recognized government.

According to al Jazeera, Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Hami Aksoy said the remarks were an attempt by the UAE to "hide their two-faced politics" and said the country was providing aid to "putschists" in Libya.

Turkey backs the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) and has signed a military cooperation agreement to help the fight against Haftar. The government in Ankara has repeatedly urged world powers to stop supporting Haftar's forces, which it deems "putschists."

In its Thursday statement, the Emirati Foreign Ministry said it "commends the Libyan National Army for conducting anti-terror operations," and expressed "its categorical rejection of the Turkish military intervention" in support of the GNA.

The UAE statement did not comment directly on Haftar's declaration on Monday that his army would take power, ripping up a 2015 political agreement that has been the basis for all international peacemaking efforts.

■ 'Hostile stance'

Aksoy said the "ugly" and "baseless" allegations that had been made by the UAE administration were attempts to cover up its own "destructive policies", the Turkish news agency Anadolu reported.

Sources told Al Jazeera on Thursday that several top Emirati officials were on a visit to Sudan's capital, Khartoum, to rally support and recruit fighters for Haftar.

"The UAE's actions disrupting international peace, security and stability not just in Libya, but all the region, including Yemen, Syria and Africa, are well known to the international community," Aksoy said in a statement.

"We call on the UAE leadership to avoid taking a hostile stance against our country and to know its place."

Afghanistan likely facing coronavirus 'health disaster': U.S. watchdog

Afghanistan, beset by a poor healthcare system, malnutrition, war and other vulnerabilities, likely is facing a "health disaster" from the coronavirus, a watchdog report to the U.S. Congress warns.

The report released late on Thursday by Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) John Sopko could heighten concerns among U.S. officials and lawmakers that the pandemic threatens to derail stalled U.S.-led peace efforts.

The spread of COVID-19 already has significantly impacted Afghanistan, the report said, from complicating the peace initiative to forcing border crossing closures that have disrupted commercial and humanitarian deliveries.

"Afghanistan's numerous and, in some cases, unique vulnerabilities - a weak health-care system, widespread malnutrition, porous borders, massive internal displacement, contiguity with Iran, and ongoing conflict - make it likely the country will confront a health disaster in the coming months," the report said.

Rising food prices in the impoverished country likely will worsen the crisis, Sopko said in a letter accompanying the report.

As the pandemic has spread, Washington has pressed the Taliban and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani to free thousands of at-risk militant and government prisoners as a precursor to peace talks originally set to begin on March 10.

Kabul, however, was not a party to a Feb. 29 U.S. troop withdrawal deal between the Taliban and Washington that called for the releases. Differences over the pace and numbers of prisoners to be freed have helped stall the peace effort, which could suffer a major blow if many prisoners were to die.

(Source: Reuters)

Axis of Resistance slams Germany for complying with U.S., Israeli dictates to ban Hezbollah

By staff & agencies

Syria, Iran and Yemen have slammed the German government's decision to designate Hezbollah a "terrorist organization", saying Berlin has complied with the dictates of Washington and Tel Aviv to ban the resistance movement.

"The Syrian Arab Republic condemns Berlin's blacklisting of Hezbollah with utmost vigor," a Syrian Foreign Ministry source told state news agency SANA on Thursday.

The source said the blacklisting was a "medal of honor" which effectively acknowledged Hezbollah's prominent role in countering Zionist and Western plots in the region.

The source said the move clearly demonstrated Germany's submission to "world Zionism" and the country's continued lack of sovereignty and independence ever since the end of World War II.

On Thursday, Germany designated Hezbollah as a "terrorist group" and ordered raids on various mosques and cultural sites allegedly linked to the resistance movement.

Police raided four mosque associations in Dortmund and Muenster in the western state of North Rhine-Westphalia, Bremen and Berlin, along with private homes of alleged Hezbollah members.

Israel and the United States had been pushing Berlin to ban the resistance movement which is credited with helping defeat the most violent Takfiri and other terrorist groups in Syria and driving out Israeli troops from southern Lebanon.

The resistance movement's popularity for shattering Israel's myth of invincibility among the Arab public opinion has worried Israel and the West. Its military engagement in the Syria war has also turned it into a seasoned force, forcing many Western observers to



describe Hezbollah as the most powerful Arab "army".

Last December, Germany's parliament approved a motion urging Chancellor Angela Merkel's government to ban all activities by Hezbollah on German soil.

It came after U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on a trip to Berlin last year that he hoped Germany would follow Britain in banning Hezbollah.

Britain introduced legislation in February of last year that classified Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.

