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Iran will never accept violation of Resolution 2231: Rouhani

TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani warned on Wednesday that Iran “will never accept” violation of the UN Security Council Resolution 2231 that endorsed the 2015 nuclear deal.

“It is the absolute right of Iran to be removed from the arms embargo (list) within the framework of the 2231 reso-

lution,” Rouhani told a cabinet meeting.

Under Resolution 2231, arms embargo against Iran will expire in October.

However, U.S. Secretary of States Mike Pompeo is preparing an argument that the U.S. remains a participant in the Iran nuclear accord that President Trump has renounced. **→2**

IMIDRO to inaugurate projects worth over \$2.2b by next March

TEHRAN — Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) plans to put projects worth \$2.276 billion into operation during the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2021), according to the head of the organization, IRNA reported.

Khodadad Gharibpour said IMIDRO and its subsidiaries are going to implement 31 projects in a variety of fields including steel, copper, gold, antimony, nepheline

syenite, phosphate and also mining infrastructure in the current year which is named the year of “Surge in Production” by the Leader of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei.

According to the official, the mentioned projects are going to create 4,113 direct jobs and 23,280 indirect jobs.

Gharibpour further noted that IMIDRO is also contributing to \$1.93 billion worth of projects that are going to be implemented by the private sector. **→4**

Naqqali perfect medium to present Shahnameh stories: performer Mirza-Ali

By Manijeh Rezapoor

TEHRAN — Morshed Mohsen Mirza-Ali has said that naqqali is the most powerful medium for presenting stories from the Shahnameh, Persian poet Ferdowsi's epic masterpiece.

Naqqali is a dramatic style of storytelling dedicated to stories from the Shahnameh and other epic Persian stories, and someone

who performs naqqali is called a morshed or naqqal.

The Shahnameh contains stories of legendary Iranian kings and heroes.

“You can give the naqqals pieces of old texts from the Shahnameh, or Persian poets like Sadi and Hafez, and they can make and produce the best out of them,” he told the Tehran Times in an interview on Wednesday. **→12**



PERSPECTIVE

M.A. Saki
Deputy editor-in-chief

White House discussing phasing out coronavirus task force. Here is the motive behind it.

The White House is mulling over the winding down of its coronavirus task force, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence announced on Tuesday, even as the country is exceeding the grim death milestone of 70,000.

“But it’s — it really is all a reflection of the tremendous progress we’ve made as a country. The president stood up the White House Coronavirus Task Force to marshal — in January — to marshal a national response”, the vice president, who leads the task force, told reporters.

While it is not clear whether the task force would be replaced by a different type, Pence said doctors like Dr. Deborah Birx and Dr. Anthony Fauci, two prominent figures in the task force's briefings, will continue to work with the White House on the pandemic.

Dr. Fauci appeared to be unaware of the announcement. “That’s not true, I’ve been in every task force meeting, and that’s not what they are doing,” Fauci told CBS News earlier Tuesday.

Later in the day in Arizona, President Trump confirmed his vice president's remarks and suggested that it's time to move on to other phases. “I think we're looking at phase two and we're looking at other phases ... the task force has done a phenomenal job,” he said.

In an interview with CNN, a senior administration official linked the decision to reopening the economy, saying, the administration is shifting focus toward “putting Americans back to work”.

Trump's obsession with a fast-track economic recovery is quite understandable. The U.S. economy is in free fall with as many as 30 million Americans out of work and countless businesses collapsing.

Trump is well aware of how this situation can dent re-election chances; thus, feeling the scramble to salvage the economy.

Holding regular briefings about the pandemic is least helpful to the flailing president as the meetings keep the pandemic in the spotlight, making it harder for the White House to justify urgent measures to reopen the economy. **→3**

Iran among few countries cited by WHO for clinical trials

TEHRAN — The World Health Organization (WHO) has so far announced clinical trials of only 12 countries, including Iran, with scientific and high-level research capabilities can be cited worldwide, head of Tehran coronavirus control committee has said.

In Tehran alone, 125 clinical trials with research and high scientific standards are underway, ISNA quoted Alireza Zali as saying on Wednesday.

So far, 640 new research projects in the field of COVID-19 are being carried out at medical universities, and for some time now, due to special global conditions, global webinars are being formed, most of which have been between Iranian experts and European or North American physicians, he explained.

In all of these joint webinars, countries were amazed with our ways of diagnosis, treatment,

and prevention; today, we can export the best practices in the field of medicine, he added.

Medicine such as chloroquine were used to treat coronavirus in the early days of the outbreak in Iran, and only 40 days later did political officials in other countries refer to it as an effective drug, he stated.

Today, we have the highest level of expertise in respiratory care and the use of non-invasive artificial ventilation devices, he said, noting, we are proud to have the highest number of spinal and orthopedic surgeries in the world at the time of epidemic.

“We treated coronavirus patients who did not even have a companion, and fortunately the medical community have done the best ever,” he emphasized.

In Tehran, we are facing an increase in waste generation since the onset of the epidemic, and perhaps the lesser-known staff who played an

important role are municipal waste workers, whose work has increased 8-10 times during this period, he concluded.

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

By implementing research and development projects on coronavirus, we will offer excellent scientific products shortly on the international scale, he added.

Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Wednesday that the total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus has reached 101,650 of whom 6,418 have lost their lives.

However, 81,587 patients have recovered from the disease. During the past 24 hours, some 1,680 new cases have been identified in the country.

‘Iraq will purchase S-400 if U.S. does not provide modern armaments’

A senior Iraqi lawmaker says his country will buy long-range surface-to-air S-300 or S-400 air defense missile systems from Russia in a bid to update its own defense infrastructure in case Washington does not help Baghdad in getting modern armaments.

“Iraq is contemplating buying S-300 or S-400 systems from Russia in order to secure its own airspace against any foreign act of aggression. Iraq will reach out to purchase such systems in case the American side does not provide modern air defense armaments,” the head of the security and defense committee in the Iraqi parliament, Mohammad Reza al-Haider, told Iraqi News Agency (INA) in an exclusive interview on Tuesday.

He added, “Iraq needs to upgrade its air defense infrastructure in order to protect its skies

and sovereignty, and to prevent any possible violations of the country's airspace. There is an ineffective American air defense system as well as a Russian system that can strike air targets at ranges up to 20 kilometers.”

“The security and defense committee plays a supervisory and legislative role to improve the morale of security forces, meet their needs in cooperation with the executive branch, approve necessary funds in the budget, and offer advice particularly in the field of intelligence...,” the senior Iraqi legislator pointed out.

Back on April 30, Russian Ambassador to Iraq Maksim Maksimov said Moscow was prepared to provide Baghdad with advanced S-400 air defense missile systems once the Arab country made an official request for the military hardware.

“The Russian side has, thus far, not received an official request in this regard. There is no doubt that recent developments have increased interest in [procurement of] air missile defense systems, especially the S-400 system,” Iraq's Arabic-language al-Ahad news agency quoted Maksimov as saying at the time. The United States has already warned Iraq of the consequences of extending military cooperation with Russia, and striking deals to purchase advanced weaponry, particularly S-400 missile systems.

According to Press TV, Washington had earlier threatened sanctions against Iraq under the so-called Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) as a possible consequence of striking defense deals with Moscow.

The CAATSA was signed into law in August 2017, imposing sanctions on Iran, North Korea, and Russia.



© ISNA / Morteza Zanganeh

Tiran-Karvan home to enigmatic stone doors

Tiran-Karvan county in central Iran is somewhat known for its enigmatic stone doors that lead to backyard of many houses.

Some of them bear special engravings such as rose-like patterns. The doors are said to date from nearly two millennia, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

Despite being fairly heavy, the doors are easily opened and closed. Actually, they are one of the most important features of Tiran's architecture.

