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## Leader provided ‘strongest’, ‘most scientific’ support in corona fight

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## Annual manufacturing of home appliances rises

**TEHRAN** — Iranian Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry data indicates that domestic manufacturing of home appliances in the country experienced a meaningful rise for various products in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19).

As reported by IRNA, the manufacturing of television sets, which was fol-

lowing a downward trend up to the end of the last year's 11th calendar month (January, 20), finally started moving upward and by the yearend, the production of TV sets registered a 6.3 percent rise year on year.

Domestic manufacturers produced 825,400 TV sets last year. [→4](#)

## Travel ads start in Iran as coronavirus lockdown eased

**TEHRAN** — Travel advertising has been resumed in Iran mainly for destinations that have no traces of the coronavirus.

President Hassan Rouhani has said the country will be divided into three risk zones based on the number of COVID-19 infections and fatalities.

Rouhani said the Health Ministry would draw up a map of “white,” “yellow” and “red” risk zones in the country.

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

Meanwhile, Hormatollah Rafiei, the head of the Association of Iranian Travel Agents, said on Saturday that “Advertisements for [package] tours have been started for Khordad holidays (June 3 to 5) by some tourism agencies. [→8](#)

## Huge sculpture in Sanandaj represents Iranian Kurds’ resistance during war

**TEHRAN** — A 15-meter high iron sculpture representing Iranian Kurdish people's resistance during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war has been set up in the western Iranian city of Sanandaj.

Created by Hadi Ziaeddini, the sculpture is situated in Abidar Park, and portrays a father carrying his two martyred children. It is Iran's tallest sculpture.

“This sculpture made of five 3-meter-high pieces of iron reflects a protest

against the inhuman actions taken towards the Kurdish civilians around Iran during the war,” Ziaeddini told the Persian service of ISNA on Saturday.

“The sculpture was commissioned by the Foundation for Preservation of Sacred Defense Works and Values about nine years ago. I began working on its design and completed the work within two years, however, it took several years to be set up in the city,” he said. [→12](#)



### ARTICLE

**Farrokh Hesabi**  
Tehran Times journalist

## To hold or not to hold IPL, that is the question

While the Iranian football chiefs are still considering how to conclude football leagues' season, most of the experts believe that continuing the matches are the best way possible.

The death counts from coronavirus pandemic vary in different countries around the world. Countries have taken vastly different measures to stop the spread of the virus.

Some, have mandated complete lockdown and others are planning a cautious reopening for jobs and events such as sports tournaments and competitions, including football.

Plans are taking shape for football to return but the point that crosses everyone's mind is the aftermath of the decision.

Iran Professional League (IPL) chiefs are considering ways to complete the 2019-20 season in a safe and secure way without endangering anyone's life due to the risk of infection.

Some European football leagues such as France, Netherlands and Belgium have taken a decision about the fate of the league matches.

In France, they decided to cancel the Ligue 1 season and Paris saint-Germain have been crowned champions. The French government has banned all team sports until at least September and the country's football organizers concluded that finishing the league was the best thing to do at the moment.

PSG had a 12-point lead at the top of Ligue 1 table with 11 matches left to play when it was suspended as part of measures to contain the spread of COVID-19.

In Netherlands, they also have ended their season but decided against splitting Ajax and AZ Alkmaar who were level on points at the top, thus awarding no title this season.

The German Bundesliga had initial plans to restart on May 9, however, the decision has been put back for safety consideration.

The Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) wants to try and complete the season and that is their first priority.

## General: Iran ready to share coronavirus fight experience with friendly states

**TEHRAN** — The Iranian armed forces are ready to share the experience in dealing with the novel coronavirus with friendly countries across the region, Chief of Staff of Iran's Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Bagheri has said.

General Bagheri made the offer in separate messages to his counterparts and defense ministers of Iraq, the Republic of Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Syria and Lebanon.

According to Tasnim, the top commander highlighted the Islamic Republic's success in dealing with the coronavirus outbreak, saying, “The Iranian armed forces are prepared to exchange the experiences that have been achieved and offer them to the officials of friendly and

brotherly countries.”

He also warned that a failure to cope with the virus in a correct and scientific manner could increase the spread of the disease and threaten the health of nations.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran's successful performance in controlling the virus could provide solutions for other Islamic nations and friendly and neighboring states,” the top commander added.

In remarks on April 14, commander of the Iranian Army Ground Force said his units are ready to provide other countries with the experiences in the fight against coronavirus at the discretion of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

## 130 British MPs call for sanctions on Israel over West Bank annexation

A number of British politicians have called for sanctions against Israel if it goes ahead with its plan to annex parts of the occupied West Bank, emphasizing that the move is illegal under international law.

In a letter organized by the Council for Arab-British Understanding (Caabu) on Friday, 127 current and former MPs from across the political spectrum expressed their outrage at Israel's West Bank annexation plan.

They urged British Prime Minister Boris Johnson to make it clear that annexation is illegal under international law and “will have severe consequences including sanctions”.

“International law is crystal clear. The acquisition of territory through war is prohibited,” the letter said.

This came after Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu set July 1st for the start of cabinet discussions on extending Israeli appropriation to settlements in the West Bank and annexing the Jordan Valley.

The letter by the British politicians described annexing West Bank as a “mortal blow” to peace efforts and the so-called two-state solution.

Israel, they also said, is taking advantage of the spread of the new coronavirus to “implement this egregious plan”.

Israel occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds during the Six-Day War in 1967. It later annexed East Jerusalem al-Quds in a move not recognized by the international community.

Palestinians want the West Bank as part of a

future independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem al-Quds as its capital.

But Israel's aggressive settlement expansion and annexation plans have dealt a perennial blow to any prospects of peace.

The last round of Israeli-Palestinian talks collapsed in 2014. Among the major sticking points in those negotiations was Israel's continued settlement expansion on Palestinian territories.

More than 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds.

The UN Security Council has condemned Israel's settlement activities in the occupied territories in several resolutions. [→10](#)



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## Weaving factories resume activity in western Iran

Weaving factories in Boroujerd, a city in Lorestan Province in west of Iran, which had stopped activity due to the coronavirus pandemic and also lack of working capital, returned to the production cycle on Saturday.

The factories resuming activity is in line with materializing the motto of this Iranian calendar year (began on March 20), which is named “Surge in Production” by Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei.



### ARTICLE

**Mohammad Jafari**  
Tehran Times journalist

## Tel Aviv using COVID-19 crisis to occupy more lands in West Bank

Both Israeli parties of “Likud” and “Blue and White”, regardless of their seeming differences, have a common plan for the West Bank which is nothing but using the novel coronavirus crisis to annex more Palestinian lands.

Asa Winstanley, an investigative journalist living in London who writes about Palestine and the Middle East, says that the Zionist regime of Israel is using any minor opportunity, including the COVID-19 pandemic, to grab more territories from the West Bank for building new illegal settlements.

“Israel is about to annex large swathes of the occupied West Bank, making the territory formally part of the Zionist state according to Israeli law. The millions of Palestinians living in the West Bank will continue to be denied the vote and even the most basic of human rights by the despotic Israeli regime,” Winstanley explained in his article published by the Middle East Monitor.

The West Bank is home to some 2.2 million Palestinians and about 600,000 Israeli colonists. The Gaza Strip and West Bank together represent 22 percent of historic Palestine, although this is a somewhat arbitrary division of the land, based on the “Green Line”, the armistice line drawn up in 1949 after the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

Between 1947 and 1949, Zionist militias and the nascent Israeli army expelled about 800,000 Palestinians from Palestine, around two-thirds of the indigenous population. The goal of Zionism was to create a Jewish state in Palestine, despite the fact that the population of the country was overwhelmingly non-Jewish. Therefore it was inevitable that the Zionist project was always going to be a racist project that required the violent expulsion of the majority Arab population.

In 1967, Israel engaged in another war against the neighboring Arab countries, invading and occupying the remaining 22 percent of historic Palestine. Israel has imposed a military dictatorship against the Palestinians there ever since the Naksa (Setback), but it was unable to expel as many Palestinians as it did during the Nakba (Catastrophe) of 1948. [→7](#)



## World's top arms seller worried about Iran, Zarif says

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Saturday that the U.S. as the biggest “military spender” and “arms seller”, which has also been starting, instigating and benefiting from wars around the globe, is worried about Iran.



“The U.S. has long been the world's top  
- Military spender  
- Arms seller  
- War initiator & instigator  
- Conflict profiteer.  
Yet @SecPompeo is apparently so worried about Iran—a huge U.S. arms customer till 1979—that he's pouring weapons all over the globe,” Zarif tweeted.  
Zarif also posted a video titled “The United States of Arms” which shows international arms transfer exported by the U.S. from 1950 to 2017.

The tweet by Zarif came as U.S. Secretary of States Mike Pompeo is pressing the United Nations Security Council to extend arms embargo against Iran which ends in October based on the Resolution 2231 that endorsed the Iran nuclear deal.

## Supreme economic council meets

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani, Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani and Judiciary Chief Hojjatolislam Ebrahim Raesi held a session of the Supreme Council of Economic Coordination on Saturday.



First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri; Presidential Chief of Staff Mahmoud Vaezi; Vice President for Economic Affairs Mohammad Nahavandian; Head of the Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) Mohammad Baqer Nobakht; government spokesperson Ali Rabiei; Governor of Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Abdolnasser Hemmati; Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs Farhad Dejpasand; Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, the deputy head of the Judiciary; Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazi; Gholamreza Tajgardoan, chairman of the Parliament Planning and Budget Committee; and Elias Hazrati, chairman of Parliament's Economic Committee attended the session.

## U.S. plan to say still a party to nuclear deal ‘a joke’: Iran’s envoy to UN

**(Press TV)** — Iran’s ambassador to the UN says U.S. officials’ calls for an extension of an arms embargo on Tehran lack legal standing in international law, noting that the request will be “certainly” turned down at the Security Council.

Majid Takht-Ravanchi made the remarks on Friday after Washington drafted a resolution to indefinitely prolong the embargo — which is to be lifted later this year under UN Security Council’s Resolution 2231 that enshrined the 2015 landmark nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The world’s countries “will not accept to be a partner in the Americans’ very ugly measure that runs against international law.”  
“The fact that the United States wants to say that it is a member of the JCPOA and use the path of Resolution 2231 is similar to a joke.”



The UN arms embargo on Iran — in place since 2006/2007 - will be lifted in October 2020 — five years after the JCPOA took effect.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Wednesday that Washington was considering “every possibility” to renew the ban on selling conventional arms to Iran.

“We’re not going to let that happen,” he said, adding that the U.S. administration is urging the three European signatories to the JCPOA “to take action which is within their capacity today.”

“We’ll work with the UN Security Council to extend that prohibition on those arms sales,” he continued.

U.S. Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook said on Thursday that Washington had drafted a Security Council resolution on the issue and was “hopeful” the 15-member body will extend the arms embargo on Iran before it expires.

However, Russia and China, both parties to the JCPOA, are unlikely to allow that with their veto power.

To circumvent the veto, the U.S. will argue that it legally remains a “participant state” in the nuclear deal only to invoke a “snapback” that would restore the UN sanctions, which had been in place against Iran prior to the JCPOA’s inking.

This is while the U.S. unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA in May 2018 and re-imposed the anti-Iran sanctions that had been lifted under the agreement.

“Therefore, the Americans have nothing to say and lack any legal arguments,” Takht-Ravanchi said, adding that their measure will certainly be dismissed by the UN member states and the Security Council.

“What the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and some other officials said have been rejected and have no legal standing in international law,” he noted.

# Chomsky: Maintaining sanctions on Iran amid coronavirus is ‘sheer sadism’

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Renowned American scholar Noam Chomsky has said it is “sheer sadism” that that the United States maintains sanctions on Iran during the coronavirus pandemic.

“The sanctions are illegitimate in the first place, and maintaining them during the pandemic is sheer sadism,” Chomsky told IRNA in an interview published on Saturday.

Speaking from his office in self-isolation to Croatian philosopher and author Srecko Horvat in April, Chomsky blasted U.S. President Donald Trump for continuing sanctions on Iran.

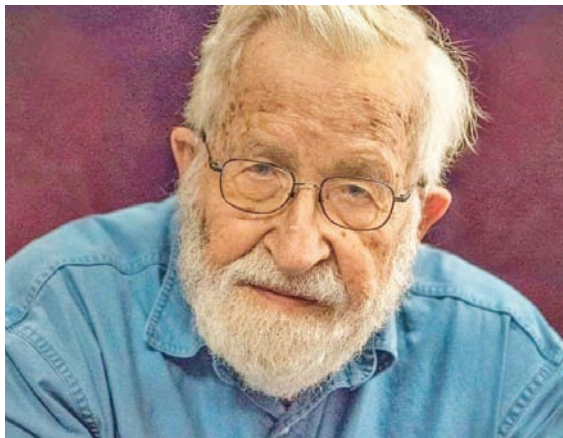
“When the U.S. imposes devastating sanctions — it’s the only country that can do that, everyone has to follow ... the master. Or else they are kicked out the financial system,” said Chomsky, according to Aljazeera.

Democratic presidential contender Joe Biden said on April 2 that Trump’s administration must ease economic sanctions on Iran as a humanitarian gesture during the global coronavirus pandemic.

The former vice president said the U.S. has a moral obligation to be among the first to offer aid to people in need regardless of where they live when confronting a virus that knows no borders or political affiliations, according to Aljazeera.

The U.S. is even impeding Iran to get loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to contain the virus.

On March 31, a UN human rights expert called for lifting international sanctions against countries ranging from Iran to North Korea and Venezuela in coronavirus crisis, according



to Reuters.

“The continued imposition of crippling economic sanctions on Syria, Venezuela, Iran, Cuba, and, to a lesser degree, Zimbabwe, to name the most prominent instances, severely undermines the ordinary citizens’ fundamental right to sufficient and adequate food,” Hilal Elver, UN special rapporteur on the right to food, said in a statement.

Elver, an independent expert, said that it was a matter of “humanitarian and practical urgency to lift unilateral economic sanctions immediately”.

## Without Hezbollah, ISIS would have reached Europe, Shamkhani tells Germany

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), has reacted to Germany for designating Lebanon’s Hezbollah as a terrorist group, saying ISIS failed to reach Europe because it was defeated by Resistance groups such as Hezbollah.

“#ISIS did not reach Europe because it was stuck behind the walls of #Resistance,” Shamkhani said. “The mask fell down the face of terrorism supporters.”

Shamkhani reminded Germany of providing materials to former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein’s regime to build chemical weapons and use them against Iranians and Iraqi Kurds in the 1980s.

Iran’s top security official added the blacklisting is done to please Israel, which



has got the title of a “child killing” regime. “Sellers of chemical weapons to Saddam have become human rights defenders, fearing of their child-killing friend, called

#Hezbollah, terrorist,” Shamkhani said in a tweet on Friday evening.

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

The police early on Thursday raided properties belonging to associations linked to Hezbollah in five German cities including Berlin and Dortmund, the Interior Ministry said in a statement. Hezbollah’s military arm has long been banned in Germany, though the group had been allowed to pursue political and social activities.

In a statement earlier on Thursday, Iran’s Foreign Ministry strongly condemned the move, saying it was 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 Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi.

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

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

## Health minister: Leader provided ‘strongest,’ ‘most scientific’ support in corona fight

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Health Minister Saeed Namaki has said that Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei provided the “strongest” and “most scientific” support in the campaign to counter the outbreak of the coronavirus, also called Covid-19.

“The Leader of the Revolution provided strongest and most scientific support, and I have no doubt that we could not take effective steps if he did not support,” khamenei.ir quoted Namaki as saying in an interview published on April 29.

The minister also praised the Leader for his support to the National Headquarters for Fighting the Coronavirus.

Namaki said “obeying the decisions” of the taskforce to fight the virus was the most important support given by the Leader.

“Also, the greatest support of the Leader of the

Revolution for us was that he tasked all to obey the decisions of the National Headquarters for Fighting the Coronavirus,” the minister remarked.

The Leader said in March that it is essential that citizens follow health guidelines to help boost the country’s battle against the coronavirus outbreak.

“These guidelines must not be disobeyed, because God has made us duty bound to feel responsible for the health of ourselves and others,” Ayatollah Khamenei said after he planted two saplings, an annual tradition in honor of National Arbor Day and Natural Resources Week.

He added, “Anything that helps prevent the spread of coronavirus is a good deed and anything that helps spread it is a sin.”

The Leader also said that all sectors of the country must fully cooperate with the Ministry of Health, which is at the forefront of the fight against Coronavirus.



Iran is hardest hit by the virus in West Asia. It is also among the ten countries affected most in the world by the deadly virus.

Iran’s campaign against the Covid-19 has won the praise of the World Health Organization.