■ 'Germany blindly following destructive U.S., Israeli plots'

Yemen's government and the country's popular Ansarullah resistance movement also condemned the measure as a sign of Berlin's

submission to Washington and Tel Aviv.

"This unjust decision by Germany took place in compliance with U.S. and Israeli dictates targeting the group," Yemen's Information Minister and Government spokesperson Dhaifallah al-Shami said, according to the Saba news agency.

Ansarullah's political bureau published a statement saying that "Germany's decision has fulfilled U.S. and Israeli wishes in normalizing Zionism and opposing the free nations which seek to resist global tyranny and arrogance".

Ansarullah has been battling a five-year Saudi Yemen war, heavily supported by Western states such as Germany. The popular group reiterated its support for Hezbollah and urged Arab and Muslim countries to

reject Berlin's decision.

Germany has long been known for its controversial support for terrorists and oppressive forces in the region, most recently facilitating terrorist presence in foreign-backed terrorism in Syria and Iraq.

It is responsible along with other European states for allowing extremists from across Europe to join Daesh in 2014 with the aim of toppling the Syrian government.

The German government has also been accused of helping the U.S. assassinate Iran's top anti-terror commander General Qasem Soleimani earlier this year.

According to Press TV, Berlin has been a longtime backer of Israel, providing billions of dollars in aid enabling the occupation of Palestine in the name of reparations for Jewish persecution by the Nazi Germany.

Also during the 1980-1988 imposed war against Iran, Germany was among the countries providing Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein with blueprints and material needed to build chemical weapons used indiscriminately against Iranian civilians and troops.

Germany has been a longtime safe haven and supporter of the terrorist Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) which has killed thousands of innocent Iranians.

On Thursday, Israel was effusive in its praise of Germany, with the regime's foreign minister Israel Katz hailing the blacklisting as a "very important decision".

"I call on other European countries as well as the European Union to do the same," Katz said in a statement.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu also welcomed the decision. "All peace-loving countries should reject terrorist organizations and provide them with no direct or indirect assistance," he said.

Chief ICC prosecutor affirms Palestinian statehood, says court can probe Israeli crimes

Chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court Fatou Bensouda has reiterated her position affirming the statehood of Palestine.

The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court Fatou Bensouda has reiterated her position affirming the statehood of Palestine, granting the court's jurisdiction to probe Israeli war crimes against Palestinians.

"The Prosecution has carefully considered the observations of the participants and remains of the view that the Court has jurisdiction over the Occupied Palestinian Territory," Bensouda wrote in a 60-document published on Thursday.

The ICC chief argued in detail in the document that the State of Palestine - an ICC member - fulfills all required criteria to file a criminal case in the court.

The announcement was welcomed later in the day by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

"We trust that the facts of this issue will prevail and that the long-awaited investigation into war crimes committed in the territory of the State of Palestine will soon



be launched," it said in a statement.

Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz, who has been appointed by the Israeli regime to handle the ICC file, disregarded the ruling as being "influenced" by pro-Palestinian groups such as the global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

The document published on Thursday came in response

to so-called amicus curiae (friends of the court) documents submitted to the court by various states, international organizations and experts offering their views on the matter in February.

According to Press TV, Bensouda noted in the document that the submissions offered "a wide variety of perspectives" on the matter, consequently affording "considerable legitimacy to the Court's ultimate decision".

Back on December 19, 2019, Bensouda said in a statement that the court would launch a full investigation into war crimes in the Palestinian territories, as there is a "reasonable basis" to probe into the situation in Palestine.

However, the chief prosecutor asked the ICC Pretrial Chamber to endorse her view. The chamber has yet to pronounce its final decision on the matter and is expected to do so within 120 days.

The Palestinian Authority, which signed up to the ICC in 2015, has already accepted the court's jurisdiction, but has repeatedly urged the court to act faster.

NATO withholds key information on Taliban attacks: U.S. watchdog



The U.S.-led NATO mission in Afghanistan has for the first time refused to publicly release key information about Taliban attacks, a U.S. watchdog has said, potentially making insights into the war harder just as the Pentagon begins withdrawing its troops.

The report released on Friday by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction or SIGAR said U.S. forces have classified all casualty information from Afghan national defense and security forces for the first quarter of 2020.

John F Sopko, who heads the watchdog, wrote that data on the Taliban and other rebel attacks "was one of the last remaining metrics SIGAR was able to use to report publicly on the security situation in Afghanistan".

NATO's Resolute Support (RS) mission previously disclosed data on "enemy-initiated attacks".