ARTICLE

Salman Parviz
Journalist

Politicizing Covid-19 Trump's reactions as U.S. president and medic-in-chief

Before the Covid-19 pandemic I dreaded at my certainty that U.S. President Donald Trump stands a good chance for re-election in November. However, Trump's behavior and reactions have given me some hope. Can Trump administration's poor response to the pandemic cost him the elections in November?

His early neglect has accelerated the America's economic decline and now he is hurrying to re-open cities and bring a festival of economic recovery before November, prioritizing economics over public health. Rather prioritizing his presidency.

Referring to virus as the “Democrat's hoax” and later as the “Chinese virus”, attacking the credibility of WHO, suspension of all immigration to the U.S., blaming China for ignoring the outbreak in the early stages, blocking Iran's \$5 billion in emergency aid from IMF, ratcheting up even more sanctions on Iran amid the deadly outbreak, ..., and the list goes on.

In one of his White House briefings, Trump prematurely assumed that the coronavirus outbreak can be contained and declared that the U.S. economy will ‘skyrocket’ once it is. There is no way of knowing how or when this pandemic will end.

Second Covid-19 peak would be a disaster if the lockdowns are lifted too early, says UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson in his first public statement since recovering from coronavirus.

Remember the “war on HIV”? Since the 1980s, the virus has infected more than 74 million and killed 32 million people, mostly non-Westerners, mostly after the scientists found a treatment to control the virus in the mid-1990s. Tragically, some 770,000 people died from AIDS in 2018 alone, reports WHO.

Early on when the Covid-19 was called “virus” or “pneumonia” and the rate of fatalities were on the increase the Western media repeatedly compared the number of U.S. fatalities with casualties of 9/11, of September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York. **→3**

Iran tops list of countries accepting IAEA inspections in 2019

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's ambassador to the Vienna-based international organizations, has said that Iran tops the list of countries which accepted inspections of the International Atomic Energy Agency in 2019.

"Last year, the Islamic Republic received 21 percent of the entire visits that were made to various nuclear sites across the world by inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Organization (IAEA)," Press TV quoted him as saying on Tuesday.

He was citing the IAEA's 129-page 2019 Safeguards Implementation Report.

The country also received more than 90 percent of the visits that were paid by the inspectors to the 62 countries which have signed the Safeguards Agreement with the agency and its Additional Protocol, the ambassador explained.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's 2019 Safeguards Implementation Report shows that monitors continued receiving wide access to Iranian nuclear sites even as new questions arose over the completeness of the country's declared atomic stockpile, according to the restricted document seen by Bloomberg.

"The agency continued to verify and monitor the nuclear-related commitments of the Islamic Republic of Iran under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action," read the 129-page report prepared for diplomats that accounts for resources spent on enforcing the landmark 2015 agreement among world powers.

IAEA monitors increased visits to nuclear sites more than a 10th last year, said the report, according to Bloomberg.

Pentagon claims Iran's recent military satellite launch is a 'security concern'

The United States' top military officer claimed on Tuesday that Iran's recent military satellite launch, the first for the country, is a concerning feat.

"Different missiles can do different things, one can carry a satellite and one can carry some sort of device that can explode. So, the bottom line is yes, it is a security concern anytime Iran is testing any type of long-range missile," explained Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army Gen. Mark Milley, CNBC reported.

"They launched a satellite vehicle and I think we publicly stated that it was tumbling, so the satellite itself, not overly concerned about it, but the missile technology, the second and third-order missile technology and the lessons learned from that is a concern," he added.

Iran said last month that it successfully launched the nation's first military satellite.

The satellite, dubbed Noor, was sent into orbit using a long-range rocket, according to an April 22 statement by Iran's Revolutionary Guard.

U.S. officials have long feared that Iran's pursuit of developing satellite technology is a cover for ballistic missile activity. Tehran, meanwhile, has denied those assertions and has said that Iran is not working toward a nuclear weapons program.

The satellite launch came days after the Pentagon claimed that ships from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy took "dangerous and provocative" actions near U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ships in the Persian Gulf.

Six U.S. military vessels were conducting training operations in international waters when 11 Iranian ships "crossed the bows and sterns of the U.S. vessels at extremely close range and high speeds," according to a U.S. Navy statement.

The U.S. crews issued multiple warnings via bridge-to-bridge radio, five short blasts from the ships' horns and long-range acoustic noise maker devices to the Iranian ships.

President Donald Trump warned that the United States would destroy Iranian gunboats that harass American ships at sea.

"I have instructed the United States Navy to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea," the president wrote in a post on Twitter.

The threat, which contributed to a recovery in oil prices, represents another anxious turn in relations between Washington and Tehran.

Tensions have soared following Trump's withdrawal from the landmark Iran nuclear deal brokered by the Obama administration.

The 2015 nuclear agreement lifted sanctions on Iran that crippled its economy and cut its oil exports roughly in half. In exchange for sanctions relief, Iran accepted limits on its nuclear program and allowed international inspectors into its facilities.

And while Trump's "maximum pressure" policy has crippled Iran's economy, slashing its oil exports, Tehran has said it will not negotiate with Washington while sanctions are in place.

What's more, the Trump administration has previously said that it will not offer sanctions relief to Iran as the deadly coronavirus outbreak hits the West Asian nation.

"The whole world should know that humanitarian assistance to Iran is wide open, it's not sanctioned," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo claimed during a March 20 press briefing at the White House.

Iran, Azerbaijan eager to boost economic ties

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — Presidential officials from Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan weighed plans to promote the economic ties between the two neighbors regardless of the novel coronavirus outbreak.

In a telephone conversation on Tuesday, Chief of Staff of the Iranian president Mahmoud Vaezi and Hikmat Hajiev, head of the Foreign Policy Affairs Department of Azerbaijan's Presidential Administration, called for the continuation of economic exchanges between the two neighbors in conformity with the health protocols, stressing that there is no obstacle to the enhancement of mutual cooperation.

Vaezi commended Azerbaijan for its timely decision to convene an online summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Contact Group earlier this week, adding, "The Republic of Azerbaijan, as the holder of the NAM presidency, not only did not allow the coronavirus outbreak to prevent the summit meeting, but also took a valuable step in coordinating collective action among the countries in the battle with the disease by choosing the issue of coronavirus as the main topic of the conference."

He also expressed hope that the stances and solutions mooted in the NAM summit would help the countries to join hands to overcome such a global challenge and stand against the parties that seek to take advantage of these problems.

The Iranian official further expressed satisfaction with the growing trend in the cooperation and relations between Tehran and Baku regardless of the coronavirus outbreak, saying Iran hopes that the relations would continue to grow with a rapid pace.

Iran will never accept violation of Resolution 2231: Rouhani

1 → That claim comes even as President Donald Trump clearly stated in May 2018 he was "terminating the United States' participation" in the JCPOA.

Pompeo's move is part of an intricate strategy to pressure the United Nations Security Council to extend arms embargo on Tehran or see far more stringent sanctions reimposed on the country.

Diplomats and analysts say it is absurd that the United States is still a participant to the JCPOA.

Rouhani said, "If we build a weapon or purchase it, it will be for defending the people. Our weapon is not fuel on fire, it is water on fire and we will not start a war."

Rouhani added, "The United States and certain other countries must know this path (extending arms embargo) is closed to them."

The president asked the U.S. to return to the deal and compensate Iran for the losses.

"It is the best way for the United States to repent, return to the JCPOA [the 2015 nuclear deal] and apologize the Iranian people and pay for the harm. However, I think this administration will not come to its sense."

Rouhani threatened Iran will respond if arms embargo is extended.

"The United States must know what it argues about arms embargo is inseparable



part of the JCPOA. Our response to extension of arms embargo will be the same that I wrote to leaders of the 4+1 group. I wrote to them in the last paragraph that if they make a mistake, it will be a historic defeat for them," the president pointed out.