As of Saturday, May 2, the number of Iranian citizens confirmed infected with the virus reached 96, 448. The Health Ministry also put the number of dead at 6,156.

## Blacklisting of Hezbollah by Germany is to satisfy U.S., Israel: ex-diplomat

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Alireza Sheikh-Attar, a former Iranian ambassador to Germany, has said that Germany’s action in blacklisting Lebanon’s Hezbollah was to satisfy the United States and the Zionist regime of Israel.

“What Germany has done is a gesture to satisfy the United States and the Zionist regime. The move is propaganda, because Hezbollah has no official and unofficial office in Germany,” he told ISNA in an interview published on Saturday.

Germany announced on Thursday it has designated the Lebanese political group Hezbollah as 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.

Iran’s Foreign Ministry has strongly condemned the German government’s action, saying the move is in line with objectives 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,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said 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 the negative consequences of its decision on the fight against the terrorist groups in the region.

Writing on his Twitter page late on Friday, Iran’s Supreme National Security Council secretary Ali Shamkhani strongly criticized Germany, saying if it was not for the sacrifices of resistance groups such as Hezbollah, Daesh (ISIS) would have reached Europe.

“#ISIS did not reach Europe because it was stuck behind the walls of #Resistance,” Shamkhani said. “The mask fell down the face of terrorism supporters.”

## Zarif discusses U.S. sanctions with Cuban FM

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has discussed the “illegal” and “unilateral” sanctions of the United States with Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Eduardo Rodriguez Parrilla.

In a phone conversation, the two foreign ministers also discussed cooperation in fighting the coronavirus.

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

Zarif has said the U.S. has extended its “economic terrorism” against Iran to “medical terrorism”.

“This even ‘exceeds what would be permissible on the battlefield’,” Zarif tweeted in late March.

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday condemned the United States’ sanctions on Iran as the world is fighting the coronavirus pandemic.

“I consider myself duty-bound to support Iran against the illegal acts of the United States,” Khan said in a phone conversation with President Hassan Rouhani.

Rouhani said on Monday that the United States’ sanctions are against the fundamental human rights.

“Illegal opposition, when all the countries in the world are fighting the coronavirus, can be dangerous,” Rou-

hani said in a phone conversation with Indonesian President Joko Widodo.

On March 31, a UN human rights expert called for lifting international sanctions against countries ranging from Iran to North Korea and Venezuela in coronavirus crisis, according to Reuters.

“The continued imposition of crippling economic sanctions on Syria, Venezuela, Iran, Cuba, and, to a lesser degree, Zimbabwe, to name the most prominent instances, severely undermines the ordinary citizens’ fundamental right to sufficient and adequate food,” Hilal Elver, UN special rapporteur on the right to food, said in a statement.

In a letter to the G-20 economic powers on March 24, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for rolling back international sanctions regimes around the world.

Guterres said sanctions are heightening the health risks for millions of people and weakening the global effort to contain the spread of the new coronavirus, Foreign Policy reported.

“I am encouraging the waiving of sanctions imposed on countries to ensure access to food, essential health supplies, and COVID-19 medical support. This is the time for solidarity, not exclusion,” he said.

“Let us remember that we are only as strong as the weakest health system in our interconnected world,” the UN chief said.



# Parliamentary committee to mull U.S. move regarding JCPOA

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — A top Iranian lawmaker has said the United States' new plan regarding the 2015 nuclear agreement will be discussed in an upcoming meeting of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee.

Mojtaba Zonnour said Washington's return to the deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), must be dependent on full compliance with the accord, Tasnim reported.

Zonnour made it clear that the U.S. will have to fully honor the JCPOA if it intends to return to the agreement, stressing that all of the sanctions that the U.S. has imposed on Iran must be lifted and Washington has to accept the fact that the UN arms embargo on Iran will be lifted in October.

"The Islamic Republic will agree on the return of the U.S. to the JCPOA when the



White House and the Europeans carry out the contents of this international agreement," underlined Zonnour, the chairman of the parliamentary committee.

The MP also pointed to several options Iran has on the table to scrap the JCPOA in case the Western parties resort to the snapback mechanism, saying Tehran may decide to stop implementing the Additional Protocol, review the process of cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), or even withdraw from the nuclear Non-Proliferation (NPT).

"Iran has never been eager to pull out of the NPT, unless it has no choice," he remarked.

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

## Arms ban extension to trigger Iran's harsh response, Tehran warns

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — Iran has sent a clear message to the U.S. that extension of a UN arms embargo will draw a harsh response from the Islamic Republic, the Iranian administration's spokesman said.

Speaking to Tasnim on Saturday, Ali Rabiee decried the U.S.'s push for extending the arms embargo against Iran under a plan to again become a participant of the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), saying the White House must realize that international treaties are not toys.

On the U.S. state secretary's proposal for using a mechanism embedded within the JCPOA to make the UN maintain the arms embargo on Tehran, Rabiee told the U.S., "You're wrong. Other countries are not playthings in your hands, and they do honor international commitments."



The UN Security Council members and the JCPOA parties are well aware that extension of the arms embargo on Iran will have "dire consequence" not only for the JCPOA but also for regional security and stability, he warned.

"We think we have sent this clear message to the U.S. and others that extension of the arms embargo on Iran contravenes the previous agreements and will draw a harsh reaction from the Islamic Republic of Iran," Rabiee underlined.

"We are confident that the U.S. will not accomplish this objective," the spokesman stated.

There is no place for such bullying acts in the international arena, he added. "We believe that the JCPOA member states and the permanent members of the Security Council will definitely oppose this American law-breaking."

## Trump's hollow and angsty threat to Iran showed he must be really out of his mind

**(Raw Story)** — A tweet by the U.S. President Donald Trump on April 22 said, "I have instructed the United States Navy to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea." Trump seems to be talking the language of war while indulging in politics by other means. Like his ban on immigration, Trump is resorting to distractions to turn attention away from his incompetence in tackling the COVID-19 crisis in the United States.

The Time report while referring to the tweet said, "The White House had no immediate comment. The U.S. Navy's Bahrain-based 5th Fleet referred questions about the tweet to the Pentagon, and the Pentagon referred questions to the White House."

Meanwhile, Tehran is plainly dismissive. The spokesman for the Iranian armed forces Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi said disdainfully, "Instead of bullying others today, Americans should put their efforts into saving their forces, who have contracted coronavirus."

Trump was ostensibly reacting to an allegation by the U.S. Navy on April 15 that 11 Iranian vessels had "repeatedly conducted dangerous and harassing approaches against multiple U.S. naval ships operating in international waters." Speedboats belonging to the Iranian Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Navy (IRGCN) apparently came too close to a squadron of U.S. warships sailing close to Iranian waters.

These warships included the expeditionary mobile base vessel Lewis B. Puller—a ship designed to serve as a platform for a U.S. invasion—the Paul Hamilton, a guided-missile destroyer, two coastal patrol boats and two Coast Guard ships.

The U.S. Navy statement said, "The IRGCN's dangerous and provocative actions increased the risk of miscalculation and collision... and were not in accordance with the obligation under international law to act with due regard for the safety of other vessels in the area."

The Iranians have since released a video on April 19 that showed the IRGCN warning off a flotilla of U.S. warships in the Persian Gulf as they tried to approach the Iranian territorial waters. Following the Iranian warning, the U.S. ships apparently moved away.

Such incidents are not uncommon and the two sides know how to de-escalate. Trump had no reason to meddle. He must be really out of his mind to kickstart a military conflict in the Middle East [West Asia] over such incidents at this point when the U.S.'s [Persian Gulf] allies are preoccupied with COVID-19.

In fact, the specter of an ever-widening spread of the coronavirus among American sailors haunts the U.S. Navy too. The U.S. aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt is detained in the Pacific Island of Guam, its crew was quarantined after hundreds of its sailors tested positive.

Three other aircraft carriers, the Nimitz, the Ronald Reagan, and the Carl Vinson, are also being docked in ports because of sailors testing positive, while a fourth, the Truman, is being kept at sea for fear that its crew will become infected if it comes into port.

A former Navy Secretary, Ray Mabus, who held the post from 2009 to 2017, said, "I think what they need to do is bring every ship in... Offload most of the crew... leave a very skeletal force on board, sanitize the ship, quarantine people for two weeks, make sure nobody's got COVID." After that, he added, crews would have to be kept on the ships indefinitely until the pandemic is mitigated.

Arguably, Iran is not spoiling for a fight, either, as it emerges out of the pandemic. The struggle took a heavy toll; over 6,000 people died. In reality, what unnerves Washington is that Iran weathered the storm despite the U.S.'s "maximum pressure" approach.

The Trump administration even obstructed an Iranian request for a \$5 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund

(IMF) to fight COVID-19, although Iran was the regional epicenter of the pandemic and dozens of frontline health workers and health care professionals died due to non-availability of personal protective equipment, and shortages of medicines and medical devices, including respirators.

The UN, the European Union, Russia, and China have called on the U.S. to ease sanctions. Even within the U.S., Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden joined members of Congress in urging the Trump administration to suspend sanctions on Iran. But all that fell on a stony heart. The Secretary of State Mike Pompeo kept advancing the ridiculous argument that Iran will divert IMF funds away from coronavirus relief and toward weapons of mass destruction programs.

Thus, the Trump administration watched with shock and awe when on April 22, a three-stage Qased rocket lifted off from the Markazi Desert in central Iran and successfully delivered a military reconnaissance satellite to orbit 425 km above earth's surface. By doing so, Iran joined an elite club of superpowers with the capability to launch a military satellite using combined fuel in satellite carriers.

The Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami said, "Today, we can visualize the world from space, and this means extending the strategic intelligence of the powerful defense force, the IRGC." All parts of the satellite, including the carrier and satellite, have been produced by the Iranian scientists and the message behind this important achievement is that sanctions are not an obstacle in the way of Iran's progress.

Clearly, Trump has run out of options. Looking back, he made a ghastly mistake to order the murder of the Quds Force commander General Qassem Soleimani in January. The months since the incident took place go to show that Trump's decision turned out to be a strategic blunder.

Soleimani's murder has not exactly strengthened Trump's prospects in the presidential election in November; it has not weakened Iran's resolve in leading the "axis of resistance" in Syria and Iraq; but, it has weakened the U.S.'s standing in Iraq. Most importantly, Iran's attitude toward the Trump administration has hardened.

Iranian diplomacy, which was low key in the last couple of months, has shifted gear as the country emerges out of the COVID-19 crisis. Foreign Minister Javad Zarif paid a visit to Damascus on April 20; Soleimani's successor Esmail Ghaani was in Baghdad. During his meeting with Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, Zarif said that Iran's "path in support of the resistance" remains unwavering.

Meanwhile, Tehran has switched to a proactive policy toward Afghanistan. Tehran's key interlocutor and veteran Afghan hand, Mohammad Ebrahim Taherian visited Kabul on April 20. Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Seyed Abbas Mousavi on this occasion said in Tehran:

"Iran's efforts are independent and within the framework of the interests of the Afghan government and nation. We hope that our efforts would yield results, an inclusive government would be formed in Afghanistan, stability and calm would return to Afghanistan, and then intra-Afghan talks would be held."

Tehran so far allowed a free hand to Washington but is now stepping in to try to consolidate the forces of Afghan nationalism who are incensed over the U.S.'s prescriptive approach. From April 12 to April 15, Zarif held consultations regarding Afghanistan with his counterparts in Kabul, Ankara, Beijing, New Delhi, Moscow, and Doha.

Tehran is determined to challenge Washington's self-appointed role to navigate an Afghan settlement. The eviction of U.S. presence in Iraq and Afghanistan has become top priority in Tehran's regional strategies.

## Russia criticizes U.S. for not saying a word about its obligations under resolution 2231

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organizations, has criticized the United States for not saying a "single word" about its obligations under the UN Security Council Resolution 2231 the confirms the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

Ulyanov made the comments as the United States has drafted a resolution to extend arms embargo against Iran which ends in October under the resolution.

"US officials claim that US retains the rights under UNSC resolution 2231. No single word about US obligations which come together with rights. In particular, what about refraining from 'actions that undermine implementation of commitments under #JCPOA' (paragraph 2 of res.2231)?" Ulyanov tweeted on Friday.

In a report on April 26, The New York Times said U.S. Secretary of State Mike 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 imposed 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.

In a tweet addressed to U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren on Thursday, Pompeo claimed that the rights of the U.S. under the 2231 resolution are separate from the 2015 nuclear agreement, known as the JCPOA.

Warren, a former Democratic presidential candidate, had dismissed the argument by the Trump administration.

"The international prohibition on weapons going to/from Iran ends in October. To extend this arms embargo, the Trump admin is suddenly arguing that the US is a party to the same Iran Deal it abandoned. That makes no sense. Make up your mind, @SecPompeo," Warren tweeted.

Professor Frank N. von Hippel, former assistant director for national security in the White House Office of Science and Technology, has told the Tehran Times that "as I understand the argument, the Trump Administration does not want Iran to buy conventional weapons."

Speaking on Friday, Majid Takht-Ravanchi, Iran's ambassador to the UN, said, "The fact that the United States wants to say that it is a member of the JCPOA and use the path of Resolution 2231 is similar to a joke."

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.

EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell has said that the U.S. can no longer be considered as a participating member of 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.

In a tweet on Thursday, Ulyanov said, "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."

## U.S. imposes new sanctions on Iran amid coronavirus crisis

**(Press TV)** — The United States has slapped new sanctions on Iran despite claims of its readiness to help the Islamic Republic in its fight against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

In a statement released on Friday, the U.S. Treasury Department blacklisted dual Iranian and Iraqi national Amir Dianat, also known as Ameer Abdulazeez Jaafar Almhajee, and his company Taif Mining Services LLC.

The Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) claimed that Dianat is involved in what it called efforts by the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) to "generate revenue and smuggle weapons abroad."

In addition to the blacklisting, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia filed criminal charges against Dianat and one of his business associates, Iranian Kamran Lajmire, for alleged violations of sanctions and money laundering laws.

It also filed a related action alleging that "approximately \$12 million is subject to forfeiture as funds involved in these crimes and as assets of a foreign terrorist organization."

According to the complaint, Dianat and Lajmire in 2019 conspired to purchase a petroleum tanker in a scheme involving the National Iranian Oil Company, the National Iranian Tanker Company and the IRGC's Quds Force.

If convicted of the charges, the two men would face a maximum of 20 years imprisonment.

"These defendants purchased a crude oil tanker valued at over \$10 million by illegally using the U.S. financial system, defiantly violating U.S. sanctions," Assistant Attorney General for National Security John Demers said in the statement.

Meanwhile, U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin claimed that the Iranian government continues to "prioritize the funding of international terrorist organizations over the health and well-being of the Iranian people," adding, "The United States remains committed to working with financial institutions, non-profit organizations, and international partners to facilitate humanitarian trade and assistance to the Iranian people."

Iran has been among the countries hardest hit by the coronavirus that first showed up in China in late December 2019 before spreading across the globe. It has recorded 95,646 COVID-19 infection cases and a death toll of 6,091 so far.

The country is battling the highly contagious virus under illegal sanctions which the U.S. imposed after scrapping a UN-backed nuclear deal between Tehran and major world powers in 2018. Calls have recently been growing on the international stage for the U.S. to lift its inhumane anti-Iran bans, which have hampered the country's access to lifesaving medical supplies.

However, the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump has turned a deaf ear to the calls demanding sanctions relief and instead imposed even more restrictive measures on the Islamic Republic.

## Speaker's aide advises Germany not to obey U.S., Israeli dictates against Lebanese Hezbollah

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — Iranian Parliament Speaker's Special Advisor for International Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian lashed out at the German ban on Lebanon's Hezbollah, saying the country's following of nasty American-Zionist policies is a menace to Berlin's regional interests.

"Germany's measure of labeling Lebanese Hezbollah as terrorist is a strategic mistake. Hezbollah is an important part of Lebanese society which guarantees security and territorial integrity, and it is part of the Lebanese government and parliament," Amir-Abdollahian tweeted on Friday.

The official added that copying the nasty policies of the U.S. and the Zionist regime by Germany will imperil its interest in the region.

In relevant remarks on Thursday, Iran strongly denounced Germany for labeling the Lebanese Resistance Movement Hezbollah as a "terrorist organization" and warned Berlin over the repercussions of the move in the combat against



terrorism in the region.

"It seems that certain European countries take stances with no consideration for the realities in West Asia," Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Seyed Abbas Mousavi said in a statement on Thursday.



## Annual manufacturing of home appliances rises

**1 →** The official statistics released by the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade also show that in the previous year, 1,168,700 refrigerators and freezers were produced in the country, an increase of 7.8 percent compared to the preceding year 1397 (ended on March 20, 2019).



Last year, domestic companies produced 732,200 washing machines, to register a 32-percent increase year on year.