Instead, the NATO mission gave only a short statement noting the Taliban stepped up attacks in March, immediately after the signing of a U.S.-Taliban deal that was supposed to pave the way for talks.

"Between March 1 and 31, the Taliban refrained from attacks against coalition forces; however they increased attacks against (Afghan forces) to levels above seasonal norms," the RS said, according to the report.

Under the deal, foreign forces will quit Afghanistan by July 2021 if the Taliban starts negotiations with Kabul and sticks to various security commitments.

In the week before the February 29 deal signing in the Qatari capital Doha, violence plummeted during a partial truce and U.S. officials hoped attacks would stay low.

'Russia ready to sell Iraq S-400 missile systems upon Baghdad request'



Russian Ambassador to Iraq Maksim Maksimov says Moscow is prepared to provide Baghdad with advanced S-400 air defense missile systems once the Arab country makes an official request for the military hardware.

"The Russian side has, thus far, not received an official request in this regard. There is no doubt that recent developments have increased interest in [procurement of] air missile defense systems, especially the S-400 system," Iraq's Arabic-language al-Ahad news agency quoted Maksimov as saying on Thursday.

He noted, "It is too early to set out the details. Therefore, I say that we (Russians) will meet the Iraqis' request once they make such a bid."

The remarks come after the Iraqi parliament's security and defense committee submitted an in-depth study to the

country's caretaker prime minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi earlier this month, requesting the acquisition of the long-range, surface-to-air missile defense system.

"The committee has presented a comprehensive study to the prime minister, demanding approval for the purchase of the advanced S-400 air defense system. The issue has already been discussed with relevant figures at the General Command of Armed Forces, and now awaits the premier's agreement," Badr al-Ziyadi, a member of the committee, told Arabic-language al-Sabaah newspaper on April 18.

According to Press TV, the United States has already warned Iraq of the consequences of extending military cooperation with Russia, and striking deals to purchase advanced weaponry, particularly S-400 missile systems.

Arab League condemns Israeli plan to annex parts of occupied West Bank

The Arab League has vehemently denounced the Israeli regime's plan to annex much of the occupied West Bank, saying such a move amounts to a "new war crime" against the Palestinian nation.

"The implementation of plans to annex any part of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, including the Jordan Valley... and the lands on which Israeli settlements are standing, represents a new war crime... against the Palestinian people," foreign ministers of the 22-member regional organization said in a joint statement during a virtual conference chaired in the Egyptian capital city of

Cairo on Thursday, Press TV reported.

The Arab diplomats also urged the United States to abide by UN resolutions and "withdraw its support for plans and maps of the Israeli Occupation devised under the cover of the so-called American-Israeli deal of the century."

Arab League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Gheit also criticized the Tel Aviv regime for "taking advantage of the global pre-occupation with confronting the coronavirus epidemic to impose a new reality on the ground."

"This step, if taken, would eliminate the possibility of embodying an independent, sovereign, geographically con-

nected and viable Palestinian state. This step, if completed, would end the [so-called] two-state solution," Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki said, for his part, during the meeting.

Palestinians have expressed outrage at the Israeli regime's plans to further consolidate its grip on territories it has seized in the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War.

A U.S. State Department spokesperson said on Monday that Washington is prepared to recognize Israel's annexation of the West Bank, and application of the Tel Aviv regime's law on the occupied areas.

Mauro Berruto: Olympics medal achievable for Iran

➔ Italy qualified to the final round of the World League 2014, held in Florence, and took another bronze medal.

In an exclusive interview with Tehran Times, Berruto has said the Iranian team are capable of winning the first ever medal at the Olympic Games but the team need to prepare well for the prestigious event.

■ Tehran Times: As you know, Iran has been reportedly linked with Italian coaches Angelo Lorenzetti, Ferdinando De Giorgi and Roberto Piazza. Do you think they are good choice for the Iranian team?

Mauro Berruto: I really don't want to judge. All of them are good coaches, of course, but they are very busy with their clubs in A1 league in Italy. I do believe that a coach of a high-level national team like Iran, should be committed 100% to the team. That was my decision when I had the honor to coach the Italian National Team. I left the club (it was Macerata at that time) and I worked five marvelous years for Italy and I was full-time committed to the national team. This is just my opinion of course!

■ After parting ways with Italy in 2015, you have not coached any team and it seems you have retired from coaching volleyball.

A: After long time I decided to have a break from volleyball. I got many opportunities but I decided to make very different and beautiful things, like being a director of a university of storytelling and performing arts in my hometown, Torino. I never said that I'll not be back in volleyball. I think I'm still "quite" young, as a coach, in few days I'll be 51. But for sure if I'll be back it won't be with a club, if I'll be back it will be with a National Team. A team can light again a "fire" inside of me.