5+1 group has been renamed 4+1 as the U.S. is no longer a party to the multilateral deal.

Rouhani added, "A return of arms embargo on Iran under any title... or mechanism will lead to dire consequences."

"They [the U.S.] have no way forward and no way to backward," Rouhani noted.

He noted that the U.S. is no longer a party to the JCPOA.

"Unless they request again and all the

Iran sends medical items to Germany, Lebanon and Afghanistan

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi has said that Iran will keep helping countries in need, announcing Iran sent medical items to Germany, Afghanistan and Lebanon.

"As Iran has progressed in flattening the #COVID19 curve, Minister @JZarif promised to supply Earth globe europe-africa with COVID19-related devices & equipment. As a gesture of solidarity Iran has sent medical items to Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Germany recently. Iran will keep lending a helping hand to nations in need," Mousavi tweeted on Wednesday.

A consignment of COVID-19 diagnostic kits manufactured by an Iranian knowledge-based company has been exported to Germany.

The shipment has consisted of 40,000 coronavirus detection kits, Behrooz HAJIAN Tehrani, project manager and CEO

of the manufacturing company said on Tuesday, ISNA news agency reported.

Referring to the company's background of producing tumor marker test kits, infectious and hormonal diseases and more than five types of biochemical kits, he said, "So far, these products have been exported to countries such as Germany, Italy, Belgium, Brazil, South Korea, and Turkey."

Emphasizing that the diagnostic kits made by this company have been able to receive complex processes for obtaining a license in the country, he announced the kits have also obtained the European CE (certification mark that indicates conformity with health, safety, and environmental protection standards) license.

The first cases of COVID-19 were identified in the Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019, which has now spread to more than 210 countries, infecting nearly 3,663,968 people and killing more than 252,758.

IRGC forces kill several terrorists in western Kordestan province

(Press TV) — A number of terrorists have been killed as forces with Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) carried out a security operation in the western province of Kordestan, which borders Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region.

A statement by the IRGC's Hamzeh Seyed al-Shohada Base said several "counter-revolutionary" terrorists were killed during clashes in Divandarreh County on Tuesday, without providing a specified number.

Three IRGC staff members, including senior commander Colonel Shakiba Salimi, were also martyred during the operation, it added.

The statement further hailed Salimi for spending his life promoting security in Kordestan and recently making utmost efforts in fighting a deadly coronavirus in the country.

Iranian security forces have repeatedly busted terrorist grouplets and killed their

members during security operations near the western borders.

Over the past years, the country's Kordestan Province has seen numerous cross-border incursions by Iraq-based terrorists.

In July 2019, the IRGC staged a multi-pronged offensive involving its missile, drone and artillery units on terrorist positions along the Iranian border with Iraq's Kurdistan region following a deadly attack against IRGC members in Iran's northwestern province of West Azarbaijan.

The raid was conducted after Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) authorities did not heed the IRGC's earlier warnings that terrorist groups are using border areas to train, organize and dispatch terror teams into Iran, according to the elite Iranian force.

A gathering of terrorist commanders had also been targeted in the same region by an IRGC missile strike a year earlier.

Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims Office urges removal of sanctions on Iran

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims

Office has sent a letter to U.S. President Donald Trump, urging him to remove sanctions on Iran.

Sheikhulislam Allahshukur Pashazade said in his letter that the sanctions have made it difficult for Iran to access medical equipment and called for immediate end to sanctions when the country is fighting the coronavirus, the Mehr news agency reported on Wednesday.

He also attached great importance to humanitarian cause in the coronavirus pandemic.

Renowned American scholar Noam Chomsky has said it is "sheer sadism" 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 Srećko Horvat in April, Chomsky blasted U.S. Presi-



dent 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.

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

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

"Remember, if we don't beat it there, we don't beat it here. This virus doesn't respect borders," he added. "It's just good public health

policy to help even our adversaries beat back this scourge."

The novel coronavirus disease, also known as COVID-19, hit Iran at a time when U.S.-Iranian tensions were at an all-time high. The Trump administration initially relaxed its "super-maximum economic pressure" campaign in order to allow for humanitarian trade but has refused to budge any further, claiming that the current exemptions are enough. Murphy disagreed.

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

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

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

U.S. is an uninvited guest in the region: expert

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — International

affairs expert Sabah Zanganeh has said that the United States is an "uninvited guest" in the Persian Gulf region and any incident will be harmful to it.

"The United States' security and military forces have understood that Iran is serious about defending its interests. Iran is the owner, but the United States is an uninvited guest. If any incident occurs, it is this guest who will be harmed," he told IRNA in an interview published on Tuesday.

Zanganeh added that the United States knows that it should not make a mistake and endanger the regional security.

"It was a time when Portugal and Britain were in the Persian Gulf region, but they left. The United States must learn a lesson and leave the region," he noted.

President Hassan Rouhani said on April 29 that the U.S. must know that the waterway in the West Asia region is the Persian Gulf and not the New York or Washington Gulf.

"They must understand the situation by the name of the place and the people who have protected it for thousands of years and stop hatching plots against the Iranian people," Rouhani said in a cabinet meeting.

He said, "The United States has witnessed the Iranian people's success in all areas and also in protecting the Persian Gulf waterway. Our soldiers in armed forces, the Guards [the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps], Basij, Army and police forces have always protected and will protect the Persian Gulf."

Rouhani also described the Persian Gulf as very "important" and "sensitive" region.

"The Persian Gulf belongs to the Iranian nation and has always been and will be the Persian Gulf," the president noted.

IRGC Navy chief Alireza Tangsiri said on April 27 that the United States is an "uninvited guest" in the Persian Gulf region.

The chief of the Iranian Army Command and General Staff College (DAFOOS) has said that the United States is an "uninvited guest" in the Persian Gulf region.

"The Persian Gulf is like a big old house which has eight doors and independent rooms and also a yard which is shared by this eight neighbors. If a guest comes, he has to leave after a while, because a guest should not stay permanently," General Hossein Valivand told reporters on the sidelines of a ceremony held to mark the national day of the Persian Gulf.



Valivand noted that Iran wants the U.S. and all other foreign forces to leave the Persian Gulf region.

"We guarantee security of the Persian Gulf by the Army's Navy and the Guards [the IRGC] and also by cooperation with other neighbors and the countries we have formed military coalition with," he said.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on April 20 that foreign forces' presence in the region is the source of insecurity, instability and tension.

"We consider presence of the foreign forces, especially forces of the United States, in the region a source of tension, instability and insecurity. Their presence is illegal and illegitimate. This is our region and our armed

forces must be able to patrol without hurdle," Mousavi said in a press conference held through video conference.

He said, "This issue led to our forces' response. It has been for thousands of years that Iran is in this region and the regional security must be provided by the regional countries, especially Oman which is in the Strait of Hormuz region."

The spokesman urged foreign forces to leave the region and not make Iran give them warning. Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote on his Twitter page on April 23 that "US forces have no business 7,000 miles away from home, provoking our sailors off our OWN Persian Gulf shores."

It came after U.S. President Donald Trump said he had ordered the U.S. Navy to destroy Iranian boats "if they harass" U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf.

"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 said in a tweet on April 22.

The IRGC has rejected U.S. description of the Iranian boats' behavior in the Persian Gulf, saying such a depiction is like "Hollywood scenarios".

Tehran dismisses U.S. claim about mistreatment of Afghan migrants as ‘bitter joke’

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Foreign Ministry has rejected as a “bitter joke” a claim by the United States that Iranian guards were involved in the tragic deaths of a number of Afghan migrants near the border.

“Iran has strong ties with Afghanistan & leads the way to help Afghan leaders for inclusive Govt. What happened to Afghan nationals in Herat is tragic & unrelated to Iran, but US regime’s allegation against Iran is a ‘bitter joke’,” the Foreign Ministry said in a statement published via Twitter on Tuesday evening.