Also, the production of coolers increased by 6.3 percent to 904,900 units during the said period.

As the past Iranian calendar year of 1398 was named the year of "Pickup in Production" by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade defined several major plans for supporting domestic production in various areas including home appliances.

The ministry set a target of manufacturing 1,000 refrigerators, 800,000 washing machines, and 300,000 gas fireplace stoves for the mentioned year.

Since the import of many products of this group has been banned, the government support could be an opportunity for domestic manufacturers to promote their products, something which will lead not only to self-reliance but also to the production of products with higher quality which will create export markets.

## Imports, clearance of basic goods in Imam Khomeini Port uninterrupted

**ECONOMY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Head of Khuzestan Province's Ports and Maritime Department Adel Daris said every day at least one vessel containing basic goods enters the Imam Khomeini port and imports and clearance of goods is uninterrupted, IRIB reported.

According to Daris, in order to speed up the process of clearing the necessary basic goods, and to help regulate the market for high-consumption items during Ramadan, 1,423,405 tons of basic goods were cleared from warehouses and distributed across the country by rail and road transportation fleet.

The official noted that 30 ships carrying basic goods have docked in Imam Khomeini Port since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20) up to late April and more than 1.749 million tons of various goods, including livestock feed, have been unloaded.

As reported, unloading of non-oil commodities in Imam Khomeini Port Special Economic Zone in the first Iranian calendar month of Farvardin (March 20-April 19) increased by 15 percent to more than 1.791 million tons.

Imam Khomeini Port is a seaport at the northwestern end of the Persian Gulf near the provincial capital of Ahvaz, Khuzestan.

The port was opened in 1960 with two berths, today it offers 40 berths for ships.

## Germany's economic response to the coronavirus crisis is an example for the world, union chief says

Germany's approach to employment in the coronavirus crisis is an example to the rest of the world as to how to deal with the economic fallout of the pandemic, the head of the United Nation's labor agency said.

Guy Ryder, the director-general of the International Labor Organization (ILO), told CNBC that countries, like Germany, that were able to maintain employment in the 2008/2009 global financial crisis and "enabled the continuity of processes and of institutions," came out of that downturn much quicker.

He said Germany's "Kurzarbeit," or "short-time work," program during the current pandemic has similarly set an example as to how deal with this economic crisis.

Under Germany's system workers are sent home or see their hours slashed but are paid around two-thirds of their salary by the state.

It used the scheme in the last crisis, with an average of 1.1 million people affected by Germany's economic contraction in 2009. While it cost the German government around 10 billion euros (\$10.9 billion), by the end of that year the unemployment rate stood at 7.6%, lower than it was in 2008.

"Germany came out all that much better and I think these are lessons which I think apply pretty directly to what we're living through now," said Ryder.

Germany has now started to re-open certain businesses after enforcing a period of lockdown to contain the spread of the coronavirus like most countries around the world.

There have been 163,009 confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Germany and 6,623 deaths from the virus, according to latest figures from Johns Hopkins University.

Earlier this week, the ILO warned that 1.6 billion workers, nearly half of the global workforce, in the informal economy were at risk of losing their livelihoods because of the pandemic.

It also said that the global decline in working hours in the second quarter was now expected to be "significantly worse" than its previous estimate, as a result of extended lockdown measures keeping businesses around the world closed.

The UN labor agency now forecasts a 10.5% drop in working hours worldwide in the second quarter, the equivalent of 305 million full-time workers, up from its previous estimate of a 6.7% drop, or 195 million workers.

Ryder also lamented the lack of international cooperation between countries to help each other deal with the economic impact of the coronavirus, that was present in the global financial crisis.

"We need to see the G-20 do more, we need to see member states having the UN in the position to do more — it's not too late but really the urgency is extraordinary," he said.

(Source: CNBC)

# TSE passes a year of prosperity, now experiencing higher boom

By Mahnaz Abdi

**TEHRAN** — Stock market in a country is somehow considered as the economic thermometer of that country.

In Iran this thermometer has registered some record highs over the recent years when the Iranian stock market has been developing more and more.

The growth trend in this market was outstanding in the past Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended on March 19).

While the prosperity was witnessed in the four major stock exchanges of the country, i.e. Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME), and Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX), in the past year, TSE, which is the major one among the mentioned four exchanges, experienced a huge boom.

TEDPIX, the main index of TSE, that had closed at 178,000 points at the end of the year 1397, climbed to 512,000 points at the end of last year, and through surpassing half a million points it registered a new record in the exchange's existence.

### ■ A golden year

Many capital market experts and also those active in this market believe that Tehran Stock Exchange experienced a golden era in the past year, as the volume of trades and the number of shareholders in this market during the previous year was not at all comparable with those of its preceding years.

While the value of trades in TSE jumped 2.6 folds in the past year, return on investment (ROI) reached 180 percent in this market, registering the highest annual growth in the exchange's history.

Different factors contributed to the past



year's prominent success in the stock market.

One important factor was the proper ground laid in the stock market and providing a more appropriate condition for traders, for example through setting better regulations and applying some new financial instruments.

People's elevated knowledge about the stock market was another contributing factor in this due.

And the other factor was the status of parallel markets, such as those of foreign currency, gold coin, and housing in the past year that made making investment in the stock market a better and more profitable choice for the investors.

### ■ A promising year ahead

While the past Iranian year was full of success for the TSE, the market is also preserving its successful performance in the current year, and the noticeable point in this

due is that the other economic sectors are experiencing some declining trend due to the coronavirus pandemic.

We have been witnessing new record highs continuously posted by the exchange since the year start.

On April 18, TEDPIX registered its highest-ever daily jump, as it gained 23,219 points to stand at 668,981.

It also experienced its highest-ever weekly growth in the week ended on April 24, while the index rose 96,160 points to 741,923.

Now through notching the record high of 900,000 points on Saturday, climbing to the peak of one million points, something almost unbelievable just some time ago, is expected for TEDPIX.

### ■ Largest-ever IPO

Iran's stock market witnessed its largest-ever initial public offering (IPO) on April

## Rouhani calls on oil, petchem companies to be more active in stock market

**ECONOMY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has instructed Oil Ministry to take the necessary measures for increasing the presence of oil and petrochemical companies in the stock market, Shana reported.

Rouhani, in a telephone conversation with Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh, referred to the listing of state-owned companies on the stock market and stressed the need for a stronger and more active presence of oil and petrochemical companies in this market.

In this telephone conversation, Zanganeh reported on the progress of the country's oil and gas projects and discussed the global oil market and its future developments.

The main index of the Tehran Stock Market has been rising significantly in the past few months after more and more government-owned companies signaled offering their shares in the market.

Earlier this week, Rouhani described the significant rise of Tehran Stock Exchange's index as a sign of the strength of Iran's political system.

On April 26, the executive regulations of the budget plan of the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 19) regarding the privatization of state-owned enterprises was referred to Ministry of Finance and Economic



Affairs for implementation.

Following a privatization program envisioned in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year, the government also pursued privatization of its companies in the Sixth national development plan.

Under the present interpretation of the Article 44, some state-owned companies have been privatized to reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity.

## Housing rentals expected to stay under inflation ceiling

**ECONOMY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Deputy head of Tehran Real Estate Association says rent prices in the country's housing market are not expected to increase drastically and will stay under the inflation rate, IRNA reported on Saturday.

"Last year, when house prices experienced a 100-percent growth, rent prices rose by as much as 30 percent. Of course, this year we anticipate that rent growth will not reach inflation and will stay below inflation rate," Hesam Oqbaei said.

The housing market is experiencing inflation and rise in prices, both in terms of rentals and sales, but the rise in prices is not going to be like the last year's sudden surge, he said.

According to the official, 37 percent of the country's urban population are tenants, who are from the low and middle classes of the society and their salary increase has been up to 22 percent, so if the rent prices were supposed to grow along with the house prices people won't be able to afford it.

Noting that the government planned to provide financial facilities for the low class tenants last year, Oqbaei said: "Now is the time to grant financial facilities,

15, when Social Security Investment Company (SSIC, also known by its Persian acronym Shasta) offered eight billion shares, which account for 10 percent of its stakes, for sales in Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE).

Anticipating that the TSE's trend of growth will be also continued in the current year is endorsed as the government is strongly determined to carry out its privatization plan through offering the shares of some state-owned organizations in the stock market during this year.

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

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

And last week, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani stressed the need for the expansion of the privatization program.

Speaking in a meeting of the government economic coordination headquarters, on April 21, Rouhani called for more government-owned companies and big enterprises to be listed on the stock market.

Taking this approach of the government into account and also considering that making investment in the stock market is still more profitable compared to the parallel markets inside the country, as well as some other factors such as the people getting more and more acquainted and interested in this market, one can conclude and expect that the TSE will also experience a prominent performance in the current Iranian calendar year.



because the transfer season has begun and it is time for the government's last year's proposal to become operational."

Oqbaei underlined the lack of balance in supply and demand as the main reason for the upward trend in housing prices and said since there are not enough bank facilities available to homebuyers, more people will stay as tenants and the demand for house rents increases, so consequently rent prices will also rise in areas where there is an imbalance between supply and demand.

## Worth of trades at IME up 50% in a week

**ECONOMY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — While 787,778 tons of commodities valued at over \$904 million were traded at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) during the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday), the value and volume of trades experienced growth of 50 percent and 53 percent, respectively.

As reported by IME's International Affairs and Public Relations Department, last week, on the domestic and export metal and mineral trading floor of IME, 292,527 tons of various products worth \$555 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 280,019 tons of steel, 6,130 tons of copper, 20 tons of zinc, 1,000 tons of coke, 5,220 tons of aluminum, 18 tons of precious metal concentrates, 120 tons of molybdenum concentrates as well as 2 kg of gold bullion were traded by customers.

The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of IME, 495,251 tons of different commodities with the total value of \$360 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 147,002 tons of bitumen, 200,150 tons of VB feed stock, 72,800 tons of polymer products,



42,500 tons of lube cut oil, 29,312 tons of chemical products, 400 tons of insulation, 2,242 tons of base oil, 600 tons of slaps waxes, as well as 245 tons of sulfur were traded.

As previously reported, over 1.812 million tons of commodities valued at 76 trillion rials (about \$1.809 billion)

were traded at Iran Mercantile Exchange in the past Iranian calendar month of Farvardin (March 20-February 19).

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

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

On April 21, IME Managing Director Hamed Soltani-Nejad unveiled the market's new outlook plan, which depicts IME's development roadmap until the Iranian calendar year of 1404 (March 20205-March 2026). Materializing the slogan of this Iranian year, which is "Surge in Production" is seriously considered in the mentioned plan and it is, in fact, the strategic approach of the outlook plan.

## Monthly non-oil exports from Hormozgan up 56% yr/yr

**ECONOMY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Non-oil exports from Hormozgan Province (in south of Iran) in the first Iranian calendar month of Farvardin (March 20-April 19) increased by 56 percent, Abolfazl Akbarpour, an official with Hormozgan Customs Department said.

According to Akbarpour, two million tons of commodities valued at 100 trillion rials (about \$2.38 billion) were exported from the Hormozgan customs in the said month, of which 1.5 million tons worth \$1.7 billion

were non-oil commodities.

The value of non-oil exports from the province's customs stood at \$1.1 billion in the previous calendar year's same month.

During this period, more than 500,000 tons of various goods valued at about \$600,000 were also imported into the country through the province's customs.

The imports increased by 21 percent in terms of weight during this period, he added.

Over \$16 billion worth of non-oil commodities were cleared from Hormozgan customs

during the past Iranian calendar year, of which more than \$14 billion were intermediate and capital goods, the official stated.

Over 80 percent of the commodities imported into the country in the previous calendar year (ended on March 19) were intermediate and capital goods, he explained.

Based on the Hormozgan Province's custom data, only one billion dollars of consumer goods were cleared from the province's customs last year, and the share of these items in the total imports was only six percent.





# SP 3rd refinery to increase quality of LPG output

ENERGY  
desk

**TEHRAN** — Director of the 3rd South Pars refinery which receives natural gas from phases 4 and 5 said the refinery is working with one of the country's science and technology parks on a project to increase the quality of the refinery's liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) product, IRNA reported.

"Implementing this project will increase the quality and value of the product [LPG], reduce the residues and environmental pollutants, and create a new way to purify LPG," Mohammad-Shafi Moazeni said.

LPG is made up of butane, propane or a mixture of both gases. It is second-best after natural gas delivered via trunk lines

in terms of efficiency and is eco-friendlier compared to diesel or fuel oil.

Pointing to the refinery's major programs in the current Iranian year (began on March 20), which has been named the year of "surge in production" by the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the official noted that in the current year, all efforts will be made to use domestic equipment and services needed for the refinery.

"Cooperation with knowledge-based companies is underway for solving the refinery's problems and optimizing production processes," he added.

In this regard, a project for reducing



the total sulfur of the refinery's produced LPG is being carried out with one of the country's science and technology parks, the output of which will increase the quality and value of the product, Moazeni said.

According to the official, the refinery is going to take serious measures based on the goals set for this year, to reduce emergency and planned shutdowns, optimize process

conditions, and increase ethane production at the refinery, which will increase the refinery's total production.

South Pars is the world's largest gas field shared between Iran and Qatar in the Persian Gulf. Iran is developing the mega project in 24 phases. It reportedly provides more than two-thirds of the country's natural gas.

## Goldman 'patiently bullish' on oil as fundamentals improve

Goldman Sachs Commodities Research on Friday raised its second-quarter and full-year forecasts for global oil benchmark Brent crude futures, citing signs of improvement in fundamentals with quickly declining supplies and improving demand as lockdown measures are eased gradually.

The Wall Street bank raised its second-quarter 2020 Brent price forecast to \$25 per barrel from \$20 previously, while also slightly raising its full-year forecast for Brent to \$35.8 per barrel from \$35.2.

Its forecast would still leave oil prices down sharply on the year. Brent averaged \$64.16 a barrel in 2019, so Goldman's upwardly revised forecast of \$35.80 for this year would still represent a decline of about 44 percent.

"It now appears likely that the market is passing its test on storage capacity, due to improving fundamentals, new creative forms of storage being put in place and a likely c.1 million barrels per day (mbpd) smaller May surplus than previously expected," the bank said in a note.

Oil prices rose further above \$26 a barrel on Friday as OPEC and its allies embarked on record output cuts to tackle a supply glut due to the coronavirus crisis that has been

weighing on the market.

"We believe the recent rally can extend further in May, back to cash-cost levels (\$25 per barrel for WTI), albeit with still-high price volatility," it said.

Output cuts of 9.7 mbpd by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, Russia and other producers, known as OPEC+, began on Friday.

However, the bank added that the physical oil market is still in surplus and the in?ection into a de?cit is still weeks away.

"Beyond this relief rally, we caution that the oil bull market that we forecast will take time and require patience," the bank added.

"Oil remains a physical asset and will therefore need to first price to clear the substantial inventory overhang through 2H20, leaving the commodity to lag the rally in related anticipatory ?nancial assets like equities."

The bank expects demand to continue to accelerate over the coming weeks as lockdown measures are finally eased, but lowered its 4Q20 and 2021 demand forecasts citing a disproportionate transportation hit and lasting impact on cruises and jet demand.

(Source: Reuters)

## Russian oil output jumped to 11.35m bpd in April, ahead of cuts

Russia raised oil and gas condensate output in April to 46.45 million tons, or 11.35 million barrels per day (bpd), from 11.29 million bpd in March, Interfax reported on Saturday, before it makes cuts this month under a global supply pact.

The report, which cited Energy Ministry data, showed April's figure was the highest monthly average output since January 2019, when it was 11.38 million bpd.

Reuters uses the barrels/tons ratio of 7.33.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Russia and other allied producers, a group known as OPEC+, agreed last month to cut their combined oil output by about almost 10 million bpd, or 10 percent of global supply in May and June to tackle the economic fallout from the new coronavirus.

The United States, Norway, Canada and Brazil may add cuts that would bring the total reduction to 20 million bpd, or 20 percent of global supply, although the coronavirus crisis has driven down demand by as much as 30 percent, driving down prices.

Russia is expected to cut its oil production by 2.5 million bpd from a baseline of



11 million bpd in May and June.

This number exempts production of gas condensate, or light oil. Russian energy ministry does not disclose gas condensate production separately.

Russia has pledged to meet its commitments in full with output projected to fall to between 480 million and 500 million tons, or 9.6 million to 10 million bpd, this year, its first annual decline since 2008.

Natural gas production in April reached 55.14 billion cubic meters, a decline of 14.3 percent from the same month a year earlier, the Interfax news agency also reported.

It also said Russian oil exports increased 2.2 percent year on year to 83.79 million tons in the January-April period.