■ Mauro Berruto knows Iran volleyball well because he has traveled to Tehran to meet the Iranian team several times. Could you speak a little more in-depth about volleyball in Iran and also the Iranian fans?

A: Playing against Iran (many times) was a beautiful experience. The team were and are absolutely high-level and their fans are hard to describe! I think Azadi Stadium is the noisiest hall I've ever seen! Really beautiful. And, also there is always an enormous number of Iranian fans, living in Italy. I think volleyball in Iran is something very important and it's easy to understand it, when you see with your own eyes.

■ Iran joined the great teams in the world under stewardship of Julio Velasco



and then continued its way with Lozano and Kolakovic. I think it's a huge setback for Iran in its progressive process. What's your opinion on this matter?

A: Iran must continue on this way. I know Iran has a huge project on youngsters and will have good players for long time! The only necessary thing is to increase the number of matches against five top ranked teams in the world. You become better when you play often against the best.

■ You led Italy to a bronze medal at the 2012 Olympic Games at London. Do you think the Iranian team have a chance of winning a medal in the Olympics?

A: I will be straight: this have to be the target for the Iranian volleyball, for sure. Like all the great targets: difficult but achievable.

■ You have a good knowledge of Iranian stars and I want to know if you want to choose one, which player is your choice?

A: I'm "in love" with Saeid Marouf. He's

a great talent, not a giant physically and incredibly smart and with a great technique. And he's a leader, you can feel it.

■ As a former coach of Lube, have you followed Amir Ghafour in the Italian team?

A: Yes, Ghafour is a great player, but Iran has many good ones, really. Most of them absolutely ready for the very top level.

■ Iran are the best team in Asia and the golden generation has lived up to all expectations so far. But the team needs fresh energy to stay on high. Do you anticipate a bright future for Iran volleyball?

A: As I said, a bright future depends on playing more against top teams. Sorry to say, but the Asiatic championship is not enough, is not the right target. If you want to compete for a medal at the Olympic Games (and you should!) you must play constantly against Brazil, Russia, the U.S., Italy, Poland, Serbia, France etc. Sorry again, but China or Japan or Korea are not the "right"

competitors for Iran.

■ Cancellation of the volleyball tournaments due to COVID-19 is a big blow to sport. Playing behind the closed doors could be a better way but FIVB doesn't think so. What about you?

A: It's really early to answer to this question. In Italy the situation is still dramatic and the pandemic will have a huge effect on the sport economy. Personally, I can't imagine to play matches behind the closed doors. My passion for volleyball was so big when I felt the "magic" feeling between players and fans. And... really? Can you imagine Iran playing behind closed doors? I do hope we will find a solution to follow the real nature of sport: we need to inspire spectators. That is the sport that I love.

■ And my last question, when do you come out of retirement?

A: As I told when somebody will propose me a project can make my heart beat faster.

Everton again linked with Azmoun

Everton have again been linked with Zenit St Petersburg striker Sardar Azmoun.

Everton have seen Richarlison and Dominic Calvert-Lewin form a strong partnership in Carlo Ancelotti's attack, but they may still in the market for a new striker.

Moise Kean's future looks a little up in the air right now, whilst Cenk Tosun's injury means he can't be counted upon even if he does end up staying put.

A number of strikers have already been linked with Everton despite the start of the transfer window being unclear, and Sardar Azmoun is a particularly interesting name.

Area Napoli claim that Everton have been offered the chance to sign Zenit St Petersburg hitman Azmoun, pushing him to Premier League clubs as an alternative to Celtic ace Odsonne Edouard.

Azmoun has impressed with Zenit this season, bagging 14 goals and seven assists in 29 games, and he may well be



an appealing option for Everton if these reports are true. One man who may be very interested in such a move

is Farhad Moshiri, who is believed to be an admirer of his fellow Iranian.

In 2018, Rubin Kazan boss Kurban Berdyev was quoted by the Liverpool Echo as saying that Moshiri tried to negotiate a deal for Azmoun, but couldn't engineer a move.

Azmoun is the golden boy of Iranian football, so it's no great shock that Moshiri would like to bring him to Goodison Park, and he would make sense as a well-rounded attacker to support Richarlison and Dominic Calvert-Lewin.

Moshiri may see some commercial opportunity with Azmoun given his status back in Iran, and having wanted him years ago, he may now have the chance to strike a deal.

Add in that Marcel Brands wanted Azmoun at PSV Eindhoven in 2016 according to The Express, and the 25-year-old attacker has his admirers at Everton – it's now up to them to decide whether a deal is worthwhile.