“The (US) regime is a war criminal in Afghanistan & state sponsor of terrorism across the world,” the statement added.

It came after U.S. Acting Assistant Secretary for South Asia Alice Wells earlier in the day described as “horrific” Iran’s “cruel treatment and abuse of Afghan migrants alleged in these reports.”

On Sunday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi voiced sympathy with the



families of the victims, saying, “This incident has occurred on Afghan soil, and the

Islamic Republic of Iran’s border police has denied that any happening in relation to this

has taken place on the soil of our country.”

Afghan news media had reported that about 50 Afghan migrants crossing into Iran illegally had been beaten and thrown into a river.

Afghanistan’s Foreign Ministry announced on Saturday that an inquiry had been launched into the tragedy.

According to Tasnim, Afghanistan’s Foreign Ministry spokesman has said the Iranian Foreign Ministry was to submit a letter to the country’s embassy in Tehran on Wednesday proposing joint investigation.

According to Tasnim, Iran spends eight billion dollars on Afghan migrants every year in various sectors.

Based on the latest official figures, 951,142 Afghan refugees reside in Iran. In addition to the refugees, there are around 2.5 million Afghan nationals living in Iran, inclusive of passport holders and undocumented Afghans.

The UN refugee agency has, on numerous occasions, praised Iran for hosting Afghan refugees for more than four decades.

Iran exporting anti-body test kits thanks to talented scientists, envoy boasts

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iran has started to export coronavirus diagnostic kits to a number of countries, including Germany and Turkey, Iranian Ambassador to London Hamid Baedinejad announced on Wednesday.

“Iran is now privileged, thanks to its talented scientists, to consolidate itself within the rank of countries mastering the Covid 19 diagnostic kit technology,” Baedinejad wrote in his Twitter page.

“Iran has now started to export #COVID19 diagnostic kits to a number of countries including Germany and Turkey,” he added.

After succeeding in flattening its coronavirus curve, Iran began helping other countries, especially its neighbors.

On Monday, Lebanese Health Minister Hamad Hassan announced his country has received the first shipment of medical aid from Iran to help Beirut in its fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

“Iran’s help is much appreciated while the country is struggling at the same time to fight against the virus,” Hassan said during a ceremony held at the airport to receive the donation.



Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Mohammad-Jalal Firouznia said that the PCR tests were made in Iran as the country is now capable of exporting such products to other countries.

“We are always ready to help the Lebanese people in all fields especially in the medical area,” he said.

Iran was initially among the countries hardest hit by the novel coronavirus pandemic – partly because of its close ties with China, where the virus originated. As of Wednesday, the disease had infected 101,650 people in the country and claimed the lives of 6,418 people.

Hossein Amir Abdollahian, a senior foreign policy advisor to the Iranian Parliament speaker, said on Saturday evening that Iran can share its experience of successful fight against the coronavirus with Europe and America.

“#CoronaCrisis management has failed in America & parts of Western Europe,” Amir Abdollahian tweeted.

“As #Iran expresses its sympathy, the Nation can share its successful #COVID19 experience w/ Europe & America,” he added.

Last week, the Defense Ministry provided Afghanistan with a consignment of medical and health products for diagnosing COVID-19.

Iran’s armed forces in relentless fight against coronavirus

TEHRAN (FNA) — A military official with Iranian Armed Forces informed on Wednesday of manufacturing a special disinfection system that can be applied in public places as the selfless personnel of the Army and Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) along with the Volunteer forces of Basij are in frontline of combat against coronavirus.

“Designing and building of the first prototype fogging system mounted on vehicles has ended in the IRGC Ground Force,” Brigadier-General Qorban Mohammad Asha’ari, an official at the IRGC Ground Force’s Operation Department, said on Wednesday.

“The system is equipped with a turbo fan to conduct disinfecting operations in the environment,” he added.

General Asha’ari said that earlier the IRGC had mounted water tanks and high-pressure pumps on vehicles to disinfect the public places.

Moreover, a knowledge-based company successfully produced 300,000 face masks per day and is going to finalize manufacturing of 70 machines for producing three-ply masks till the end of the current Iranian year (March 20, 2021)

The company is based in Isfahan’s Scientific-Industrial Town and has been engaged in producing medical, radiological devices

and various types of hospital beds prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 in Iran.

But as of the onset of the deadly disease, it shifted its production line to making face masks to contribute to the nationwide fight against the virus.

Meanwhile, Chairman of the Biotechnology Development Council of Iran Mostafa Qanayee praised the Iranian knowledge-based companies for production of medical equipment, special to fight against coronavirus, with a quality as high as the western products.

“Exports of Iran’s productions in area of fighting and preventing coronavirus to the countries which claim to be pioneers in medical fields after 2 months of the virus outbreak shows that the measures adopted to develop the knowledge-based companies and their works have been very good and effective,” Qanayee said on Wednesday.

His remarks came one day after a knowledge-based company in Iran which has succeeded in the mass-production of serological kits to diagnose COVID-19 virus announced that it would export its product to Germany.

Furthermore, Tehran Mayor Pirouz Hanachi, in a video contact with his counterpart in Vienna Laurie A. DiRocco, conferred on exchange of experiences in battling

coronavirus.

Hanachi referred to the difficulties caused by illegal sanctions in supplying hygiene equipment and medical items.

“We started the social distancing plan after Nowruz Holiday with the cooperation of the Iranian Ministry of Health,” he said.

Hanachi referred to disinfecting pedestrian areas and transportation system, saying “Studies show that 50% of infection in metropolitan cities is related to public areas and transportation.”

“Accordingly, buses and subways are disinfected two times a day,” he added.

Meanwhile, DiRocco said mayors of metropolitan cities should be in touch regardless of political issues.

DiRocco praised the efforts made by Iran in fighting coronavirus which have led to reduction of death toll and number of patients.

Meantime, Iranian Judiciary Spokesman Gholamhossein Esmayeeli said that more than 114,193 prisoners have been granted temporary leave to prevent likely spread of the coronavirus infection among inmates.

“After issuing a circular on granting furlough to prisoners in the coronavirus era, over 500 groups were assigned to examine the situation in jails,” Esmayeeli said.

He added that all cases were examined over the last 15 days and furlough was granted to them in proportion to their crime and behavior.

The Iranian health ministry announced on Wednesday that 1,680 new coronavirus cases have been identified in the country in the past 24 hours, adding that over 81,578 patients have recovered.

“1,680 more patients infected with COVID-19 virus have been identified in the country since yesterday based on confirmed diagnosis criteria,” Health Ministry Spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Wednesday.

He added that the number of coronavirus patients in the country has increased to 101,650 people.

Jahanpour said that 6,418 people have lost their lives due to infection to the virus, including 78 in the past 24 hours.

He, meantime, stated that 81,578 infected people have recovered and been discharged from hospital, expressing concern that 2,735 patients infected with COVID-19 virus are in critical conditions.

Iranian Health Minister Saeed Namaki stressed on April 7 effective measures to control coronavirus epidemic, expressing the hope that the disease would be controlled in Iran by late May.

Politicizing Covid-19

1→ Now the casualties from Covid-19 have way passed the number of people who died during the 9/11 attacks, those comparisons have dimmed.

If not terrorism then war? Now that the Covid-19 death toll in the U.S has surpassed the 59,000 Americans killed in Vietnam war, that comparison has also been dimmed.

Politicizing the response to the pandemic has not only delayed an appropriate reaction and prevention response from heads of states.

Referring to the pandemic as a war and the virus as the ‘invisible enemy’ Trump declared himself as ‘wartime president’ in coronavirus battle in March.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier has insisted this is not a war, but rather the “test of humanity” indirectly responding to French President Emmanuel Macron’s “we are at war” statement.