(Source: Reuters)

## ExxonMobil to curb 10 percent of oil, gas output in Q2; Permian to take bigger hit

ExxonMobil said Friday it expects to cut global upstream production by 10 percent or 400,000 bpd of oil equivalent in the second quarter through shut-ins and curtailments in response to the oil price collapse and plunging global demand.

Permian oil and natural gas production will drop by about 100,000 boe/d in Q2, or 28 percent, from 352,000 boe/d in Q1, as ExxonMobil shuts in newer, promising wells to preserve their higher flow rates for when prices recover, said CEO Darren Woods.

"A lot of these wells that are early in their life or just started up, you get very high production

rates," Woods told analysts during an earnings call. "You're better off deferring that high production rate into a period with better pricing."

At the same time, Woods said ExxonMobil is working to slash drilling costs in the Permian so that its remaining production can stay competitive during extended low prices.

"The challenge we've got today is the investment we're making to get into that position and that's what's inhibiting us," he said. "But once we get into it, we feel really good about operating competitively in an oversupplied market."

Woods said ExxonMobil's Permian drilling

rig count would be slashed by about 75 percent to 15 rigs by the end of the year.

ExxonMobil's shut-ins would bring the entire sector's announced production cuts to 3.8 million bpd in response to very low oil prices as storage facilities reach their limits, according to S&P Global Platts Analytics.

### ■ Guyana target delayed

ExxonMobil's Q1 oil and natural gas production was flat from Q4 at 4 million boe/d, although Permian volumes increased by 20 percent.

Guyana remains and "integral part" of ExxonMobil's long-term growth plan, Woods said,

but the project has been delayed by about six months to a year as a result of the country's election uncertainty and the challenges of rotating crews to prevent virus spread. That will push the target for producing 750,000 bpd from 2025 to 2026, he said.

Global refinery throughput in Q1 was also essentially flat quarter on quarter at 4.1 million bpd, with slowdowns in the US and Europe offset by slightly higher throughput in the Asia Pacific.

The company expects continue pressure on refining margins into Q2, with scheduled maintenance next quarter in line with Q1.

(Source: Reuters)

## Oil-tanker rates crash as OPEC+ cuts near

Oil tanker rates are crashing on the eve of a pact to limit global crude production. Don't bet on the rout enduring.

From Friday, crude producers in the OPEC+ alliance will cut their collective output by a level that's unprecedented in history -- almost 10 percent of global consumption. Normally, such huge curbs would have destroyed the tanker market almost as soon as they were announced a few weeks ago, as a dogfight broke out for a fast-diminishing pool of cargoes. But these aren't normal times.

The coronavirus has wiped out so much oil demand that the world will still be over-producing on a huge scale. While that means fewer cargoes, which is bad for the owners, it also means a glut that must be stashed some place. And that place is often on supertankers because space in on-land tanks has already been booked up or filled.

"OPEC+ cuts would have led to rates crashing" down to about \$9,000 a day, a level that just covers the ships' running costs, said Frode Morkedal, an analyst at Clarksons Platou AS, a unit of the world's largest shipbroker. Instead, the drop in cargoes will mostly just free up more tankers to act as storage vessels -- for which demand remains strong -- propping up freight rates.

Shares of Euronav NV, Frontline Ltd. and DHT Holdings Inc., three owners whose fleets are dominated by crude carriers, all slumped earlier in the week amid concern that the supply curtailments of 9.7 million barrels a day will ultimately hurt their earnings, and also because an oil-market incentive to store diminished.

Day rates to China from Saudi Arabia stood at just over \$100,000 a day on Thursday, according to the Baltic Exchange. That represents a drop of more than 50 percent in the space of a week -- a big decline even by the volatile standards of the spot tanker business.

But tanker owners, and analysts who follow them, remain confident there won't be the kind of wipeout that normally accompanies deep oil production cuts by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies. By one estimate, as much as 35 million barrels a day of demand -- more than three times the output curbs -- has been lost because



buying of transport fuels has been crushed by lockdowns to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

And despite becoming less favorable for tanker owners, the oil market's forward curve is still offering deep incentives to store.

At the nadir of the oil market rout, Brent for the nearest month was trading at a discount of almost \$14 a barrel compared to supply in six months' time. For a supertanker cargo of 2 million barrels, it implied a gap of \$28 million, meaning potentially big profits for traders if they could book storage for less than that. Since then, the per-barrel spread has narrowed to about \$8 a barrel, but that's still \$16 million for a supertanker cargo.

There are now 143 million barrels of crude oil in floating storage, according to the most recent data on Bloomberg from Vortexa Ltd., an oil and shipping analytics firm. That's the highest since at least early 2016, and quite possibly an all-time record. Traders also placed well over 100 million barrels on ships during the 2008-09 recession.

Euronav, which reports first-quarter earnings next week, said that demand for tankers to be deployed for floating storage remains strong.

### ■ Do the contango

"Investors and the stock market are pricing in data points as they emerge so the contango spread reduces tanker share

prices sell off; contango spread increases so share prices rise," said Brian Gallagher, Euronav's investor relations manager. "The demand for storage remains well underpinned for economic profit and increasingly for logistical reasons."

Clarksons Platou estimates that, were it not for floating storage, the hit to tanker demand from the output cuts would slash the tanker fleet's utilization rates by 21 percentage points to 79 percent, and that day rates would tumble to levels of about \$9,000 -- roughly what supertankers need to cover their running costs.

However, the continued overproduction of oil and traders' consequent need to keep storing barrels on ships will see that utilization rate at about 90 percent by late June -- a level that's still very high by historical standards and will support day rates as high as \$75,000 a day, according to Morkedal.

### ■ Oil on water

Frontline Ltd. boss Robert Hvide Macleod says ships will keep storing and the amount of oil on the water -- up 18 percent this year by his reckoning -- will keep on rising even when the output cuts do start to result in fewer cargoes.

"Oil on water is steadily increasing," he said. "This is likely to continue as the world produces far more oil than the world consumes, which has a positive effect on tanker rates. Simply put, we expect the oil on water increase to outpace supply cuts. Oil-on-water statistics captures storage, congestion, slow steaming and we find it a very good indicator."

Earnings for very large crude tankers, known as VLCCs, on the benchmark route from the West Asia to China have been at high levels since early March because of a battle for market share among major crude producers at a time when demand was being crushed by Covid-19.

They peaked this year at \$250,000 a day on March 16, but even rates of \$100,000 are very high by historical standards.

"We believe the steep contango in Brent crude prices will continue due to Covid-19 demand destruction, which will further support floating storage demand and tanker rates," said Randy Giveans, senior vice president for equity research at Jefferies LLC in Houston.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## The next perovskite solar breakthrough could give us endless energy by 2025

Harnessing the motherlode of the sun's power is almost within our reach.

The sun, our primary source of energy, bathes our Blue Planet in more solar energy than we can ever hope to reasonably use. Each hour, the sun sends 430 quintillion Joules of energy our way, more than the 410 quintillion Joules that humans consume in a whole year. With the sun likely to be around for another five billion years or so, we have a virtually unlimited source of energy--if only we could tap it efficiently.

Unfortunately, we are currently only able to harness a minuscule amount of this energy due to technical limitations.

But that could be about change, thanks to advances in one wonder-crystal--perovskite.

The U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE's) National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) has forged a public-private consortium dubbed the U.S.-MAP for U.S. Manufacturing of Advanced Perovskites Consortium that aims to fast track the development of low-cost perovskite solar cells for the global marketplace.

### ■ Silicon panels

According to the IEA, solar power supplied just 592GW, or a mere 2.2 percent, of the world's 26,571GW in electricity consumption in 2018. That was after an impressive 20 percent growth in global PV installations to the tune of nearly 100GW.

More than 90 percent of those photovoltaic (PV) panels installed were constructed from crystallized silicon.

Silicon panels have their advantages: They're quite robust and relatively easy to install. Thanks to advances in manufacturing methods, they've become quite cheap over the past decade, particularly the polycrystalline panels constructed in Chinese factories.

However, they have one major drawback: Silicon PV panels are quite inefficient, with the most affordable models managing only 7 percent-16 percent energy efficiency depending on factors like placement, orientation, and weather conditions. Si panels are wafer-based rather than thin-film, which makes them sturdier and durable, but the trade-off is a sacrifice of efficiency.

To meet the world's rapidly growing energy appetite--and achieve the kind of de-carbonization goals that would help slow the impact of climate change--it would take hundreds of years to build and install enough silicon PV panels.

This is way too slow, given that we have a mere 10-year window to act to avert irreversible and catastrophic climate change.

More critically, the best (and most expensive) silicon panels to-date boast an efficiency rating maximum efficiency rating of 26.7 percent, pretty close to the theoretical maximum of 29.1 percent.

For years, scientists have experimented with alternative crystal formations that would allow panels of similar size to capture more energy. Until now, few designs emerged that were commercially viable, particularly thin-film cells that could theoretically achieve much higher levels of efficiency.

Thin-film PV panels can absorb more light, and thus produce more energy. These panels can be manufactured cheaply and quickly, meeting more energy demand in less time. There are a few different types of thin-film out there, all of them a little different from standard crystalline silicon (c-si) PV panels.

Amorphous silicon (a-Si) panels are the oldest form of thin-film: a chemical vapor deposits a thin layer of silicon onto glass or plastic, producing a low weight panel that isn't very energy efficient, managing 13.6 percent. Then there are cadmium telluride (CdTe) panels, which uses the cadmium particle on glass to produce a high-efficiency panel.

The drawback there is the metal cadmium, which is toxic and difficult to produce in large quantities.

These panels are usually produced using evaporation technology: the particles are superheated and the vapor is sprayed onto a hard surface, such as glass. They are thin, but not as dependable or durable as c-si panels, which currently dominate the market.

### ■ NREL perovskite breakthrough

Perovskite has now managed to break the efficiency glass ceiling. Perovskites are a family of crystals named after Russian geologist Leo Perovski, "perovskites." They share a set of characteristics that make them potential building blocks for solar cells: high superconductivity, magnetoresistance, and ferroelectricity. Perovskite thin-film PV panels can absorb light from a wider variety of wavelengths, producing more electricity from the same solar intensity.

In 2012, scientists finally succeeded in manufacturing thin-film perovskite solar cells, which achieved efficiencies over 10 percent. But since then, efficiencies in new perovskite cell designs have skyrocketed: recent models can achieve 20 percent, all from a thin-film cell that is (in theory) much easier and cheaper to manufacture than a thick-film silicon panel.

At Oxford University, researchers reached 25 percent efficiency; a German research team has achieved 21.6 percent, while a new record was set in December 2018, when an Oxford lab reached 28 percent efficiency.

The National Renewable Energy Laboratory NREL has been able to build composite Silicon-Perovskite cell by putting perovskites atop a silicon solar cell to create a multijunction solar cell, with the new cell boasting an efficiency of 27 percent compared to just 21 percent when only silicon is used.

But perhaps more significant is that the organization has been able to boost the longevity of Perovskite solar cells by altering their chemical composition to overcome light-induced phase-segregation--a process through which the alloys that make up the solar cells break down when exposed to continuous light.

### ■ Low-cost perovskite panels

Solar power has become more affordable, accessible, and prevalent than ever before thanks to technology improvements, competitive procurement, and a large base of experienced, internationally active project developers.

According to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), solar power generation is now fully competitive with fossil fuel power plants, with the global weighted average levelized cost of electricity (LCOE) for utility-scale solar PV cells having declined 75 percent to below \$0.10/kWh since 2010.

However, there's still work to be done. At an LCOE of \$0.085/kWh for photovoltaic cells and \$0.185/kWh for concentrating solar projects, solar power (utility-scale + residential rooftop) remains more expensive than other renewable sources including hydro, onshore wind, geothermal and bioenergy.

U.S.-MAP plans to solve issues mainly regarding manufacturing and durability and also tackle sustainability issues mainly relating the use of lead and other metals. The consortium will focus on funding from federal sources and also explore private-sector financing.

Hopefully, it will be able to make this IEA prediction a reality by making solar power one of the cheapest, if not the cheapest, ways to generate electricity by 2025.

The capacity-weighted average is the average levelized cost per technology, weighted by the new capacity coming online in each region. The capacity additions for each region are based on additions from 2023 to 2025. Technologies for which capacity additions are not expected do not have a capacity-weighted average and are marked as NB, or not built.

(Source: oilprice.com)



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

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# Coronavirus crisis able to shape a new unsympathetic generation in the U.S. similar to the post-WWII people!

As the World War II and its following crisis made a fresh generation in the United States that was more severe and less sympathetic than the previous one, the current COVID-19 pandemic's negative economic and social impacts may end in bringing about a new unbearable nation.

Kristin Tate, a libertarian author and an analyst for Young Americans for Liberty, has warned about social impacts of the novel coronavirus on a new generation of the Americans.

"A new age is dawning on our nation. For all of the major events of history, the engines of our economy and functions of our government have been upended by an invisible enemy. The death toll of our long lasting conflict in Vietnam has already been eclipsed, and markets are reacting with more fear than in 2008. This novel disease has had more impact on the average American than the largest stories of the last two decades, including wars in the Middle East, September 11th, and the real estate crash," Tate explained in her article published by The Hill.

Cutting across ethnic, income, and geographic lines, the coronavirus has disrupted American life well beyond any government edict by states or by Washington. Most of the changes to our society that have emerged during the last two months have been negative. The massive shifts caused by the pandemic have acted as a mirror for wider underlying trends.

Look at the demise of local businesses. For years, the political mantra has been to support Main Street over Wall Street. However, social distancing and the internet have harmed small businesses. The National Federation of Independent Business reported that its optimism index fell in March by the sharpest rate since the survey started. Consumer spending also fell by around 18 percent over the first quarter, despite the shutdown restrictions happening in only the



second half of March. The brick and mortar model is not only running independent stores into the risk of default but could also decimate many of the 1,100 malls all across the country.

In place of traditional shopping, online sales are the topic of the day. Amazon has seen an unprecedented boom thanks to the crisis. Online grocery sales have nearly doubled, while spending on video games has increased by 50 percent. Total online sales have increased 49 percent since the pandemic started. Physical sales outside of food have been heaviest in alcohol sales, increasing by a whopping 75 percent.

The housing market has shifted dramatically as well. One third of renters missed their payments last month, and things do not look any better for home buyers. Lenders expect 15 million homeowners will default on their mortgage payments. Despite low interest rates, young families will likely not want to lock themselves into 30 year mortgages if their job prospects are unstable. The same goes for commercial real estate because the lack of consumer spending shorts businesses

that must pay rent.

Our norms of social interaction are changing, even beyond wearing masks and gloves when venturing to the supermarket. Customary hand shaking may become a thing of the past. A recent survey revealed that 31 percent of the public said they do not plan to shake hands with people after the pandemic has passed. The elbow bump may be here to stay.

As Americans are glued to all the news on the coronavirus, our habits have also accelerated shifts in both radio and television, along with the demise of print media. National cable networks are bringing in additional viewers and scoring enormous primetime numbers. The same goes for local news but with a major asterisk. Local news viewing is up 50 percent since the crisis started, however, advertising revenues have cratered.

The same cannot be said of newspapers, as dozens of publications fire hundreds of reporters and even suspend print altogether. One estimate has called the wave an "extinction level event" for print journalism. The decline of commuting has also led to a sharp decrease in revenues and listenership for

radio stations. For a public disgusted with national media, local newspapers and radio stations are now the closest thing to trusted media, but both these news elements may soon evaporate.

More directly related to the coronavirus, Americans are now taking their health more seriously. Increased demand for prescriptions and a shortage of raw medical materials from China have taken their toll. Drug costs have risen while the drug companies are pouring billions of dollars into several potential treatments and vaccines. The result has yet to be seen, but may represent a profound shift toward the permanent increase in private and public investment in drug research and development. For the most part, these are not trends that Americans would like to embrace. Instead, they are elements of a new reality that we are forced to confront.

Americans have been far less affected by strife in recent generations. For many, this crisis has been a rude awakening. An age of true austerity with government control, swinging prices, and the possible rationing of health care threatens all part of our potential future. Hopefully, a combination of effective therapeutics and reopening the economy will offer us a chance to avoid a global depression. Much like the generation born after World War One was shaped by that conflict and the Spanish flu, hardening Americans to take on the Great Depression and World War Two, here is the anvil on which the strength of our young people today will be tested or broken.

For the millions of Americans out of work and hundreds of thousands of shuttered small businesses, every day of this pandemic is a never-ending nightmare. But for all of our current struggles, there is an opportunity for each of us to persevere. Only our actions will show how we will ultimately define this period. We must not let the coronavirus define us.

## Tel Aviv using COVID-19 crisis to occupy more lands in West Bank

➔ Israel's aim was to establish an ethnocracy, a state created to serve the interests of one ethnic group alone. Hence, although it desired to possess the land, at the same time it wanted the land to be free of non-Jews: "Maximum land, minimum Arabs".