(Source: HITC)

Liverpool hit back at mayor for calling to end Premier League season



Premier League leaders Liverpool said they were "disappointed" by the city's mayor saying the Premier League season should not be re-started even behind closed doors because of the risk of fans gathering outside Anfield.

Liverpool were 25 points clear of closest rivals Manchester City, who have a game in hand, when the league was suspended in March and need only two wins to secure their first top-flight title in 30 years.

Premier League clubs are set to meet on Friday to discuss ways to finish the season, with some already back in individual training.

However, Liverpool Mayor Joe Anderson said on Thursday that health and safety was the bottom line and the best thing to do was to declare the season

over and hand the title to Liverpool as deserving champions.

"Even if it was behind closed doors, there'd be many thousands of people who would turn up outside Anfield," said Anderson, a fan of Liverpool's city rivals Everton.

"There's not many people who would respect what we were saying and stay away from the ground, a lot of people would come to celebrate so I think it's a non-starter.

"I think it would be really difficult for the police to keep people apart and maintain social distancing if they were going to celebrate outside Anfield. It would be farcical."

Liverpool replied in a statement saying there was "a lack of evidence to support such claims."

(Source: ESPN)

Serena, NFL players to compete in charity virtual tennis event



Tennis stars Serena Williams, Venus Williams and Naomi Osaka plus NFL players DeAndre Hopkins and Ryan Tannehill are among the celebrities who will participate in a virtual charity tennis tournament.

The "Stay at Home Slam" will be streamed Sunday at 4 p.m. ET on Facebook Gaming and on the tennis Facebook page of the company coordinating the tournament, IMG.

Two-person teams will compete using the Mario Tennis Aces game on Nintendo Switch.

Each team will be allotted \$25,000 to donate of a charity of its choosing, with the championship duo getting another \$1 million for charity. Leo Olebe, the global director of games partnerships for Facebook Gaming, said, according to Deadline.com, "Gaming's superpower has always been bringing people together and right now that's the case more

than ever. Blending that superpower with pro athletes and epic entertainment to raise money for COVID-19 relief and research efforts is a natural fit that we're proud to be a part of."

The competing teams will be:
-Serena Williams and model Gigi Hadid
-Naomi Osaka and model Hailey Bieber
-Venus Williams and Arizona Cardinals wide receiver DeAndre Hopkins
-Maria Sharapova and model Karlie Kloss
-Kei Nishikori and DJ Steve Aoki
-Madison Keys and musician Seal
-Taylor Fritz and TikTok personality Addison Rae
-Kevin Anderson and Tennessee Titans quarterback Ryan Tannehill

The commentary team will be International Tennis Hall of Famer John McEnroe and YouTube personality Justine "iJustine" Ezarik.

(Source: Reuters)

IPC lauds late Siamand Rahman

There are plenty of great moments to remember when we talk about Para powerlifting at the Paralympic Games.

The late Siamand Rahman of Iran created history by becoming the first Paralympian to lift over 300kg with a gold medal in the men's over 107kg lifting 310kg – the equivalent of a Siberian tiger.



Rahman of Iran passed away on Sunday (March 1) due to cardiac arrest in his hometown Oshnavieh.

Rahman who was preparing to compete in his third Paralympic Games in Tokyo 2020, where he wanted to set a new world record in World Para Powerlifting, will always be remembered for his kind smile and enthusiasm - An epitome of hope, humanity, faith, love and peace.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

Stramaccioni's agent dismisses Iran link

Andrea Stramaccioni's agent has dismissed speculation linking the former Inter boss with the role of Iran national football team manager.

Federico Pastorello instead released a statement on his Instagram page 'wishing the best of luck' for current CT Dragan Skocic.

It read: "With relation to the news appeared on the media worldwide in the last days about alleged contacts between our agency PP Sport Management and the Iranian Federation, on behalf of Sstramaccioni - who reconfirms his deep affection for the Iranian people, to whom he will always be bounded - I wish to express the absolute respect for the work and the role covered by the current Iranian technical chief, to whom Andrea wishes the best of luck in achieving all professional conquests with the national team."

Besides working in Iran and his native Italy, the 44-year-old has also managed Greek side Panathinakos and Czech club Sparta Prague.

(Source: Football Italia)

AS Roma praise another Iranian nurse

Italian football club AS Roma has praised the Iranian nurse.

"Tohid Soleimani is a nurse at Masih Daneshvari Hospital in Tehran. "The photo shows Tohid feels fatigue in the stressful early days of the #COVID19 crisis in Iran. He saw the horrors of the Coronavirus with his own eyes," AS Roma tweeted.