Trump has warned that the Chinese may not have created the virus in a lab, but have contributed to the spread of the contagion with their habitual secrecy, concealment, and prioritization of politics over health.

Referring to himself as a ‘war president’ Trump accused China of not asking for help at the beginning of the crisis ‘out of pride’.

Changes by the pandemic can result in drastic economic and political changes comparable to those of post WWI and

WWII and could indeed tip the balance of power in favor of one state or another.

Accusations of Chinese hiding the contagion could lead to the beginning of a new cold war between the U.S. and China. ==Medic-in-chief?

The sad hilarity was in full view during a White House briefing, when Trump suggested possibly hitting the body with a “tremendous - whether it’s ultraviolet or just very powerful light, or bringing the light inside the body, either through the skin or some other way” and theorized on injecting disinfectant to knock the virus out «in a minute».

A Washington Post analysis recently found over the 13 hours of past three weeks of briefings Trump spent two hours on attacks, 45 minutes praising himself and his administration and just 4.5 minutes expressing condolences for coronavirus victim. The analysis found that Trump has attacked someone in 113 out of 346 questions he has answered – or a third of his responses.

The analysis found out that Trump has played videos praising himself and his administration’s efforts three times, including one that was widely derided as campaign propaganda produced by White House aides.

Returning back to the 3 November 2020 U.S. elections when Joe Biden and Trump will go head to head for the White House, currently polls are showing Biden is leading,

in battleground states such as Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania.

Following shrinking polling data, Trump had erupted at his campaign manager, Brad Parscale, CNN and The New York Times reported.

The timing of Pence’s announcement and Trump’s argument with his campaign

manager helps reveal the true motive behind the decision.

It is quite likely that the phasing out of the coronavirus task force has been suggested by Parscale in an effort to salvage the president himself no matter how many more American lives are lost to the administration’s poor handling of the situation.

Leader: Satellite launch proves production surge achievable

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Launching satellite into orbit proves Iran is able to achieve a surge in production as well, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Wednesday.

“Some people keep saying it’s impossible and we can’t, but we can,” Ayatollah Khamenei said in a video conference with seven active manufacturers from different parts of the country on the occasion of Labor Week.

“When we can launch a satellite into space with a speed of 7500 m/s, have put a satellite into orbit, and have made significant progress in the defense industry, then we can achieve a surge in production too,” he said, according to his official website.

The Leader explained, “The Iranian wisdom and thought that can build a satellite and set a goal of a 36,000 kilometer orbit for the next satellite, certainly enjoy the same spirit, innovation and creativity needed to produce cars with a consumption of 5 liters/100 km and for production in other sectors.”

During the video conference, managers and a number of exemplary laborers delivered reports on the status of production and about their achievements as well as the problems they face.

They also put forward solutions and proposals for solving the existing problems in order to materialize a surge in production. The Leader meets with laborers every year on the occasion of Labor Week, but this year the meeting was held via videoconference in order to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus.

“A key point is respecting workers’ rights,” said Ayatollah Khamenei. “Fair and punctual payments and job security, which I’ve always stressed, are very important. Some of these gentlemen have mentioned that they haven’t fired any workers following the economic problems due to the coronavirus outbreak. This is very good.”

“Insurance, training, welfare and health services are rights of workers and the responsibility of employers. Of course, if the needs of the families of workers, including their children’s education are fulfilled, it will strengthen worker-employer relationship, which is an auspicious thing.”

■ ‘Should production surge, sanctions virus cannot harm Iran’

The Leader compared production to the body’s immune system, saying if production is favorable and growing, invasive viruses like sanctions and oil prices cannot harm Iran’s economy.

“Real cooperation between the labor force and employers can increase production and economic growth,” he noted, adding, “The labor force should increase their skills and sense of responsibility; employers should increase the workers share from the income of the business.”

“Some of our worker friends had complaints about legislation that overlooked workers’ opinions. Such regulations should definitely be designed justly, and business owners should take this into consideration.”

Iranian special envoy holds phone talk with Taliban officials

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iran’s special envoy for Afghanistan has held phone talks with Taliban political bureau officials over the latest developments in Afghanistan.

During the phone conversation, Mohammad Ebrahim Taherian and Taliban officials exchanged views on future developments in inter-Afghan talks and comprehensive efforts to prevent the spread of the coronavirus in Afghanistan, according to Mehr.

It comes while one of the concerns of the international community is the spread of coronavirus in Afghanistan, especially in the Taliban-controlled areas.

The spread of coronavirus and widespread economic problems as well as a shortage of foodstuffs can lead to new and serious pains for Afghan citizens.

In previous weeks, Taherian has held separate meetings in Kabul with Afghan Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah; President Ashraf Ghani; former president Hamid Karzai; leader of Afghan Jamiat-e Islami Salahuddin Rabbani; and leader of the Islamic Dawah Organization Abdul Rasul Sayyaf to discuss the latest political developments in the country, the peace process and issues of mutual interest.

Chief Iranian, Georgian diplomats discuss coronavirus fight

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif had a phone conversation with his Georgian counterpart David Zalkaliani late on Tuesday.

During the phone call, the two sides conferred on the latest developments in bilateral relations, according to the Foreign Ministry website.

They also discussed the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. Iran has voiced readiness to share its experience in the fight against COVID-19 with the friendly countries across the region.

Also, a consignment of COVID-19 diagnostic kits manufactured by an Iranian knowledge-based company has been exported to Germany.

The shipment has consisted of 40,000 coronavirus detection kits, Behrooz Hajian Tehrani, project manager and CEO of the manufacturing company said on Tuesday.

With the onset of the epidemic, Iranian researchers soon achieved the technology to produce three kinds of COVID-19 diagnostic kits that hit the market.

Two types of diagnostic kits are now mass-produced by knowledge-based companies, first one is the RT-PCR tests, 8 million of which are being produced per month; while the other is serology-based tests that a total of 400,000 are being manufactured monthly and is expected to reach up to 2 million.

The first cases of COVID-19 were identified in the Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019, which has now spread to more than 210 countries, infecting over 3,700,000 people and killing more than 258,000.



White House discussing phasing out coronavirus task force. Here is the motive behind it.

1→ In Trump’s calculation, losing 200,000 American lives does not equate losing a second term. But failing to restore the economy is for sure a one-term predictor.

Aside from the economic aspect of the decision, the briefings have also provided a glimpse into how the White House has

turned into the Trump House.

The gavel-to-gavel coverage of the meetings has damaged Trump’s image unprecedentedly, contributing to the growing disillusionment of American voters with his handling of affairs including the pandemic.

Recent polls have shown Trump trailing the presumptive Democratic nominee Biden

Annual coal output exceeds 1.5m tons

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** - Annual production of coal in Iran reached 1.585 million tons in the previous Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended on March 19), IRNA reported citing the data released by Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO).



As reported, the country's average annual coal concentrate production is about 1.5 million tons, while the country's current demand has reached two million tons.

Currently, Iran's coal sector provides employment for 17,000 people, however the capacity of the country's coal mines is much more than this figure, and development of the mining sector and modernization projects can play an effective role in increasing employment in this sector.

Unofficial data indicate that there are 185 small and large coal mines in the country, of which more than 59 percent are currently active, while 10 mines are being equipped and prepared, and the rest are idle.

Expect a bumpy recovery? Exchanges may provide an upside

As market volatility has eased after the mayhem of March, investors betting on a rocky economic recovery from the coronavirus crisis are buying shares of exchanges that are poised to profit if more turmoil ensues.

The global exchange sector, which thrives in turbulent markets, has outperformed so far this year, falling only 2% in value compared with a 15% drop in world stocks, a Reuters analysis showed.