Such a state comes with a price to pay, of course. As Israeli war criminal and late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin once wished of the Gaza Strip, "If only it would just sink into the sea." Israel wanted the land, but it did not want to give the millions of Palestinians living on it human, political or national rights.

It was crucial for the Zionist project that the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip should not be given a vote in the self-proclaimed "only democracy in the Middle East". With demographic trends being what they are, that would have almost certainly led to the end of the Jewish majority in the "Land of Israel", which in any event was always an artificial majority, having been violently gerrymandered by 1948's act of ethnic cleansing.

This explains why Israel has so far not formally annexed the West Bank, despite having occupied it for almost 53 years. The 2.2 million Palestinians there outnumber the 600,000 Israeli colonial-settlers. Millions of Palestinians suddenly on the electoral roll would mean the end of Zionist dominance in Israel's parliament, the Knesset. The Joint List, the only non-Zionist party (most of whose voters and MKs are Palestinians) could become the largest in the Knesset. That would, in turn, create a constitutional crisis, because a non-Zionist, Arab party has never formed any part of the government of Israel.

Now, though, Israel is making moves towards the annexation of the West Bank. Why, and why now?

Over the past year, Israel has held three inconclusive General Elections, each resulting in political deadlock. This was finally broken this month with the announcement of a "national unity" government between incumbent Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his main contender in the election,



former General Benny Gantz. Having sworn during the election campaigns never to enter a coalition with Netanyahu — who is facing corruption charges — Gantz has now split his Blue and White party in order to renege on his oath and go into such a coalition.

As I noted in a column just before the last election in March, one thing that all of Israel's Zionist political parties agree on is the continuation of their racist military dictatorship in the West Bank targeting Palestinians on an indefinite basis. It is, therefore, no surprise that the supposed opposition Blue and White agreed with Netanyahu's Likud on increasing Israel's control of the occupied territory.

Boosted by U.S. President Donald Trump's approval with his "deal of the century peace plan", both parties now want to annex a large part of what Zionists call "Judea and Samaria". Their solution for what they see as the "demographic threat" of too many babies of the "wrong" ethnicity being born, is to avoid the annexation of those areas of the West Bank where Palestinians are still the most populous. In practice, though, with Palestinian population centers being isolated islands within a sea of "Israeli" territory, the effect will be the same as if Israel had annexed the whole West Bank.

A key clause of the coalition deal between Gantz and Net-

anyahu will allow annexation to go ahead as soon as July, and it now seems certain that Israel is going to use the Covid-19 crisis as cover to launch its unprecedented illegal land grab.

It is nothing new for Israel to impose and increase its control of Palestinian lands. Indeed, annexation itself was used by the rogue state to declare Jerusalem as its "undivided" capital city, in defiance of international law. Annexation on the scale proposed by Netanyahu and Gantz, though, is a grave new step in the 130 years of Zionism's war against the indigenous population of Palestine. It is a crime of massive proportions, even by Israeli standards.

A Middle East "vision" unveiled in January by US President Donald Trump gave a green light to annexations. Netanyahu's coalition deal with centrist Benny Gantz agreed the cabinet would consult Washington before moving forward.

But Palestinians have expressed outrage at Israel's plans to cement its hold further on land it seized in the 1967 war, territory they are seeking for a future state. The European Union has also criticized Trump's plan.

Palestinians have flatly rejected the Trump proposal, partly because it awards Israel most of what it has sought during decades of conflict, including nearly all the occupied land on which it has built settlements.

The Palestinians have already threatened to cancel existing peace agreements if Netanyahu moves forward with his plan, while the EU foreign policy chief said annexation would be a violation of international law and force the bloc to "act accordingly".

The UN's Middle East envoy said such a step would "ignite" the region.

The Palestinians and much of the international community regard Israel's settlements in the occupied West Bank as illegal under the Geneva Conventions that bar settling on land captured in war.

Israel disputes this, citing security needs and biblical, historical and political connections to the land.

## The lucrative trade in human blood samples

By Jane Bradley

After 103 terrible days of chills, nausea, a fever of 103 and a headache of such intensity that her nose bled, Aleacia Jenkins knew she had been stricken with the coronavirus even before she tested positive.

So when a friend told her about an obscure Californian company that was asking for blood donations from people who have recovered from the virus to help researchers develop tests for antibodies, she didn't hesitate.

"If my blood donation could help save someone's life who is older or more vulnerable," said Ms. Jenkins, 42, of Shoreline, Wash., "it would be crazy not to want to help do that."

But what she did not know at the time was that the company, Cantor BioConnect, was selling those donations to laboratories and test manufacturers at sometimes exorbitant prices: from \$350 up to \$40,000 for a rare sample from a single donor.

Cantor BioConnect said its prices were directly related to the "high costs" of its supply chain, which includes finding donors, testing the samples, safety costs and shipping logistics.

Around the world, scientists are racing to develop and mass produce reliable antibody tests that public health experts say are a crucial element in ending the coronavirus lockdowns that are causing economic devastation. But that effort is being hamstrung,

scientists say, by a shortage of the blood samples containing antibodies to Covid-19, the disease caused by the virus, that are needed to validate the tests.

Recognizing a rare opportunity, some companies are seeking to cash in on the shortages, soliciting blood donations and selling samples at rich markups in a practice that has been condemned by medical professionals as, at the very least, unethical.

While the trade is happening worldwide, there is a particular shortage in Britain, which has only a small number of positive Covid-19 blood samples, public health officials said, because it was slow to roll out testing.

Traditionally, blood samples have been provided at low cost by Britain's largely centralized public health system to labs and clinics. In contrast to the private market in the United States, the British system is not set up to distribute samples to a large network of labs and test manufacturers, leaving many of them now to fend for themselves.

Strict rules govern the collection and use of human samples in the country, banning the payment of donors (past a small expense fee) and prohibiting third parties from making a profit from blood samples sourced from the National Health Service.

But that has not stopped businesses from trying to make a profit by selling blood donated in other countries to Britain and elsewhere,

which they can do legally.

Documents, emails and price lists obtained by The New York Times show that Cantor BioConnect is one of several companies throughout the world offering to sell Covid-19 blood samples to labs and test manufacturers at elevated prices. The higher the level of antibodies in the blood, the higher the price.

From March 31 to April 22, prices asked by Cantor BioConnect for its cheapest samples — always sold by the milliliter, the equivalent of less than a quarter of a teaspoon — rose more than 40 percent, to \$500 from \$350. In addition to the \$40,000 sample, the company also increased the amount of blood samples for sale for \$3,000 and introduced new prices of \$1,000 to \$2,000 for other "premium" stock.

"I've never seen these prices before," said Dr. Joe Fitchett, the medical director of Mologic, one of the British test manufacturers that was offered the blood samples. "It's money being made from people's suffering."

Stymied by the soaring prices, scientists in Britain say they have been forced to turn to personal connections and word-of-mouth to procure the blood donations they need.

Human tissue samples are critical for virologists, medical researchers and pharmaceutical companies trying to develop vaccines, cures, treatments and tests. The samples include things like organs and bones, as well as blood. "Any drug or vaccine or test kit being de-

veloped needs to go through trials and tests and validations, and to do that you need to have positive samples," said Kelly Sapsford, who manages blood collections for Clinical Trials Laboratory Services, a private blood donation center in London. "They're critical."

All of the companies mentioned in this article have denied any profiteering.

Cantor BioConnect was founded in 2016 in a San Diego suburb. Its creator, David Cantor, was following in the footsteps of his father in what was then a sleepy business. He said in a statement that he was "proud to be playing a role in the scientific research that will eventually help neutralize this deadly virus."

Mr. Cantor was early to spot a gap in the market. On March 18 of this year, he posted on Facebook: "As you know, the war against coronavirus is currently hampered by lack of testing availability."

He added: "I've been flooded with requests for this blood and we need to find 50 patients willing to help the cause by donating some tubes of blood."

Mr. Cantor and his employees began contacting coronavirus patients on social media to solicit blood donations. In a since-removed online advertisement, they said they were working "in conjunction" with the White House Covid-19 Task Force and offered \$100 for each donation.

(Source: NY Times)

## Hillary Clinton keen on running for president 2020 via bypassing Joe Biden

The observers, who are closely monitoring the 2020 presidential election in the United States, have come to the conclusion that Hillary Clinton is mulling over the possibilities to pave the way for Joe Biden to step down before the November election and allow her to run in his place.

Liz Peek, a former partner of major bracket Wall Street firm Wertheim & Company, believes that Hillary Clinton is getting ready to step forward should Joe Biden fail.

"Don't look now, but Joe is failing. Not only has his campaign been rocked by sexual assault allegations from one-time staffer Tara Reade, but the public is beginning to give up on the former vice president. A new Emerson College poll showed 57 percent of likely voters think President Trump will win reelection in November," Peek wrote in her analysis published by the Information Clearing House.

Remember, Establishment Democrats put forward Uncle Joe because he was the "safe" candidate, bound to defeat Trump. Oops.

That's not the only problem that crops up in the Emerson Poll. It also shows Trump supporters 19 points more enthusiastic about their candidate than Biden supporters. That "enthusiasm gap" will drive turnout this fall. With Democrats dependent on young people and minorities, both typically less reliable voters, that lack of excitement for the candidate could be a big problem.

Also less than gung-ho about Biden is, predictably, Bernie Sanders's army. Though the Vermont socialist has endorsed Biden, 51 percent of Bernie supporters are, according to Emerson, open to voting for a third-party candidate.

Another red flag is Biden's tepid fund-raising; according to the New York Times, Trump has a monster cash advantage of \$187 million. Further, in swing-state polling, the presumptive Democratic nominee is running behind where Hillary Clinton stood at this point in the race, and we know how that turned out.

As all of those issues cast doubt on Biden's prospects, the presumptive nominee must now fend off Tara Reade's allegations, which put #MeToo-supporting Democrats into an incredibly awkward spot.

None of this augurs well for the Biden campaign, which will likely confront further obstacles in the months ahead. Eventually, the coronavirus will no longer excuse the former VP's invisibility; he will have to engage in the kind of give-and-take that often shows him getting befuddled, including real — not scripted — town halls and interviews.

At that point, the public will see what numerous Democrats have noted sotto voce — Obama's former wing-man is struggling with some cognitive decline.

We really cannot elect a president who mixes up his sister with his wife or who collapses in mid-sentence, unsure of where he's going next.

Democrats' obstacle to pushing Biden aside is Bernie Sanders. The Vermont senator was the runner-up in the primaries, and continues to hold onto his delegates. Democratic leaders do not want to see Sanders resurgent; they are convinced he is unelectable. But they also know that if they move to replace Biden at the top of the ticket, and don't elevate Sanders, the Bernie Bros would revolt.

Indeed, it seems clear that party officials are so worried Sanders might stage another run that they cancelled the 224-delegate rich New York State primary. They claimed the vote would have been dangerous in that epicenter of COVID-19, but since they still plan to host a primary for state and local officials, that excuse seems weak.

As the primaries roll forward, and especially with officials' thumbs on the scales, Biden will almost certainly win the candidacy. In the absence of a brokered convention, how could Democrats replace their standard-bearer?

One idea has been to convince Biden to step aside in favor of the very popular Michelle Obama, seen as a sure bet to beat Trump. So far, though, the former first lady has reportedly rebuffed all invitations to enter the fray.

That leaves Hillary Clinton. Biden could choose Clinton as his running mate, and then step down before the election and allow Hillary to run in his place.

Clinton is the only VP candidate who would be able to pull off such a last-minute switch. She has the team, the resources and the experience to be the nominee; Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), former Georgia state Rep. Stacey Abrams and Sen. Kamala Harris (D-Calif.) do not.

Clinton is ready and eager. She is desperate to avenge her 2016 loss (which she still blames on Putin) and has pumped up her public profile to keep herself in consideration. In past months she has conducted endless interviews, promoted the uber-flattering four-part Hulu film about herself, made headlines by attacking Bernie Sanders and Mark Zuckerberg, and fired unending broadsides against President Trump.

Most recently, she joined Vice President Biden in a town hall devoted to women's issues, during which she effusively endorsed her long-time colleague. She reminisced about their time together in the Obama administration, talked about their mutual love of Scranton, Pa., where her father grew up, and recalled meetings in the Situation Room.

In fact, Clinton talked so much about their shared history that it was easy to forget that she was endorsing Joe Biden. It almost sounded as though she were touting her own resume instead. Maybe she was.

How would Hillary stack up as a nominee this time around? Hillary certainly looks stronger and more fired-up than Biden; she has the energy he lacks. She has a bigger following on social media (28 million Twitter followers, compared to 5 million, for instance) and she has a large devoted following who, like Hillary, still cannot believe she lost in 2016.

She could count on President Obama to campaign for her, as Biden also can, and she would also have ever-popular husband Bill helping out. In 2016, Democrats were not wildly excited about her candidacy, but her "enthusiasm" readings were better than Biden's today. As was her polling in critical battleground states.

Hillary is hideously polarizing, but she would be a more forceful nominee than Biden, has enormous name recognition and, perhaps most important, can begin and end a sentence without major detours. And, she has not been credibly accused of sexual assault.

Hillary may be Democrats' nominee of last resort. You know she wants it.





## Natural cave discovered in north Iran

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – A natural cave has been discovered in Deylaman region, in the northern province of Gilan, a provincial tourism official has said.

The newly discovered cave is located on the slope of a limestone mountain, with narrow corridors and stalactite-covered tops, IRNA quoted Shahroud Amir-Entekhabi as saying on Friday.



As the cave is located near the main road, it has the potential to become one of the region's tourist attractions, he added.

He also explained that 110 caves have been discovered in the province, 15 of which are among the popular tourist attractions in the region.

Bounded by the Caspian Sea and the Republic of Azerbaijan on the north, Gilan, in the far past, was within the sphere of influence of the successive Achaemenid, Seleucid, Parthian, and Sassanid empires that ruled Iran until the 7th century CE.

Sophisticated Rasht, capital of Gilan province, has long been a weekend escape for residents of Tehran who are looking to sample the famous local cuisine and hoping for some pluvial action – it's the largest, and wettest town in the northern region. Gilan is divided into a coastal plain including the large delta of Sefid Rud and adjacent parts of the Alborz mountain range.

## Craftspeople produce 300,000 face masks for locals, foreign tourists

**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** – Some 300,000 protective face masks, produced by craftspeople of the south-eastern Sistan-Baluchestan province, have been distributed among local residents and foreign tourists.

As the country is battling coronavirus pandemic, some handicrafts workshops in the province have been repurposed to make protective face masks, deputy provincial tourism chief Mohammad-Behrouz Isazehi said on Saturday, CHTN reported.



Most of the masks, which were produced in the cities of Zahedan, Zabol, Nimruz, Hirmand and Chabahar following health protocols, have been distributed in deprived areas of the province, he added.

Last month, a handicrafts workshop in northeastern Khorasan Razavi province, as well as five traditional costumes production workshops in western Kordestan province, were also readjusted to produce face masks.

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

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

## Iran is a rich country for its cultural heritage

By Paolo Patricians

(Part 2/3)

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.

The heart of Isfahan and the Naqshejahan square, which is said to be the second largest public square in the world. The royal polo matches were held here and are commemorated in miniatures painted on camel bone, one of the most popular souvenirs displayed in the arches of the bazar of Qesariye that flank the square.

The city of Yazd, immersed in a desert landscape, it was an important center for pilgrimage Zoroastrian and it is still the seat of a considerable population Zoroastrian. It is also known as the city of Wind Towers, which dot the skyline. These rectangular chimney-shaped structures were built to provide natural ventilation in homes. The part of the old city of Yazd it is very unusual - it is almost entirely built in a kind of clay and its arched alleys wind in various directions. Most homes have dome skylights designed to let in natural light while protecting from the heat during the summer.

Shiraz gave birth to two of Iran's most beloved poets, Hafez e Sa'adi. The verses of Hafez are familiar to everyone. They are carved on monuments up and down the country, have been sung several times and are often cited in the course of daily conversation.

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

# Travel ads start in Iran as coronavirus lockdown eased

→ 1 Rafiei warned that no tour operator or travel agency should give customers promises they could not fulfil," Mehr reported.

"None of them should create a commitment for a traveler that they will not be able to do it."

"We can't really be out of work. I have informed my colleagues that they should start advertising for tours beginning from the month of Khordad (May 21), but none of them should give a commitment to the passengers that they will not be able to meet."

"Agencies have to make a commitment that are able to implement, not to take money from people under this pretext, and then say that the government does allow them to do obligations. For foreign trips, no one can sell tickets until airlines announce that they are transferring passengers," he explained.

On April 20, Iran lifted intercity travel bans days after President Hassan Rouhani unveiled a "Smart Social Distancing Initiative" as a new phase of measures to prevent the virus spread.