AS Roma had previously praised Iranian nurse Niloufar Barani. Iran's death toll from the outbreak of the new coronavirus increased by 63 in the past 24 hours to 6,091, Health Ministry spokesman Kianush Jahanpur said in a statement on state TV on Friday.

(Source: Twitter)

Trabzonspor extend Majid Hosseini's contract

Trabzonspor have extended the deal of Iranian international defender Majid Hosseini for one year more.

Hosseini was transferred to the Turkish top-flight football team from Iran's Esteghlal in 2018 on a two-year contract with the option of a further year.

The management is very pleased with the performance of the Iranian defender and always satisfied with his character and has decided to extend his deal.

The 23-year-old stopper can earn up 600,000 euros.

(Source: gazetendamga.com.tr)

Greenyard Maaseik eye Iran's Esfandiyar

TASNIM — Belgian volleyball team Greenyard Maaseik has reportedly showed an interest in signing Iranian wing spiker Amir Hossein Esfandiyar.



Greenyard Maaseik has recently signed Iran international setter Javad Karimi and now is going to sign another Iranian player.

Esfandiyar has recently played for Kalleh Mazandaran of Iran. Greenyard Maaseik will play at the CEV Champions League next season.

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■ Managing Director: Mohammad Shojaeian
■ Editor-in-Chief: Ali A.Jenabzadeh

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
editor@tehrantimes.com

» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000

» Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051450

» Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807

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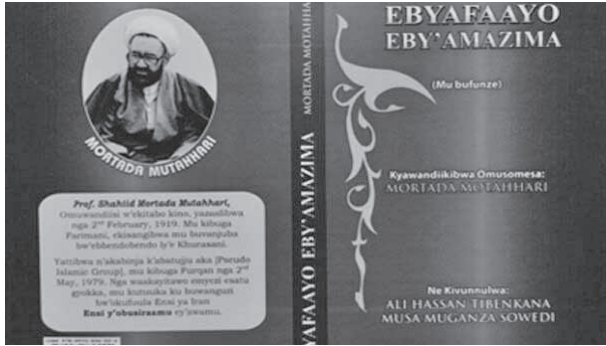
GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Beware of being seen by God in sinning and being considered a stranger and forgotten when you knock at the door of devotion and worship, and then you will be the loser. If you have ability, endeavor in His worship, and when you are feeble, show your feebleness in sinning, too.

Imam Ali (AS)

Martyr Motahhari’s
“Stories of the Truthful”
published in Luganda

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — “The Stories of the Truthful” (Dastan-e Rastan) by Martyr Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari has been published in Uganda. The book has been translated into Luganda, a Bantu language spoken in the African Great Lakes region.



Front cover of the Luganda translation of “The Stories of the Truthful” by Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari.

It has been published by Iran’s Center for Organizing Translation and Publication of Islamic Instructions and Humanities and Iran’s Cultural Office in Uganda and a publisher in Uganda. The book, which is a collection of short stories about Prophet Muhammad (S) and his household, has been rendered into many languages and was selected as the book of the year in 1965 by UNESCO. Musa Muganza Sowedi, an expert at the Makerere University of Uganda, and Ali Hassan TibenKana, a graduate from the Qom Seminary in Iran, are the two translators of the book. The book will be available at bookstores after the threat of the coronavirus fades away. Born in 1920, Motahhari was among the major Iranian Islamic ideologists. His innovative theories played a major role in clarifying Islamic beliefs for the younger generation. Motahhari was martyred by the terrorist group Forqan in 1979.

Film Movement to distribute
“Yalda” in Europe, U.S.

A R T **TEHRAN** — Film Movement, a New York-based distributor of award-winning independent and foreign films, has purchased rights to screen Iranian director Masud Bakhshi’s movie “Yalda, a Night for Forgiveness” across Europe and the U.S. in September, Persian media have reported. The company plans to screen the film in the U.S. independent theaters in case the cinemas reopen after the threat of coronavirus is over.



A scene from Iranian director Masud Bakhshi’s movie “Yalda, a Night for Forgiveness”.

“Yalda” is about a young woman, Maryam, who has been sentenced to death for murdering her husband, Nasser. Iranian law allows for the victim’s family to forgive her and spare her life, so Maryam’s fate will be decided by Nasser’s daughter, Mona, on the country’s most popular televised reality show. In front of millions of viewers during Yalda, the winter solstice celebration, Maryam and Mona discover that forgiveness can be difficult as they relive the past. A co-production of Iran, France, Germany, Switzerland, Luxembourg and Lebanon, the film was due to go on screen in France on May 6 and later move to other European countries, but screening was halted due to the spread of the coronavirus around the world. “Yalda, a Night for Forgiveness” received the Grand Jury Prize of the World Cinema Dramatic section at the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah in February.