As countries around the world went into lockdown to slow the spread of the coronavirus, investors repriced the value of assets including stocks, commodities and derivatives, such as futures and options, to reflect recessions. That led to a surge in trading activity as investors tried to hedge positions, while others made bets on where markets were going to bottom out.

Financial exchanges, such as Singapore Exchange Ltd (SGX.SI), Deutsche Boerse (DB1Gn.DE) and New York Stock Exchange-owner Intercontinental Exchange Inc (ICE.N), all saw profits jump as trading-based fee revenues surged.

Asia's bourses, which are more reliant on volumes than their global peers, have gained the most, the analysis showed, as investors reckon they are best placed to benefit from further volatility.

"I think on balance the trends that have been in place will continue for quite a while," said Scott Gilchrist, who manages an AS\$680 million (\$440 million) portfolio of Japanese stocks at Australia's Platinum Asset Management (PTM.AX).

"It's very hard to tell, but my sense - and it's only a gut feel - is that we haven't fully passed through this period of volatility yet," he said.

Gilchrist's fund has been increasing exposure to Japan's GMO Internet Inc (9449.T), owner of a forex trading platform where volumes have been surging, as has GMO's stock, up 9% this year, compared with a 17% drop on Japan's TOPIX index .TOPX.

The 2% decline in the sector globally is largely due to poor performers in Latin America and Africa, obscuring a standout run by Asia's bourses, led by Singapore's SGX, which is benefiting from the uncertain recovery.

"It's a really hard call to make," Michael Syn, head of equities at SGX, where profit hit a 13-year high last quarter amid record turnover, said of the outlook. Markets' optimism seems out of sync with the real economy, he said.

"Is the market pricing in a long future, saying, 'let's not worry about the detail of how we get there?' Or will it suddenly have an aha moment of 'oh my God, I didn't quite understand how bad things are.'"

SGX stock is up 7% this year, one of just two gainers on the national Straits Times Index .STI.

Elsewhere, Deutsche Boerse is up about 3% year-to-date and NYSE-owner ICE is up just under 1%, compared to declines in the DAX .GDAXI and Dow Jones Industrial .DJI indexes of around 19% and 16.5%, respectively.

■ Asia's strategy pays off

Investors have sought out Asia's exchanges for their high exposure to trading volumes, driving share prices up almost 3% this year compared with declines of about 1% for U.S. exchanges and 5% in Europe.

Over the past decade as U.S. and European peers diversified by purchasing data providers and other adjacent businesses to bring in non-trading revenue, which is more stable, Asia's bourses tended to pursue new financial products, leaving them more dependent on trading revenues, but also with lower debt.

"Everyone's really concerned about recapitalisations, refinancing," said John Pearce, chief investment officer of Australian pension fund UniSuper, the top shareholder of domestic bourse operator ASX Ltd (ASX.AX).

"Well, the ASX has got none of those concerns - it's got no debt and market volatility is actually positive for the ASX, so what you're really seeing is the market pricing it as a pretty stable annuity," he said.

To be sure, a repeat of the stratospheric trade volumes of March seems unlikely, especially considering the scale and breadth of the liquidation during the sell-down.

But investors have pointed to Singapore's diversification across asset classes from forex to commodities, Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing House Ltd's (0388.HK) exposure to China, and technology investment by ASX as boosting long-term prospects.

"Recent outperformance, or resilience, is driven mostly by market volatility," said Kristy Fong, senior investment director of Asian equities at Aberdeen Standard Investments in Singapore, whose funds own all three stocks. "We see these stock exchanges as a good proxy for markets, and given that they are pretty much monopolies with good cash flow, it is quite a safe way to get exposure."

(Source: Reuters)

IMIDRO to inaugurate projects worth over \$2.2b by next March

1 → Implementing these projects is going to create direct job opportunities for 4,790 people, he said.

IMIDRO put projects worth \$3.2 billion into operation during the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), Gharibpour, who is also the deputy industry minister, has previously announced.

He also mentioned some of the exploratory projects undertaken by IMIDRO in the

previous year, saying: with 400,000 square kilometers of new exploration operations the organization's total exploration coverage reached 650,000 square kilometers in the previous year.

Gharibpour had previously announced that IMIDRO also managed to revive 146 small and medium-sized mines across the country during the past Iranian calendar year.

Due to the significant role of the mining



sector in the country's non-oil exports, the Industry Ministry has provisioned operational targets in the mining sector's three major areas of exploration, extraction and processing in the current year.

According to Deputy Industry Mining, and Trade Minister Darioush Esmaili, the mining sector accounted for 25 percent of the country's non-oil revenues in the past Iranian calendar year.

NIDC indigenizes know-how of manufacturing 6000 drilling equipment



ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) indigenized the knowledge for manufacturing 6,000 drilling equipment in collaboration with domestic manufacturers and engineers in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), the head of NIDC's Technology and Engineering Department said.

According to Behnoud Mansournejad, before this success, the technology for manufacturing the mentioned equipment was in the possession of a handful of foreign companies.

Among these equipment, the parts related to the rotary Blow out Preventers (BOP) used in air drilling operations have been tested in operation and approved by the operational units for optimal performance. Mansournejad said that the use of the

domestically-made parts and equipment saved the country 45 billion rials (about \$107 million) in the previous year.

For the current year, a list of basic equipment needs of the country have been identified in collaboration with NIDC's operational and support departments to be indigenized by local companies and knowledge-based firms for the first time, he added.

Earlier in 2019, Mansournejad had announced that almost 80 percent of the oil and gas industry's drilling equipment needs have been indigenized by NIDC in the past decade.

According to the official, the equipment indigenized by NIDC include drilling mud pumps, blowout preventers, traction motors, draw-works, drilling fluid recycling systems, mission centrifugal pumps, top drives, and drilling rig slow circulation rate pressure systems.

Shares of CSPO's 20 companies to be offered at stock exchange



ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Shares of 20 companies affiliated to Iran's Civil Servants Pension Organization (CSPO) will be offered at the country's stock exchange by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2021), head of the organization announced on Wednesday.

Making the remarks in a meeting of cooperatives, labor and social welfare minister and his directors, which was also participated by the first vice president, Akbar Eftekhari said that 24 idle companies of CSPO have been dissolved during the past three months, IRNA reported.

Iranian 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 Dajpasand 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."

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has also 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.

Nearly \$2b is required for domestic manufacturing of auto parts

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran's auto parts manufacturers need nearly \$2 billion to manufacture the auto parts required for making 1.2 million vehicles in the country during the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 2021), Iranian Auto Parts Makers Association's Secretary Maziar Beyglou announced.

Speaking with IRNA on Wednesday, Beyglou said that the biggest problem that domestic auto parts manufacturers are currently facing is securing foreign currency.

Since the year start, no foreign currency has been provided for the auto parts manufacturers and they have been seriously facing problems for the shipments of their required raw materials, he complained.

It is while through many endeavors and taking steps in the path of self-reliance in auto parts manufacturing and omitting CKD (completely knocked-down) process in domestic auto industry, today, this industry needs the lowest amount of foreign currency in its history, he added.

"This least requirement of the auto



parts manufacturers is expected to be supplied by Central Bank of Iran (CBI),

and if the CBI cannot provide it, they should give us the permit so that we can secure foreign currency directly from the exporters (who should offer their earned foreign currency in a system named NIMA to provide required foreign currency for

the importers of necessary commodities)", he further noted.

In January, Beyglou announced that Iran has achieved 80 percent self-sufficiency in the manufacturing of auto parts.

He expressed hope that self-reliance in this sector reaches 90 percent through domestic production of required raw ma-

terials.

Domestic parts manufacturers are able to play a key role in creating a boom in the country's manufacturing and employment sectors, in addition to playing their leading role as the auto industry's intermediates, Beyglou said.