Over the past couple of months, many countries, including the Islamic Republic, imposed travel restrictions to help curb the spread of novel coronavirus. In this line, incoming and outgoing flights have been suspended, and road travels restricted to a great extent.

Some experts expect Iran to achieve a tourism boom after coronavirus contained, believing its impact would be temporary and short-lived for a country that ranked the



An Iran Air aircraft takes off from the International Imam Khomeini Airport in an undated photo.

third fastest-growing tourism destination in 2019.

Latest available data show eight million tourists visited the Islamic Republic during

the first ten months of the past Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2019).

## Oshnavieh, an archaeologist's paradise

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – Resting on a layer cake of civilizations that have come and gone for millennia, Oshnavieh county, in northwest Iran, is teemed with ancient hills, tomb chambers, archaeological sites and bas-relief carvings. According to many, it's a paradise for archaeologists.

Located in West Azarbaijan province, Oshnavieh boasts 106 sites registered on Iran's National Cultural Heritage List. It is also home to five bas-relief carvings, originally belonging to the Kingdom of Urartu (860 BC – 590 BC), the main reason why Oshnavieh is called an archaeologist's paradise.

However, over the past couple of years, the region has witnessed series of unauthorized, unprecedented drillings and excavations committed by unauthorized diggers and antique dealers, IRNA reported in April.

"According to local officials, such illegal excavations with such detentions have not been recorded in this county so far, while in [the Iranian year] 1397, media coverage of these illegal excavations and the destruction of the walls of Qalatgah Castle caused a wave of concern among those interested in the region's cultural heritage."

Last year, archaeological relics relating to the ancient Kingdom were found in Anaqizli mount, Chaypareh county, northwest Iran.

The Urartu kingdom rose to power in the mid-9th century BC, but it went into gradual decline and was eventually conquered by the Iranian Medes in the early



6th century BC. The Urartians were succeeded in the area in the 6th century BC by the Armenians.

Urartu, ancient country of southwest Asia centered in the mountainous region southeast of the Black Sea and southwest of the Caspian Sea. Today the region is divided among Armenia, eastern Turkey, and northwestern Iran. Mentioned in Assyrian sources from the early 13th century BC, Urartu enjoyed considerable political power in the Middle East in the 9th and 8th centuries BC.

According to Encyclopedia Iranica, the territory of the ancient kingdom of Urartu extended over the mod-

ern frontiers of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and the Republic of Armenia. Its center was the Armenian highland between Lake Van, Lake Urmia, and Lake Sevan.

Urartian archeological finds in modern Iran including castles, settlements, water channels and other water constructions, rock chambers, rock graves, stelae, rock inscriptions, and building inscriptions.

Most impressive are the Urartian architectural remains with their different building forms and ground plans, mainly as castles and larger fortresses. They range in size from small, mostly rectangular castles or road stations to the extended fortification systems of large settlements.

Urartian pottery is mainly earthenware and, to a lesser extent, red polished ceramic, so-called palace-ware, since it is found only in the larger, central Urartian sites. Urartian pottery is mostly monochrome ware made by potter's wheel.

Cuneiform inscriptions have been found on clay tablets, cylinder seals, and bullae; there are inscriptions on building stones, as at Bastam and rock inscriptions, others on stelae and on clay vessels.

The Urartian rock chambers influenced the Achaemenid rock graves in layout and in stonecutter techniques. The monumental scale of the Urartian rock cuttings and surface preparation for cuneiform inscriptions prepared the way for the Achaemenid monumental inscriptions, in particular that of Darius at Bisotun.

## ECO-Silk Road Food Festival postponed over coronavirus



**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – The 6th International ECO-Silk Road Food Festival, which was scheduled to be held in the city of Zanjan from May 27 to 29, has been postponed indefinitely in an attempt to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

The exact dates of the festival, which is one of the highlights of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Calendar of Events 2020, will be announced in the near future, Zanjan provincial tourism chief Amir Arjmand said on Saturday, CHTN reported.

Organized under the auspices of Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, the festival is aimed to introduce healthy traditional foods across the Silk Road region and to publicize unique tourist attractions in the west-central city.

Various workshops and traditional

handicrafts exhibits associated with cooking and sightseeing excursions will be amongst side section programs of the ECO-Silk Road food festival.

ECO is an intergovernmental regional organization established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey for the purpose of promoting economic, technical and cultural cooperation among the member states.

In 1992, the organization was expanded to include seven new members, namely Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Republic of Uzbekistan.

ECO region with an area of more than 8 million square kilometers stretching from central to the south and south-west Asia and a population of around 450 million inhabitants is well-known for its natural beauties, as well as a diversity of its historical-cultural heritage.

## UNESCO puts off visit to Uraman due to coronavirus



**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – A pre-arranged visit by UNESCO experts to Uraman cultural landscape in western Kermanshah province to assess its possible inclusion in the World Heritage list, has been postponed over coronavirus outbreak in the country.

The visit, which was scheduled for late May and early June, has been postponed to August, Kermanshah tourism chief Omid Qaderi said on Saturday, CHTN reported.

Iran submitted a dossier to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization for possible inscription of the Uraman cultural landscape in 2019.

Some eighty experts in various fields compiled and developed the dossier in terms of anthropology, archeology and history, natural sciences, architecture, historical documents and other related fields.

Local officials believe that inscription

of the property on the prestigious list of the UN body could jumpstart tourism in the region and also look at it as a tool for better conservation of its natural landscapes and unique cultural scenes for the next generations, saying its unique rural texture, architecture, lifestyle and agriculture is a prominent example of integration of man into the nature.

Uraman is considered a cradle of Kurdish art and culture from the days of yore. Pirshalyar, which is named after a legendary local figure, is amongst time-honored celebrations and rituals that are practiced annually across the region.

Stretched on a steep slope in Uraman Takht rural district of Sarvabad County, the village is home to dense and step-like rows of houses in a way that roof of each house forms the yard of the upper one, a feature that adds to its charm and attractiveness.



# Official warns of second, third waves of coronavirus

**ENVIRONMENT** **TEHRAN** — Mohammad Reza Shanehsaz, head of the Food and Drug Administration, has warned that the nation need to prepare for a 'second and third wave' of coronavirus in October and November until a vaccine is developed.

"There is no doubt that the second and third waves of the virus will hit the country, however, due to the prevention and good measures, we are less worried about transmission of the disease in next months," he stated.

During October, November, and December, there is serious concern over the new waves of the outbreak, therefore, the most important advice is to observe personal hygiene and social distancing, which is still the most important tool for controlling the virus, he highlighted.

Because of the complexity of the nature of the virus, it is no easy to develop a vaccine which would turn the tide against the virus, he said, adding, an important part of what is claimed in the world is the propaganda aspect, or but it is likely to be developed a long time away at least.



"No specific medicine has been identified for the disease. At the same time, there is no vaccine, but in different countries, including our country, scientific research is being done on its production," he noted.

He went on to say that Iran is among the top three rankings in the field of coronavirus research projects. "In the field of medicine, all the drugs that so far have been proposed in the world, and raised hope to treat the disease, are produced and studied clinically in the country, and we are taking steps along with the developed countries of the world."

"For example, in three pharmaceutical items that have been talked about and promoted in the world, we can produce them all," he added.

"In the field of vaccines, several of our companies are working and moving forward step by step, and we try not to make it public until definitive results are archived," he concluded.

The Iranian health ministry on Saturday announced that the total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus has reached 96,448 of whom 6,156 have died and 77,350 (equaling 80 percent), have recovered.

## ISDB allocates €23m to equip hospital in Tehran



**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — The Islamic Development Bank (ISDB) will grant a €23 million loan to provide equipment for Shariat No.2 Hospital in Tehran, Mahmoud Biglar, the vice chancellor for resource development of Tehran University of Medical Sciences, announced.

Pointing out that this is the second hospital project in the country after Tehran Heart Center that has been provided with facilities of the Islamic Development Bank, he added that this project began 7 years ago, however, 2 years later, 10 thousand hectares of land was provided to the university.

He went on to say that 60 percent of the construction measures have so far been

completed, which has absorbed over 50 percent of the allocated facilities.

The project has attracted the ISDB experts' attention and was considered an important movement in the region, he also added, IRNA reported on Saturday.

Every year, there are two to three visits by experts, in the last of which took place in January, we proposed a sum of 23 million Euros for the provision of equipment, which fortunately was agreed upon in a few months, he explained.

He also noted that this is a good opportunity for the university to design a Smart Hospital, with international standards, making it a model for other hospitals in the country.

## Govt., private sector donate \$150,000 to free prisoners of unintentional crimes



**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — Heads of the three branches of the government and the private sector have donated 6.5 billion rials (nearly \$150,000 at the official rate of 42,000 rials) to release prisoners who had committed involuntary crimes.

As an annual tradition, benefactors come together in a ceremony to raise fund for releasing prisoners of unintentional crimes concurrent with the holy month of Ramadan, which started on April 27 this year.

President Hassan Rouhani, Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani, and Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Seyed Ebrahim Raeisi made a total of 3.9 billion rials (around \$92,000) in contributions to free prisoners of unin-

tentional crimes, ILNA reported.

Moreover, the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture and the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, representing the private sector, and also Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, participated in the event by donating 2.6 billion rials (about \$62,000).

According to the Blood Money Organization's report, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has donated 4.5 billion rials (about \$110,000) this year, and more than 25 billion rials (about \$600,000) over the past ten years, helping release over 700 prisoners of unintentional crimes in the country.

## Two flights to Spain to bring Iranians back amid coronavirus

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — Following the coronavirus outbreak and the suspension of international flights, two flights to Spain will be made to bring back the Iranians living in that country, including students, IRIB news agency reported on Saturday.

A number of people and students living in Spain applied a request to return to the country. With the permission of the Spanish national aviation agency, the Civil Aviation Organization of Iran, and the Ministry of Health, Iran Air will launch two flights to Madrid on May 4 and 6.

The Iranian health ministry on Saturday announced that the total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus has reached 96,448 of whom 6,156 have died and 77,350 (equaling 72 percent), have recovered.

### ENGLISH IN USE

#### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

## Iran spends \$477m on refugee education annually

Iran spends about 20 trillion rials (nearly \$477 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) every year on the education of foreign national students residing in the country, head of the international affairs department of the Ministry of Education has said.

Over 558,000 foreign national children are receiving education in Iran completely free of charge, 474,000 of whom are Afghan children, ISNA quoted Gholamreza Karimi as saying on Wednesday. Karimi said that there are currently about 137,000 undocumented Afghan students in the country, adding that their parents do not have valid residency documents, "but we have provided the conditions for enrolling them in schools."

A number of foreign nationals from neighboring countries came to Iran over the past four decades due to numerous regional crises and civil wars, he lamented.

## ایران سالی ۲ هزار میلیارد تومان برای دانش آموزان اتباع خارجی هزینه می کند

ایران هر سال حدود ۲ هزار میلیارد تومان برای ۵۵۸ هزار دانش آموز اتباع خارجی در مدارس سراسر کشور هزینه می کند.

به گزارش روز چهارشنبه ایسنا، غلامرضا کریمی رئیس مرکز امور بین الملل و مدارس خارج از کشور وزارت آموزش و پرورش گفت از این تعداد ۴۷۴ هزار نفر آنها اتباع افغانستانی هستند.

کریمی با بیان اینکه در حال حاضر ۱۳۷ هزار دانش آموز غیرمجاز در کشور داریم گفت پدر و مادر این افراد مدارک اقامتی معتبر ندارند اما ما شرایط ثبت نام آنها را مدارس فراهم کردیم.

تعدادی از اتباع کشورهای همسایه به خاطر بحرانیهای متعدد منطقه ای و جنگ های داخلی در طول چهار دهه گذشته به ایران آمدند. پس از صدور فرمان مقام معظم رهبری در پایان سال ۱۳۹۳ هیچ کودک ایرانی و خارجی مستقر در ایران نباید از تحصیل محروم بماند.

### PREFIX/SUFFIX

#### “mal-, male-”

■ **Meaning:** bad, evil

■ **For example:** nearly 67% of the country's population suffers from **malnutrition**.

### PHRASAL VERB

#### Rely on

■ **Meaning:** to count on, depend on; trust

■ **For example:** Don't worry. You can rely on me. I can keep a secret.

### IDIOM

#### Do a good turn

■ **Explanation:** If you do someone a good turn, you act in a helpful way

■ **For example:** Mike is a great guy - always ready to do a good turn.

## Better fasting in Ramadan

Fasting during the holy month of Ramadan requires dogged determination and as hard as it seems, considering the long hot days, it would greatly help to create balance in the body.

It is worth mentioning that everyone should keep in mind corresponding to one's distinguishing temperament is of utmost importance even during the month of Ramadan.



Fasting would help teenagers who hit puberty to be able getting a grip on the hormonal changes they might face during that stage.

Between the ages of 20 to 30 the body is characterized by excessive warmth and fasting would increase the heat in body as well. Now that the days are fairly long and hot it is necessary for the parents to set the scene for their children to experience better fasting condition to be able to continue fasting in the future.

Taking advices from Iranian traditional medicine would certainly help us all to feel better after a month of abstaining from eating and drinking both mentally and physically.

On one hand, fasting is a way of developing self-control, gaining a better understanding of God's gifts and greater compassion towards the deprived.

On the other hand, from the Iranian traditional medicine's point of view it can also help the body to maintain health by getting rid of unwanted materials built up in the body over the past eleven months.

The meals of Suhur (eaten early in the morning before the dawn) and Iftar (eaten after breaking the fast at the sun set) are somehow ushering us to the best timing for eating during the day all year round which means to have an early breakfast and dine early at night right after the sunset.

#### ■ Fasting is anti-aging, lowers cholesterol levels

Some studies reveal that fasting would reduce cholesterol levels and would slow down the aging process.

#### ■ Less fatty, salty, spicy foods, fizzy drinks

The core principle of eating during Ramadan is to eat lightly at Iftar, meal eaten after breaking fast, as the digestive system is not prepared for huge amounts of food.

It is also better to avoid consuming or cut down on fatty, salty, spicy, and fried food stuff and fizzy drinks both at Suhur and Iftar.

In general, the meals eaten at the month of Ramadan ought to be small in quantity and rich in nutrients.

#### ■ Cut back on leek, onion, tarragon

Try to cut back on some vegetables such as leek, tarragon and onion especially for Suhur meal as consuming them might work up a thirst during the day. It is better to eat salads especially lettuce with cucumber for Suhur.

#### ■ Not to eat much Ash-e reshteh, beef

Try to avoid consuming too much Ash-e reshteh (a type of thick soup featuring reshteh (thin noodles), vegetables, beans, chick pea, and lentil) or beef which are all considered as heavy meals.

#### ■ Spray face with water, rose water

During the day you can spray your face with some water and rose water to quench the thirst.

#### ■ Never break the fast with cold water

Drinking cold water at the Iftar is the worst possible habit. As the stomach is pretty hot due to long hours of fasting drinking cold water can cause damage both to the stomach and the liver (which is in close proximity of the stomach as well). It is like pouring cool water inside a hot glass container which could break or damage it

Additionally, cold water can cause constipation, poor digestion, unquenchable thirst and anxiety.

## WORDS IN THE NEWS

### Norwegians to search for Amundsen

(August 27, 2003)

The Norwegian government is considering sending a submarine to search the Arctic seabed for evidence of the wreck of a seaplane in which the explorer Roald Amundsen - the first man to reach the South Pole - is believed to have died in 1928. This report from Bruce Whitehead:

**A slab of driftwood** and a fisherman's **chart** may be the **crucial** pieces of evidence which finally help to put **to rest the mystery** of what happened to Roald Amundsen - who beat the British explorer Captain Robert Scott in a race to the South Pole in 1911. Roald Amundsen **went missing** in June 1928 while searching for a fellow **explorer**, an Italian member of an airship crew which had itself disappeared in the Arctic. Amundsen's French-built seaplane is believed to have crashed near Bear Island in about 100 metres of water. Earlier this year, a chart was discovered from a Norwegian fishing boat, marking the spot where in 1933 it had **snared** a 3 metre object - possibly from the plane's wing. **Tantalisingly**, the object slipped away and disappeared into the sea. Now the Norwegian Fisheries Minister Svein Ludvigsen, says Norway has a national responsibility to **discover the fate of** one of its famous sons. He said he'd personally bring pressure to carry out a search with a mini submarine as soon as possible.

#### ■ Words

**A slab of driftwood:** a piece of wood found floating in the sea  
**chart:** map  
**crucial:** very important

**to put to rest the mystery:** to find out the unknown facts  
**explorer:** a person who travels to new places to discover what is there

**went missing:** disappeared

**a fellow (explorer):** someone who, like him, was (an explorer)  
**snared:** caught

**tantalisingly:** the feeling when something you want is so close, but you can't reach it

**to discover the fate of:** to find out what happened to

(Source: BBC)



## Afghan rivals say they're close to ending leadership feud

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and rival Abdullah Abdullah are close to resolving a standoff over last year's disputed presidential election that has threatened a U.S.-brokered peace process, both sides said on Saturday.