Iranian association announces nominees
for 2021 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Association of Writers for Children and Youth has announced its nominees for the 2021 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, a prestigious Swedish honor to promote children’s and youths’ literature in the world. The nominees are the celebrated writer Hamidreza Shahabadi and book reading promoter Abdolhakim Bahar. The association has also selected Afghan book reading promoter Nader Musavi as its foreign nominee for the award. Shahabadi was nominated for his influential novels and creation of a world of varied stories. Bahar was selected for his reading promotion in the deprived regions and rural areas in the country. As a foreign member of the association, Musavi was nominated for his activities in portraying the endless pain of Afghan children and book reading programs in Afghanistan. The Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award amounts to SEK 5 million (about €570,000), making it the world’s largest award for children’s and young adult literature. The award was established in 2002 by the Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs to commemorate writer Astrid Lindgren and to promote children’s and youths’ literature from around the world. The Iranian literati Mohammadreza Shams and Mehdi Hejvani were Iran’s nominees for the 2020 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. Iran’s nominations for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award are selected every year by the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, the Iranian Association of Writers for Children and Youth, and the Children’s Book Council of Iran.



This combination photo shows Nader Musavi (L) Abdolhakim Bahar (C) and Hamidreza Shahabadi.

Turkish publisher Yeni İnsan to release
two Persian war memoirs



This combination photo shows the covers of the Persian books “Barefoot Fight” and “Baba Nazar”. **CULTURE** **TEHRAN** — Yeni İnsan, a Turkish publisher based in Istanbul, will publish two Persian memoirs about the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war. Iranian translator Khadijeh Javadi who lives in Istanbul is currently rendering the books “Barefoot Fight” and “Baba Nazar” into Turkish, Sureh-Mehr, the Iranian publisher of the books, announced on Thursday. “Baba Nazar” recounts martyr Mohammad-Hassan Nazarejad’s memories of the war written by Mostafa Rahimi, which was originally published in 2010. The book is the outcome of 36 hours of interviews scholar Hossein Beizaii carried out with him in 1995 and 1996. “Barefoot Fight” narrates war veteran Rahim Makhdumi’s memories of the operations Valfajr 8 and Karbala 5. The book also features the characters of some soldiers who participated in the operations. One of the key characters is Abdorrahim Jamshidi, an Afghan migrant who decided to join the Iranian soldiers to fight against the Iraqi forces. He was injured several times in the war and finally martyred in a chemical attack by Iraq in 1988. The books will be published based on an agreement between Yeni İnsan and the Pol Literary and Translation Agency, a Tehran-based institution that translates Iranian books and presents Persian language publications around the world.

Coronavirus shatters silver screen dreams for India’s Bollywood

MUMBAI (Reuters) — India’s film industry, purveyor of song-and-dance spectacles to millions, will take at least two years to recover financially from the coronavirus pandemic, which is threatening big-ticket projects, putting at risk tens of thousands of jobs. That was the somber assessment of about a dozen top producers, distributors and actors from Bollywood, the movie industry in India’s commercial capital of Mumbai, during a video conference this week, one of the participants said. “Making movies has always been a gamble, and now some of us can pack up for the next year,” said a filmmaker responsible for many successful action movies, on condition of anonymity. “We will have to beg people to come to cinema halls.” Such dim prospects, even after the lockdown is lifted, threaten the box-office takings that make up 60% of industry earnings, spurring producers to say big-budget films and extravagant shoots in foreign locations will be shelved. “Films will have a tough time,” said Jehil Thakkar, a partner at accounting firm Deloitte India. “Even after they lift the lockdown, I’d expect the psyche of a lot of people would be to avoid crowded places.” Bollywood has come to a grinding halt, with film production and theatres shut nationwide, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi imposed a 40-day lockdown to curb the virus, which has infected 31,000 people and killed more than 1,000 in India. About 9,500 theatres are shut, and business at multiplexes and single-screen cinemas is unlikely to