Mentioning the industry ministry's strategies for promoting domestic production, he said: "Following the current policies, we will see the production of a number of new vehicles from domestic automakers in the coming years."

Last May, Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani issued a directive on "strengthening domestic manufacturing of imported auto parts".

Addressing two of his deputies, Farshad Moqimi, deputy for industrial affairs, and Mohammad-Baqer Ali, the board chairman of Iran's Industrial Development and Renovation Organization (IDRO), the minister put emphasis on using the highest potential of human resources for strengthening domestic manufacturing of auto parts which are currently imported to the country.

Coronavirus: UK economy 'set for deepest downturn in memory'

The UK's economy is on track for its deepest downturn "in living memory", according to a closely watched survey, as businesses suffer from the lockdown.

The survey from IHS Markit/CIPS found the UK's dominant services sector contracted at a record pace last month.

Around 79% of services, such as cafes and hairdressers, reported a fall in business activity amid mass shutdowns in response to the coronavirus.

IHS Markit said UK GDP could fall at a quarterly rate of 7%.

However, it also warned that the decline could be even greater.

Tim Moore, economics director at IHS Markit, said the data "highlights that the downturn in the UK economy during the second quarter of 2020 will be far deeper and more widespread than anything seen in living memory".

"The April survey reading is consistent with the economy falling at a quarterly rate of approximately 7%, but we



expect the actual decline in GDP could be even greater, in part because the PMI excludes the vast majority of the self-employed and the retail sector."

The Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) services

index showed a record-low reading of just 13.4 in April, down from 34.5 in March. A figure below 50 indicates contraction. The final reading was slightly better than a preliminary - or "flash" - estimate of 12.3 that had been produced late last month.

Purchasing managers - senior employees in businesses who keep across what is happening to a company's orders and its supplies - see before anyone else if activity is slowing.

Prior to the last two months, the survey's record low stood at 40.1 in November 2008, the period of the credit crisis.

Samuel Tombs, economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, said any pick up throughout the summer would be weak.

"With several sectors of the economy set to remain closed for business throughout the summer, and consumers' confidence torn to pieces by Covid-19, we expect only about half of the second quarter's huge drop in GDP to be reversed in the third quarter."

(Source: BBC)

Iran's electricity consumption up 5%

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Electricity consumption in Iran since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20) up to May 6 has increased by five percent compared to the same period last year, IRIB reported on Wednesday, quoting an official with Iran's Power Generation and Distribution Company (known as TAVANIR).

According to Mostafa Rajabi Mashhadi, despite the coronavirus outbreak which led to the closure of some industrial units, the country's electricity consumption has increased.

"If this trend continues after all inactive units start operating, the country's energy consumption will increase very significantly and we will face power shortages during the peak consumption periods," he regretted.

The official further mentioned the Energy Ministry's incentives for encouraging consumption management, saying last year, nearly 3.06 trillion rials (about \$72.85 million) were paid to the households and industrial subscribers cooperating in the consumption management program in the form of incentives and relief packages, however.

Earlier this week, Mashhadi announced that Iranian Energy Ministry managed to



save 3,876 megawatts (MW) of electricity in the previous calendar year by implementing consumption management programs.

Cooperation with the various sectors resulted in reducing the consumption by

3,876 MW which is equal to the output of five 1000MW-capacity power plants, he said.

According to the official, Energy Ministry signed memorandums of understanding with 135,000 industrial, agricultural, and

domestic subscribers under the framework of consumption management programs, last year, to pass the summer consumption peak without outages.

Back in January, Tavanir head had said that Energy Ministry managed to prevent the consumption of 70 trillion rials (about \$1.66 billion) worth of electricity during the summer peak period by implementing consumption management programs.

"Implementation of this program allowed us to pass the summer without any power outages," the official said in a meeting of directors of the Energy Ministry subsidiaries' public relations departments.

He noted that Iran's electricity network has 100 percent coverage across the country, adding that this is an indication of the Iranian electricity industry's leadership in the region and the world.

In the past decade, constant temperature rising and the significant decrease of rainfalls across Iran have put the country in a hard situation regarding electricity supply during peak consumption periods.

In this regard, the Energy Ministry has been following new strategies in recent years to manage the consumption and lessen the electricity losses in the national grid.

NIOC to improve tender process, contract structure



E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Director of National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC)'s Legal Affairs Department says the company has it on the agenda to mechanize and improve contractual structures and the processes related to tenders in the current calendar year (started on March 20).

"Integrated approach to tenders and contracts is one of the ways to help realizing the surge in production and promoting justice in this field, the cornerstone of which has been laid by establishing office of concentrated contract affairs in the Legal Affairs Department," Seyed Hassan Mousavi told Shana.

According to the official, the mentioned office was established last December following comprehensive planning and assessment.

In addition to supervising tender processes and contractual

structures in subsidiaries that are not yet independent, the implementation of tenders and auctions, signing agreements and legal supervision over their implementation in collaboration with relevant agencies in the headquarters of the National Iranian Oil Company were mentioned as some of the main tasks of the office of contracts affairs.

In June 2016, Iran's first vice president Eshaq Jahangiri asked Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh to amend new petroleum contracts aimed at facilitating investment.

In November that year, a new model for contracts namely Iran Petroleum Contract (IPC) was presented at a Tehran conference attended by 183 Iranian companies and 152 foreign firms including oil majors.

Since the re-imposition of the U.S. sanctions in 2018, NIOC has been taking new measures to amend its contracts to make them better suited for domestic firms.

Oil prices dip as supply concerns resurface on rising U.S. stocks

Oil prices reversed course to edge lower on Wednesday as a higher than expected rise in U.S. inventories refocused investors on the risk of oversupply amid a coronavirus-driven slump in fuel demand.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures fell 27 cents, or 1.1 percent, to \$24.29 a barrel by 0436 GMT, snapping a five-day winning streak.

Brent crude futures dipped 20 cents, or 0.7 percent, to \$30.77 a barrel, ending a six-day rise.

Oil slipped after a report showed U.S. crude inventories rose 8.4 million barrels last week, more than expected, according to data from the American Petroleum Institute (API) late on Tuesday.

Oil prices had gained recently as European and Asian countries ended lockdowns aimed at halting the coronavirus spread and as producers axed supply after the demand crunch. But analysts cautioned the rebalancing of the market would be choppy.

"We're talking about normalisation of supply and demand but we've got a long way to go," said Lachlan Shaw, National Australia Bank's head of commodity strategy.

South Korea's SK Innovation (096770.KS), owner of top refiner SK Energy, said

on Wednesday it expected second-quarter refining margins to come under pressure because of a slump in fuel demand and a glut of refined products due to the pandemic.

Analysts also pointed to comments by U.S. shale producer Diamondback Energy (FANG.O) saying it would consider reviving drilling plans if WTI held above \$30 a barrel as a sign that producers will not want to shut in production for long.

"When (prices) start to hold on to those gains, there'll be a point where producers start to reverse those well shut-ins," Shaw said.

Global inventories are still expected to reach potential storage limits by June, according to Chris Midgley, Global Director of Analytics of S&P Global Platts.

Gasoline stocks in the U.S., the world's biggest producer and consumer of oil, fell by 2.2 million barrels, API reported, compared with analysts' expectations in a Reuters poll for a 43,000 barrel increase, and refinery crude runs rose.

Traders will be looking for further confirmation of the inventory data when the Energy Information Administration comes out later on Wednesday.

(Source: Reuters)

No mandated oil cuts for Texas, regulators say

Texas energy regulators on Tuesday said they will not mandate oil production cuts, ending a month-long debate about whether or not they would wade into global oil politics for the first time in 50 years as oil prices crater to historic lows.

Global energy demand has tumbled amid coronavirus-related travel and business restrictions and a glut of oil from shale. U.S. crude prices collapsed to minus \$37 a barrel on April 20. Even with recent increases in U.S. oil futures to \$24, local prices are still below the cost of production for some oil companies.