The feud culminated in both men declaring themselves president at parallel inauguration ceremonies in March.

A draft deal had been finalized that included proposals that Abdullah lead a high council for peace talks and have a half-share in government appointments, Fraidoon Khwazon, a spokesman for Abdullah, said. "In principle an agreement is reached but there are a few things that need to be finalized. We believe they are not big obstacles and will be solved," Khwazon said.

The dispute has sparked fears among many, including the United States, that the split was undermining momentum in peace talks with Islamist Taliban insurgents.

Ghani's spokesman, Sediq Sediqi, had said on Twitter late on Friday that there had been progress in resolving the dispute. "Progress has been made in the ongoing negotiations and discussions on important political issues and matters to resolve them politically," Sediq said.

Both sides have been under international pressure to strike a deal. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo flew to Afghanistan in March for a one-day visit to try to broker an arrangement even as most travel was halted due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"We have told both sides to firm up a deal this week. If not, then aid could be hit badly in this time," a senior Western diplomat said on Saturday.

Spokesmen for the U.S. Embassy in Kabul and for Ghani declined to comment. A spokesman for Abdullah said donors had emphasised they should solve the issue but they had not been given a deadline to come to a resolution.

## Istanbul brought to standstill by coronavirus lockdown

Thirty-one major provinces in Turkey on Saturday headed into the second round of a weekend lockdown, as part of measures to contain the spread of the new coronavirus.

Footage from Istanbul showed empty streets and a police checkpoint, TRT reported.

Last week, the government's 48-hour weekend lockdown order came just two hours before the curfew, prompting panic shopping by an estimated 250,000 people in Turkey.

The Turkish health ministry on Saturday reported that 126 more people had died from COVID-19, the illness caused by the virus, bringing the country's death toll to 1,769.

According to the health ministry, 78,546 people in Turkey have tested positive for the new coronavirus.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough, that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, and could lead to death.

## ISIL attack kills 10 Hashd al-Sha'abi forces in Iraq

At least 10 Iraqi fighters from the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), also known as Hashd al-Sha'abi, have been killed in an attack by the Daesh (ISIL) terrorist group in Iraq's Salahuddin Province.

The coordinated assault which took place in the cities of Mekeeshfa and Balad, led to clashes between PMU forces and the Daesh terrorists on several fronts, the paramilitary group said on Saturday.

The PMU further said its fighters have now taken control of the situation, adding the Iraqi government has also sent reinforcements to supplement efforts and prepare for a possible retaliatory attack.

Iraq's Prime Minister-designate Mustafa al-Kadhimi has paid tribute to families of those who were killed, according to a statement circulated by Iraqi media.

"With great sadness, we received news of the martyrdom of a group of heroes from among the Hashd al-Sha'abi who died defending their homeland in the face of ISIL (Daesh) attacks in the Mekeeshfah and Balad areas north of Baghdad," the statement said.

The PMU was formed by popular volunteer forces in 2014 after the Daesh terror group launched a campaign of bloodshed and destruction against Iraq.

The group played a major role pushing back and ultimately defeating the terrorist forces which had taken control of a large swathes of the Arab country.

The Iraqi parliament voted to integrate the PMU into the Iraqi military in 2016, effectively placing the force under the command of the prime minister and granting the group a standing similar to that of other branches of Iraqi security forces.

The combined push, which was reinforced by Iraq's allies, including Iran, ultimately led to Daesh's expulsion in late 2017.

Daesh remnants, who conduct sporadic attacks against Iraqi security forces and civilians alike with increasing regularity, attempt to regroup and wage a new era of its reign of terror and destruction in the region.

## 130 British MPs call for sanctions on Israel over West Bank annexation

➔ 1 According to Press TV, Netanyahu has repeatedly pledged to annex all the Palestinian territories on which Israeli settlements are built in the occupied West Bank.

The Israeli prime minister has voiced confidence that the United States would give Tel Aviv the nod to move ahead with the annexation of the occupied West Bank.

The European Union and the United Nations have already denounced the plan.

In a joint statement last year, the UK government, together with France, Germany, Italy and Spain, warned that Israel's annexation plans constituted "a serious breach of international law."

The letter by the British politicians on Friday said the international community is "duty-bound" to protect Palestinians under the occupation.

"If we are to prevent other states with territorial ambitions from copying Israeli illegal behavior, the UK must take a lead in standing up to this aggression," it said.

Signatories included Lord Chris Patten, the former chair of the Conservative Party; Sir Edward Davey, the leader of Liberal Democrats, and Baroness Helena Kennedy.

# Israel is tracking its patients through their phones

### High Court: Shabak can't track patients' phones without legislation

In a blow to the government, the High Court of Justice ordered the state to pass legislation if it wants to continue Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) surveillance of Israelis infected with the novel coronavirus.

In their decision, the justices ordered Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government to pass legislation that will regulate the use of the tracking tools. The surveillance program has been criticized since it was implemented shortly after the health crisis began in Israel nearly two months ago, Jewish news reported.

The current legal basis was inadequate, the justices said, and if a law was not passed in the Knesset, they would be forced to end the program.

Earlier in the evening, the government zigzagged over a decision concerning restrictions on sport activities.

At first, it approved lifting the restrictions and informed the Health Ministry, which then panicked that too many people may venture outside during the Independence Day holiday. As a result, the ministry asked the government to revoke its decision, which it did.

The final verdict according to a state-



ment by the Prime Minister's Office: The 500-meter restriction will be lifted as of April 30 at 8 a.m.

Minister of Culture and Sports Miri Regev said she welcomed the Health Ministry's

adoption of her recommendation to lift the restriction. She said her ministry was preparing to "expand sporting activities immediately after Independence Day," and it was considering opening workout

centers and swimming pools.

Beginning Thursday, runners and cyclists can run alone or in small groups as long as they maintain a two-meter distance from one another. Golf, marine sports, tennis, archery, horseback riding and other similar activities can be resumed. Athletes are asked to use their own personal equipment and disinfect it between training sessions. If people work out together, they should stay two meters apart.

The move came a day after restrictions were relaxed to allow some establishments to reopen, including hairdressers, beauty salons, restaurants and cafes for takeaway. Caregivers were allowed to return to work.

Netanyahu is scheduled to convene a meeting of top ministers on Monday to discuss the reopening of schools, which are expected to start in a limited framework next week. A preliminary meeting between top officials from the relevant ministries took place on Sunday.

The plans under consideration include resuming school on Sunday for infants through third grade or resuming school only for children in kindergarten and younger.

## Taliban step up attacks on Afghan forces since signing U.S. deal: data

The Taliban have mounted more than 4,500 attacks in Afghanistan, marking a sharp escalation in violence, in the 45 days since signing a deal with the United States that paves the way for a U.S. troop drawdown, according to data seen by Reuters.

Two sets of data, one from a Western military source and one from an independent body, both show attacks by the hardline Islamist group up by more than 70 percent between March 1 and April 15 compared with the same period a year ago.

Separately, Afghan government data indicates that more than 900 Afghan local and national forces were killed during that same period, up from about 520 a year earlier.

Meanwhile, Taliban casualties fell to 610 in the period, down from roughly 1,660 a year ago, as U.S. and Afghan forces have reduced the number of offensive attacks and air strikes following the U.S.-Taliban accord.

Senior Western, Afghan and independent officials tracking the ground situation say that the increase in attacks shows



the insurgent group's wilful disregard of a pledge to reduce violence made as part of the accord signed in late February.

The violence in the war-damaged nation has coincided with the rapid spread of the coronavirus infection.

In Washington, Pentagon spokesman Jonathan Hoffman told reporters that while the Taliban have adhered to

## Gun-toting protesters in U.S. occupy streets amid virus chaos



Protests against stay-at-home orders to combat the coronavirus pandemic have been held across the United States amid growing anger over the policy's economic impact that has left millions of Americans unemployed.

Rallies were scheduled in at least 10 states, including New York, which has led the country in COVID-19 deaths.

At New York's state Capitol in Albany, protesters chanted slogans and waved flags. Counter-protesters scheduled their own rallies in support of keeping non-essential businesses closed.

Some workers at Amazon, Target Corp and other companies staged protests and sick-outs in New York, Pennsylvania, Oregon and other states to demand a safer work environment and better pay during the outbreak.

California has also seen protests over Governor Gavin Newsom's sweeping stay-at-home orders.

There were about a dozen organized rallies in California's largest cities including Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco.

In Los Angeles, street vendors drove around City Hall in a caravan pleading for rent relief in a May Day demonstration, saying they have been unable to obtain unemployment assistance because of the informal nature of their work or because of their immigration status.

In Huntington Beach, located south of Los Angeles, protesters swarmed the streets, backing up traffic for at least a mile along Pacific Coast Highway.

People carried signs reading "Open Cali now." A plane buzzed overhead with a sign reading "Fire gruesome Newsom! Open California."

The rally attendants demanded workers' rights as well as aid for people affected by the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

On Thursday, hundreds of protesters, some armed with rifles, gathered at Michigan's state Capitol in Lansing objecting to Governor Gretchen Whitmer's request to extend the state's stay-at-home order.

According to Press TV, more than 3.8 million laid-off workers applied for unemployment benefits last week as the U.S. economy slid further into a crisis that is becoming the most devastating since the 1930s.

Roughly 30.3 million people have now filed for jobless aid in the six weeks since the coronavirus outbreak began forcing millions of employers to close their doors and slash their workforces. That is more people than live in the New York and Chicago metropolitan areas combined, and it's by far the worst string of layoffs on record. It adds up to more than one in six American workers.

## Kim Jong Un makes first 'public appearance' in weeks



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has made his first public appearance in 20 days, North Korean state media reported early on Saturday, ending an absence that sparked speculation about his health.

The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported that Kim attended a ceremony marking the completion of a fertilizer factory in Suncheon, near the capital of Pyongyang, with other senior officials, including his sister, Kim Yo Jong, al Jazeera reported.

KCNA said Kim cut a ribbon at the ceremony on Friday and those attending the event "burst into thunderous cheers of 'hurrah!'" for the Supreme Leader who is commanding the all-people general march for accomplishing the great cause of prosperity.

Kim was seen in photographs smiling and talking to aides at the ribbon-cutting ceremony and also touring the plant.

The authenticity of the photos, published on the website of the official Rodong Simmun newspaper, could not be verified.

Asked about the KCNA report, US President Donald Trump said: "I'd rather not comment on it yet."

Rumours about the North Korean leader's health swirled after he missed the April 15 birthday celebration for his

late grandfather Kim Il Sung, the country's most important holiday, for the first time since he took power in 2011.

Without publishing images, state media reported that Kim Jong Un was carrying out routine activities outside public view, such as sending greetings to the leaders of Syria, Cuba and South Africa and expressing gratitude to workers building tourist facilities in the coastal town of Wonsan, where some speculated he was staying.

■ 'No unusual signs'

Seoul's unification ministry reacted to Saturday's report by saying "groundless" speculation about Kim had caused "unnecessary confusion", calling for more careful consideration in future.

South Korea's government, which has a mixed record of tracking Pyongyang's ruling elite, repeatedly downplayed speculation that Kim, believed to be 36, was in poor health following surgery.

The office of South Korean President Moon Jae-in said it detected no unusual signs in North Korea or any emergency reaction by the country's ruling party, military and cabinet. It said it believed Kim was still managing state affairs but staying at an unspecified location outside Pyongyang.

(Source: Reuters)

## China mocks U.S. coronavirus response in Lego-like animation

China has published a short animation titled "Once Upon a Virus" mocking the U.S. response to the new coronavirus using Lego-like figures to represent the two countries.

Washington and Beijing are locked in a war of words over the origins of the disease, which emerged in the Chinese city of Wuhan and has grown into a global pandemic.

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Thursday he was confident the coronavirus may have originated in a Chinese virology lab, but declined to describe the evidence.

In the animation posted online by China's official Xinhua

news agency, red curtains open to reveal a stage featuring Lego-like figures in the form of a terracotta warrior wearing a face mask and the Statue of Liberty.

"We discovered a new virus," says the warrior. "So what?" replies the Statue of Liberty. "It's only a flu."

As the warrior issues warnings about the virus and counts off the grim milestones in China's outbreak, the Statue of Liberty replies dismissively with echoes of Trump's press conferences in which he played down the severity of the illness.

"Are you listening to yourselves?" asks the warrior as

the statue begins to turn red with fever and gets hooked up to an intravenous drip.

"We are always correct, even though we contradict ourselves," the statue replies. "That's what I love about you Americans, your consistency," says the warrior.

The United States and other countries have accused China of misleading the world about the severity of the outbreak, and there are growing calls for an international inquiry into the origins of the virus.



# It's time to support Skocic: Jahanbakhsh

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Alireza Jahanbakhsh says that they must support Dragan Skocic since Iran national football team is in sensitive situation.

The Iranian local media have speculated that the Iran football federation has negotiated with Italian coach Andrea Stramaccioni. The federation had reportedly negotiated with Gabriel Calderon.

"Now, it's time to support Skocic because I think he has good knowledge of our football and players and we should have positive view of him. Skocic is performing his tasks with high motivation and lot of enthusiasm," Jahanbakhsh said in an interview with IRNA.

"We are in a sensitive situation right now and all us must support our coach and our team. Unity is very important right now and our task is to help the team qualify for the next round," he added.

"I don't know where do the speculation come from but I am sure these claims are impossible to verify. We have to focus on upcoming matches because there are always speculation," Jahanbakhsh went on to say.

Iran has officially submitted its bid for hosting the AFC Asian Cup in 2027, however Jahanbakhsh says it's impossible to host the Asian Cup due to current situation in our football.

"We have two good stadiums in Ahvaz and Mashhad but the most important thing is the women are not allowed to attend the football matches in the stadiums. Perhaps this problem will be solved until the next seven years. My teammates ask me why



the women are not permitted to go to the stadiums and I say them it will get better in the next," he added.

The Brighton winger is training at home

after English Premier League was cancelled due to COVID-19 outbreak.

"I train and workout at home to stay fit. Watching film, playing Playstation and being

along with my family help me to enjoy my time in there days. We have to encourage people to stay home as much as possible," Jahanbakhsh concluded.

## To hold or not to hold IPL, that is the question

**1 →** The League Organization's officials are waiting for a mandate from the Coronavirus Combat and Prevention Headquarters to announce their plan for resuming the league.

Sporting activities across the world have come to a grinding halt due to COVID-19 pandemic which has claimed more than 234,000 lives and infected around 3,308,000 people so far.

### Experts' views

In Iran, there are various opinions about the start or cancellation of the Iranian league, most of them have just focused on the IPL -the highest level of the Iranian football competitions – and ignored the lower leagues.

During recent days, Tehran Times has asked some Iranian football experts how the football season should be concluded with most of them saying the season should be finished off as soon as the situation is safe for everyone.



Majid Jalali, head coach of Gol Gohar Sirjan Football Club, believes that there is no other way but to resume the Iran Professional League (IPL) matches: "Anything other than that requires making tough decisions," he said in his interview with Tehran Times.

Taking tough and complicated decisions is an important point to consider when it comes to determine the champions of each league, the AFC Champions League spots, the teams who relegate to lower leagues and the ones that promote to a higher division.

The IPL is yet to reveal how it plans to finish its season after being halted due to coronavirus, with Persepolis sitting 10 points clear at the top with nine games remaining. But it seems that continuing the matches in a safe situation, subject to government approval, would be the best solution.

## Ministry of Sports supports Iran's bid for 2027 AFC Cup

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Mehdi Alinejad, the Iranian Deputy Minister of Sport and Youth, has talked about Iran's bid to host the 2027 AFC Asian Cup and emphasized that the ministry will defend the bid submitted by the football federation.

"The Ministry of Sport and Youth always support Iran's hosting of international sports events, especially in popular sports such as football," Alinejad said in an interview with Mehr news agency.

"The deadline for submitting applications for hosting 2027 AFC Asian Cup is from May 31 to June 30, and the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) made the most of its opportunity. To submit this bid and to express the interest of hosting, especially if it leads to the desired result, is a good point for Iranian sports and football.

"The Situation of the country in terms of infrastructure and football stadiums



is such that it has always received the necessary approval to hold international matches and events such as the AFC Champions League. Iran has no problem with regard to transportation, hoteling, and other issues related to hosting a major sport event," he added.

Iran has already hosted the Asian Cup two times in 1968 and 1976. The country had submitted its candidacy to host the 2019 AFC Asian Cup but the UAE won the right to host the event.