bounce back for weeks or even months, as infection fears linger and discretionary spending plunges. “Theatres may not open before mid-June on a pan-India level and normal occupancy may not come back until August,” Karan Taurani, an analyst with investment firm Elara Capital, said in a note, adding they may have to slash prices to lure viewers. Industry figures show India makes 1,200 films in a typical year, but Taurani sees big-budget movies getting pushed into the next fiscal year, as production houses battle a liquidity crunch amid falling box-office revenues. For example, the release of Bollywood’s first attempt at a multi-hero action franchise, filmmaker Rohit Shetty’s “Sooryanvashi”, has been postponed indefinitely from a late March schedule. “It is likely that even after theatres re-open, only smaller films will be released, so that producers get a sense of how many people are coming to them,” Shailesh Kapoor, head of agency Ormax, which tracks Bollywood films, told Reuters. With such a re-opening unlikely until at least mid-May, and no new releases in the last month, trade analyst Girish Johar estimates lost box-office revenue at more than \$130 million over the period. Shares in India’s two largest multiplex operators, PVR and INOX Leisure, have plunged more than 40% from all-time highs in late February. Brokerage Emkay also slashed its rating on both to “hold”

from “buy”, saying they would suffer declines of more than 50% in visitor numbers, ticket sales, advertising revenue and food and beverage sales in fiscal 2020-21. Theatreowners fear that in future they will have to record customers’ names and addresses, check temperatures and ensure sanitization, use of masks, and social distancing, all of which downgrade the audience experience while boosting costs. Top-grossing actors and directors can tap savings to ride out the downturn, but it will hit tens of thousands of ordinary workers who get paid by the project, from movie extras to dancers, stagehands and technicians. “Things are pretty bad right now for us, but worse for those who work on our films on a day-to-day basis,” said Vinod Bhanushali, the head of marketing for production house T-Series, which has 12 films stalled by the crisis. Industry veterans warn the steepest slump in years may lie ahead for Bollywood, as virus infections in Mumbai, the home of the Hindi movie industry, make up about a fifth of India’s tally. “Everything will have to be calculated after the lockdown ends and when some form of normalcy returns,” said Bhanushali. For Sakshi Bhagat, whose dreams of becoming a filmmaker lured her to Mumbai in 2013 from the northern temple town of Varanasi, the lockdown has been a rude shock. “It’s been so difficult to get payments from production houses for work I did,” said the assistant director. “No one wants to pay.”

Don Quixote group director screens “Little Prince”
to remember cast member who died of COVID-19



A poster for the screenings of “A Tazieh Performance of the Little Prince”. **A R T** **TEHRAN** — Ali Asghar Dashti, the director of the Don Quixote Theater Troupe, on Thursday screened a video of “A Tazieh Performance of the Little Prince” on his Instagram page in memory of cast member Hassan Aqiqi, who recently died of COVID-19. Aqiqi played the role of the pilot of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s story, which was performed by the troupe 16 years ago. “Tazieh is a tragic performance, but I never supposed that I would screen the video of the tazieh in memory of one of the dear members

of the cast for the play,” Dashti said in an announcement for the screening of the video. “A tazieh is performed to make those who believe in the goodness of their heroes mourn for the death or martyrdom of them and become pure,” he added. “Our heroes in the present era are closer to us. For me, those who are closer are much greater heroes. Here is the earth, the seventh planet: Hassan has left the earth,” Dashti noted. The video will be also be screened again on @darbastplatform on Saturday at 10 pm.

Mexican protest singer Oscar Chávez dies of COVID-19 at 85

MEXICO CITY (AP) — One of Mexico’s best-known protest singers, Oscar Chávez, died Thursday at age 85 after being infected with the coronavirus. Mexico’s culture secretary confirmed the singer’s death, and the State Workers’ Social Security Institute said he died of complications from COVID-19 after he was hospitalized on Tuesday with symptoms. The institute said Chávez had “evident

respiratory difficulty” and had a chronic lung condition. It said he tested positive for the coronavirus and succumbed to COVID-19 related pneumonia. Chávez was best known for folk-style songs lampooning Mexico’s corrupt political elite. One such song was “La Casita” (“The Little House”), which described an imaginary politician’s mansion. Culture Secretary Alejandra Frausto

wrote in her Twitter account: “Thank you, Oscar Chávez, your life was journey worthy of you! My deepest sympathy to your relatives, friends and companions in struggle and song.” Interior Secretary Olga Sánchez wrote: “I have learned to my deep regret that a voice of the struggle has been silenced. My deepest sympathy to the family of Oscar Chávez.” Chávez sang ballads since the 1960s and played in public as recently as 2019. Mexico has reported 19,224 confirmed coronavirus cases and 1,859 deaths. On Thursday, Miguel Angel Osorio Chong, a former interior secretary and current senator for the old ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party, wrote in his Twitter account that he had tested positive for the coronavirus and would self-isolate at home.