## FC Cologne infections raise questions over safety of league restart

**BERLIN (Reuters)** — The COVID-19 infection of three people at German top-flight soccer team FC Cologne has raised questions about the safety of a possible Bundesliga restart amid the coronavirus pandemic.

With the Bundesliga battling to convince the government that the season should restart in May, and with daily infection figures dropping, Cologne announced the positive tests on Friday.

"Likely two players, one staffer infected," wrote Karl Lauterbach, senior lawmaker with the Social Democrats, junior partners in Chancellor Angela Merkel's coalition, on Twitter on Saturday.

"The rest (of the squad) continues to train. Whoever trains with COVID-19 risks damages to lung, heart and kidneys," added Lauterbach, who is a professor of health economics and epidemiology.

"I am surprised that players are allowing this," he said in reference to Cologne's training continuing with the rest of the squad instead of them all being quarantined

as a precaution.

"Football should be a model example and not 'bread and games'," he said.

Cologne had said all three cases were symptom free and the individuals were placed in a 14-day quarantine but the club did not confirm any names out of respect for the privacy of those concerned, nor did it say whether players were involved.

While Bundesliga clubs have returned to training in small groups in the past weeks after the league was suspended in mid-March, they must wait another week to find out about a possible restart to the season.

The German government on Thursday delayed any decision over a league resumption amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The cash-strapped clubs and league had been hoping for the green light to end the two-month suspension so the league can contractually finish by June 30.

The German Football League has also submitted a health safety plan for games without spectators that foresees reg-



ular testing of players but no quarantine for entire squads in cases of positive tests.

Chancellor Merkel has said any decision on if and when sports could resume would be taken on May 6.

Germany has suffered over 6,500 deaths from coronavirus with some 162,00 people infected.

## Premier League clubs to play on neutral grounds if games resume - sources

The 2019-20 Premier League season will be played to a conclusion behind closed doors at neutral venues if football can return safely, sources have told ESPN.

The move comes amid fears over mass gatherings of supporters, which was a key factor in the decision to abandon plans to play out the campaign on a home-and-away basis.

Following a video conference involving all 20 Premier League clubs on Friday, the determination to complete the season, which has been suspended since March 13 due to the coronavirus pandemic, was re-stated by the league.

Sources told ESPN earlier on Friday that the Premier League is set for a decisive vote on May 8 as talks continue over ways to

finish the 2019-20 season.

During the Friday meeting, the government-backed plan for football to return this summer -- named Project Restart -- was laid out to clubs by the Premier League hierarchy and the criteria included the insistence that all of the remaining 92 fixtures must be played at neutral venues.

Sources have told ESPN that the venues include some current Premier League stadiums, Wembley Stadium and one other unnamed ground.

With issues such as relegation yet to be decided, and with Liverpool needing just two wins to clinch the club's first title since 1990, concerns over thousands of fans congregating outside their team's stadium for key games have led to the authorities ruling

out the staging of home and away games.

The decision has also confirmed the reality that Liverpool will be unable to clinch the title at Anfield.

Sources have told ESPN that, with social distancing measures likely to be in place for months, the need for fans to stay at home is of paramount importance and that the selection of match venues would be made in order to ensure supporters do not travel to games.

The decision has opened up the prospect of fixtures such as Everton-versus-Liverpool being played at the likes of Wembley or Old Trafford, or Tottenham-versus-Manchester United being staged hundreds of miles away at Newcastle's St James' Park or Southampton's St Mary's Stadium.

Stadiums will also be selected due to their ability to ensure social distancing measures between players, staff and all other essential workers at the fixtures.

Secure perimeters around the stadium and the COVID-19 infection rate in the local area will also be factors in selecting grounds for fixtures.

The Premier League has ruled out the use of the National Football Centre at St George's Park for staging games, with stadiums the preferred and most suitable option.

While no date has been set by the Premier League for a resumption of the season, it is understood that early-June is the target if the U.K. government relaxes its current lockdown measures on May 7.

(Source: ESPN)

## New date for Asian Junior Handball Championship announced

**TASNIM** — The 17th Asian men's Junior Handball Championship will be held in October.

The competition was originally scheduled to be held from July 10 to 22, 2020 in the southern city of Shiraz, Fars Province but it was cancelled due to coronavirus outbreak.

Now, Asian Handball Federation (AHF) has announced that the competition will be held from October 3 to 13 in Shiraz.

The Iran handball federation will be hosting an Asian tournament after six years.

## Hadipour ranks 6th in world taekwondo ranking

**IRNA** — Iranian taekwondo player Armin Hadipour has ranked sixth in his weight category in the world, according to Mohsen Setorgi, the head of the Taekwondo Committee of Gilan Province.

Hadipour used to stand fifth in the previous ranking of the World Taekwondo Federation.

He plays for the Iranian national taekwondo team at -58 weight category and has already booked a ticket for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games.

Hadipour gained 312.84 points to win the sixth spot in the world ranking.

## Cycling: European championships postponed by a year - UEC

**PARIS (Reuters)** — The road cycling European championships scheduled for September in the Italian province of Trentino have been postponed by a year amid the COVID-19 crisis, the Union Europeenne de Cyclisme (UEC) said on Saturday.

"Due to the difficult situation affecting the whole world... the European Road Championships in Trentino (Italy) from 9 to 13 September will be postponed to 2021 and will be held in the same city," the UEC wrote in a statement.

With elite racing suspended until Aug. 1, the sport's flagship race, the Tour de France, was moved to Aug. 29-Sept. 20.

The UEC, however, said it would "look at the various alternatives for the 2020 European Road Championships and UEC calendar events this season so that all titles in each category can be awarded in all disciplines".

## Guardiola convinced me to snub Barcelona for Man City - Brazil teen Couto

Defender Yan Couto has told ESPN Brasil that an intervention from Pep Guardiola led to him turning down Barcelona in favor of a move to Manchester City at the 11th hour.

Couto, 17, was on the verge of joining Barca from Coritiba in January when Man City coach Guardiola phoned him and convinced him to change his mind.

Sources told ESPN that City's financial package for the Brazilian right-back was also higher than Barca's, with the Premier League side paying an initial €6 million rising to €12m. "I had a good conversation with Barcelona and I thought I would go there," Couto told ESPN Brasil. "But then Manchester City appeared and showed me how things would be there.

"At first, they wanted to loan me out straight away, but then I spoke with Guardiola. He told me that I would do preseason with the first team and from there it would depend on me.

"Guardiola was very attentive and said that he was really happy I was coming to the club. It was the best decision for me."

Couto was due to arrive at City in July, after turning 18, for preseason, although the coronavirus pandemic could delay his move to England.

German clubs Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund had also moved for the defender, who caught the eyes of Europe's biggest sides during in Brazil's U17 World Cup win in 2019.

The teenager said he leaves Coritiba with a heavy heart but the chance to succeed in Europe was too big to turn down.

"I have been a fan of Coritiba since I was a kid," he added. "My only dream when I was younger was to be a professional for Coritiba.

"I really wanted to do a full season in the Brazilian league, but unfortunately it has not worked out that way. I saw that I could achieve big things and I am fulfilling a dream by going to play in Europe."

(Source: Soccernet)

## Martinez to stay in charge of Belgium until next World Cup - reports

**BRUSSELS (Reuters)** — Belgium coach Roberto Martinez has extended his contract through to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, ending weeks of speculation about a new deal, Belgian media reported on Saturday.

There was no official confirmation from the Belgian football association but newspapers said Martinez would stay in charge through to the next World Cup after negotiating a new two-year deal.

His contract was up after this year's European Championship, which has been shifted back a year because of the coronavirus crisis.

Martinez, 46, had already said in interviews over the last weeks he wanted to stay in charge in order to take Belgium to Euro 2021, where they are drawn in Group B and will play Denmark, Finland and Russia.

The team, who are top of the FIFA world rankings, had qualified in imposing fashion, by winning all 10 qualifiers, scoring 40 goals and conceding just three.

Spanish-born Martinez, the former Wigan Athletic and Everton manager, took Belgium to third place at the World Cup and is popular among the players, reports added.



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Beware, beware of sinfulness. By God, He has veiled His servants' guilt so much as if He has forgiven them.  
*Imam Ali (AS)*

## Huge sculpture in Sanandaj represents Iranian Kurds' resistance during war

➔1 "Such big projects need a team, and a friend named Masud Samimi helped me in this project," he said.

"Huge sculptures are something common in other countries but have been missing in Iran. We could even make a sculpture twice as large and taller than this," he added.



A man poses for a photo by the huge sculpture in Abidar Park in the western Iranian city of Sanandaj in an undated photo. (ISNA/Farshid Ardalan)

He also said that he believes such huge sculptures draw the attention of tourists in addition to their concepts and values for the local people.

## "Ms. Online" goes online on weekend

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — Director Aryan Rezai plans to stage "Ms. Online" based Iranian dramatist Mohammad Charmshir's "Dead Dear Day" online for Iranian theater aficionados on Thursday and Friday.



A poster for "Ms. Online", which will be staged online by director Aryan Rezai.

Nasim Adabi will play in the monologue, which is about a woman who teaches cooking to people online during the home quarantine.

Earlier last week, Rezai directed American writer David Mamet's play "Mr. Happiness" online with actor Afshin Hashemi to raise funds for Yarane \_Barekate Mehr, a charity organization supporting female-headed households.

## India's Bollywood star Rishi Kapoor, 67, dies of leukemia

**MUMBAI (Reuters)** — Indian actor Rishi Kapoor, who starred in celebrated Bollywood movies such as "Bobby" and "Mera Naam Joker", died on Thursday after a two-year battle with leukemia, his family said.

Kapoor, 67, the scion of a famed film industry family, is survived by his wife and two children, and had been diagnosed with cancer in 2018.

"He remained jovial and determined to live to the fullest right through two years of treatment across two continents," the family said in a statement.

The actor had moved to New York for treatment soon after the cancer was detected, returning to his hometown of Mumbai last September.

Kapoor's death followed that on Wednesday of another Indian actor, Irrfan Khan, 54, who had roles in films such as "Life of Pi" and "Jurassic World", and who also suffered from cancer.

Kapoor's family urged his fans, who under normal circumstances would have been expected to pour onto the streets to mourn him, to follow novel coronavirus social-distancing rules.

# Iranian sculptor Parviz Tanavoli's nightingales chanting love song for health workers

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — Vancouver-based prominent Iranian sculptor Parviz Tanavoli has made a series of limited-edition medallions to raise funds for the hospitals in his native country fighting COVID-19, the Art Newspaper has reported.

"I am extremely impressed by how Iranian healthcare workers are dealing with the COVID-19 crisis, and what they are accomplishing with a bare minimum of equipment," said Tanavoli, who is known as the father of modern Iranian sculpture.

He also added that due to harsh sanctions imposed by the U.S. as well as plunging oil revenues, Iran has been "devastated" by the crisis.

"I wanted to show my appreciation as an Iranian—not just as an artist," Tanavoli noted.

The design for the medallion depicting a nightingale singing on the palm of a hand and a cypress tree on the flip side was created at the end of March. It was sent to expert craftsmen in Tehran that he has worked with before. They produced molds and began casting a limited edition of 100 bronze medallions, which are on sale for \$600, and 20 silver medallions, priced at \$1,500 each.

Tanavoli said that in Iranian folklore, the nightingale is a lucky bird bearing good news who "brings the message of the beloved to the lovers" while the cypress tree is a symbol of long life.

The cypress motif on the medallions bears an inscription reading, "This medal is designed to commemorate the heroic endeavors of all healthcare workers worldwide who are risking their own lives to save the lives of others."

The medallions are set against a background of hundreds of vertical lines



Parviz Tanavoli's medallion, which he is selling

representing the Iranian people, says the artist.

They each come wrapped in a turquoise ribbon representing "healthy lungs". Twenty of the medallions have sold in the past two

days, mainly to members of the Iranian diaspora, who like the artist, "want to do something" to help their countrymen from afar, Tanavoli says.

The medallions can be ordered by emailing pr@tanavolimuseum.com to help hospitals in Iran during the coronavirus pandemic.

## Abdolhossein Zarrinkub's "The Dawn of Islam" published in Italy

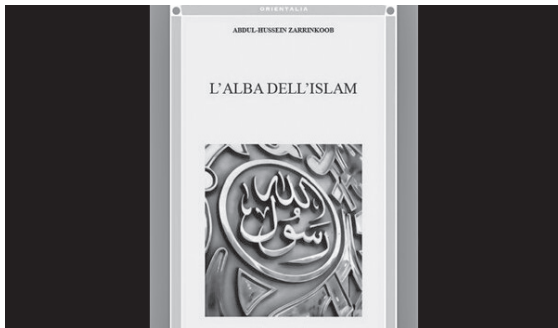
**CULTURE** **TEHRAN** — An Italian translation of "The Dawn of Islam" by the prominent scholar of Iranian literature Abdolhossein Zarrinkub has been published in Italy.

Published by the Il Cerchio Publishing House in the Italian city of Rimini on March 15, the book has been translated into Italian by Somayyeh Seddiqi under the title "L'alba dell'Islam".

The book will be available from several online bookshops on May 12 and will next appear in bookstores in July.

The book reviews the condition of Mecca in Saudi Arabia before and during the birth of Prophet Muhammad (S), in addition to the years after the death of the Prophet of Islam till the end of the Umayyad government.

Zarrinkub's studies on Persian culture, history and literature made him a global Iranologist and undisputed master of Persian literature and poetry. He wrote dozens of books in Persian, French and English, and published hundreds of articles.



Front cover of the Italian version of "The Dawn of Islam" by Abdolhossein Zarrinkub.

## Iran's UNESCO to organize music festival to salute health workers

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — The Iranian National Commission for UNESCO plans to organize an online music festival to salute doctors and health workers fighting COVID-19.

In a press release published on Saturday, the organization has asked Iranian musicians in single or group performances to take part in the festival entitled "The Clad in White, Caretakers of Love".

Those musicians who are interested in participating in the event must send their performances recorded on five-minute maximum videos.

The participant can leave messages in the videos, expressing their thanks to the doctors and medical staff in the country.

The Iranian National Commission for UNESCO will publish a selection of the submissions on its Instagram.



A poster for the Clad in White, Caretakers of Love music festival.

## NBCUniversal weighs layoffs at media, entertainment units: WSJ



People pose for photos at Universal Studios Singapore in Sentosa March 4, 2020. (Reuters/Edgar Su)

**NEW YORK (Reuters)** — Comcast Corp (CMCSA.O) owned NBCUniversal is evaluating a significant reduction of staff across its portfolio of media and entertainment properties as part of a cost-cutting effort, the Wall Street Journal reported on Friday, citing people familiar with the matter.

Discussions began this week regarding cost-cutting measures, including layoffs, according to the report.

Along with its industry peers, NBCUniversal is taking a financial hit from the coronavirus outbreak which has shuttered movie theaters and theme parks. The company has temporarily closed its theme parks and suspended its sports

productions and most of its film and TV production.

Although all divisions are being looked at, some areas likely to be under a microscope at NBCUniversal are the theme-parks division and Universal Pictures, the WSJ reported.

NBCUniversal declined to comment on the report.

The company, which reported its results earlier this week, said its quarterly revenue at the filmed entertainment unit fell 22.5% this quarter from a year earlier, while revenue at theme parks fell 31.9%.

Last month, Walt Disney Co (DIS.N) said it will start furloughs of non-essential U.S. employees across the company.

## Nigerian Afrobeat pioneer Tony Allen dies aged 79



Nigerian singer Tony Allen performs at the Mawazine Festival in Rabat, May 17, 2008. (Reuters/Rafael Marchante)

**LAGOS (Reuters)** — Nigerian drummer and composer Tony Allen, who worked closely with musician Fela Kuti as a pioneer of the Afrobeat genre, died in Paris aged 79, his manager said.

The Afrobeat sound, which rose to prominence in Nigeria in the 1970s, combined organ riffs with West African drum patterns and brass instruments. Allen's drumming was a key part of the rhythmic structure that underpinned the fusion of jazz, funk and West African melodies.

Allen died on Wednesday evening in Paris of a heart attack, National Public Radio (NPR) cited his manager Eric Trosset as saying on Thursday.

"Farewell Tony! Your eyes saw what most

couldn't see. You are the coolest person on Earth! As you used to say, "There is no end," Trosset said in a tribute posted on Facebook.

Allen recorded more than 30 albums with Kuti and his group, Africa '70, which fused jazz, funk and African traditional singing. The songs were usually over 10 minutes long and Kuti's lyrics were often angry diatribes against corruption, African dictators and Nigeria's military regimes.

Kuti, who died in 1997, once said that "without Tony Allen, there would be no Afrobeat".

In later years Allen worked with a broad range of artists including musician Brian Eno who referred to Allen "perhaps the greatest drummer who has ever lived".