The turmoil prompted State Railroad Commissioner Ryan Sitton last month to push the idea after Parsley Energy and Pioneer Natural Resources asked regulators to mandate 20 percent curtailments, or 1 million barrels. Sitton promoted the curbs on Twitter and TV and won audiences from OPEC Secretary General Mohammad Barkindo and Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak.

But the idea never won support from the other two commissioners, and at least two votes were needed for approval. A motion to consider proration was dismissed Tuesday.

"The industry and the market move a lot faster than we can as a regulatory body,"

Commissioner Christi Craddick said.

Other states and countries have not acted to cut additional output, which would have Texas "on our own with this," Commission Chairman Wayne Christian said.

Small and large companies including Chevron Corp, Exxon Mobil Corp and Occidental Petroleum Corp were already planning to cut hundreds of thousands of barrels per day of shale, well ahead of any state action.

Texas is the largest U.S. oil-producing state, pumping about 5.4 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude. Last year its output rose by 600,000 bpd, to about 41 percent of the nation's total.

Commissioners instead on Tuesday waived some fees and voted to allow storage of crude oil in formations other than salt domes. Storage is filling this month as supply continues to outstrip the demand and the ability of refiners to process crude.

After several producers and environmental groups raised the issue in the past month, Christian also asked the state's major trade organizations to come back with suggestions before its June meeting for how to address high levels of natural gas flaring in the state's oil fields.

(Source: Reuters)

West Asia petro-states look past oil rout to chase solar power

Some of the Middle East (West Asia)'s biggest oil producers are pushing into solar energy even amid the rout in crude prices.

Cheap crude used to deter investment in renewable energy in countries that depend on oil sales for revenue. Today, solar projects cost only about a 10th of what they did a decade ago, thanks to more affordable equipment and better technology, according to research by BloombergNEF.

The West Asia's first forays into renewables faltered when oil prices dropped or official priorities shifted. Solar programs that Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi embarked on a decade or so ago would have required tens of billions of dollars and never got far off the ground. Since then, governments have found partners to help shoulder costs, and in spite of potential delays from the coronavirus, their solar ambitions are gaining traction.

"Solar power is the cheapest kilowatt-hour in the West Asia," Benjamin Attia, an analyst for power and renewables at consultant Wood Mackenzie Ltd., said in a telephone interview from Boston. New projects in the region rely on private funding, rather than government spending, and are therefore "insulated from headwinds" of lower oil prices, he said.

■ Solar surge

Electricity demand in the West Asia has risen by about 6 percent a year on average since 2000, according to the International Energy Agency. Whereas countries in the region used to rely mostly on power stations fueled by natural gas or crude, solar plants can now meet all of their likely growth in demand, said Robin Mills, founder of Dubai-based consulting firm Qamar Energy.



Wind and solar plants generate only about 5 percent of the power in the West Asia and North Africa, according to Bloomberg Intelligence, and crude-producing countries in the Persian Gulf are among the world's biggest emitters per capita of greenhouse gases. An analysis in the Guardian newspaper in October reckoned that oil from state producer Saudi Aramco was responsible for more emissions than any other single company.

"The West Asia has planned for a long time to reduce its dependence on oil," said Jenny Chase, an analyst at BloombergNEF.

Prices for benchmark Brent crude have slumped 52 percent this year, falling far below levels that most governments in the region need to balance their budgets. The coronavirus, meanwhile, is delaying the construction of solar facilities in Abu Dhabi,

Jordan and Qatar, and many of these projects will "spill over into next year," Attia said.

Despite uncertainty about the pandemic, the region's expanding populations are sure to need more electricity as economies recover. West Asiaern countries will add thousands of megawatts of new solar-power capacity through at least 2025, according to Wood Mackenzie.

Saudi Arabia, which currently has about 500 megawatts of renewables capacity, targets a 120-fold surge to 60 gigawatts by 2030, with most of it in solar. That's a lofty goal, and while initial progress has been slow, the Energy Ministry is taking concrete steps: it aims later this year to select winners in the country's second tender round of solar projects, and in April it began seeking bids for a third round.

In the United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi said last week that it received a record-low bid for the installation of a 2-gigawatt plant. That project, to start operating next year, would more than double Abu Dhabi's solar capacity. A day later, the neighboring emirate of Dubai awarded a contract for a project to generate power at a historically low price — part of a solar park designed to produce 5 gigawatts by 2030.

Qatar chose partners earlier this year to build its first solar plant, and in March private partners completed financing arrangements for the largest project in Oman, the biggest West Asiaern oil producer outside of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Hidden threat: Japan has only 2-week stockpile of LNG

The coronavirus outbreak has raised a new risk for Japan: a potential cut-off of its crucial liquefied natural gas supply that would plunge large portions of the country into darkness.

Because LNG is poorly suited for long-term storage, Japan only has a two-week stockpile. Yet the country depends on the fuel for 40 percent of its electric power generation, and all of the LNG it uses is imported from the West- and south-east Asia.

To protect the resource, JERA, Japan's largest fossil-fuel generator, in which Tokyo Electric Power Holdings and Chubu Electric Power have equal stakes, began taking emergency measures at the very front lines of the battle: the ports where the fuel is offloaded.



At a meeting room in a JERA power station in Tokyo's Shinagawa ward that provides the capital region and beyond with electricity, multiple single-person tents stand in a row. If commuting on public transport becomes too risky, employees will sleep at the power station.

"We have taken multiple measures to maintain a stable supply even if the infection spreads," said a company official.

Work procedures have been changed to ensure a smooth flow of LNG. When a carrier ship arrives at port, for example, onshore workers are not allowed to board.

These extraordinary steps underscore just how vital the power station is. Tokyo Bay, which stretches across the prefectures of Chiba, Tokyo and Kanagawa, is Japan's most important LNG power generation hub. JERA operates many of the power plants there, all of which run on LNG.

Accounting for about 30 percent of Japan's total LNG power generation, these plants produce 26m kilowatts of electricity. If the coronavirus crisis was to force these plants to stop, the Greater Tokyo area would immediately lose its power supply.

Before Japan's earthquake and tsunami of March 11 2022, LNG made up 28 percent of the country's power generation. That increased to 40 percent in fiscal 2017 as the nation's nuclear power plants went off grid, one after the other, following the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

While some of Japan's nuclear plants have come back online, based on the strictest standards in the world, only three of the 10 electric power companies have been able to use nuclear power.

Moreover, coronavirus is inching closer to the nuclear plants. Recently, a contractor working at the Genkai Nuclear Power Plant in the southern prefecture of Saga tested positive for the virus and construction at the site was temporarily stopped.

Japan has traditionally tried to maintain a diverse mixture of power sources — including nuclear, LNG, fossil fuels and renewable energy — due to its reliance on imports as an island nation. "It is highly unbalanced to depend for close to half of our energy on LNG alone," an official at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry conceded.

This article is from the Nikkei Asian Review, a global publication with a uniquely Asian perspective on politics, the economy, business and international affairs. Our own correspondents and outside commentators from around the world share their views on Asia, while our Asia300 section provides in-depth coverage of 300 of the biggest and fastest-growing listed companies from 11 economies outside Japan.

Unlike oil, LNG is hard to stockpile. After the Arab oil shocks of the early 1970s, Japan passed a law to require stockpiling oil, and about 200 days of domestic consumption is stored together with the private sector. Even if there were a hindrance to the transportation of oil, "we can hold up until the infection subsides", said an employee at a private energy company.

LNG, meanwhile, cannot be held in large volume because of its composition. To ship over long distances, the gas is chilled to minus 162C, at which point it becomes liquid. But it evaporates as it is being transported. That is why Japan has only two weeks' worth of LNG at any given time.

It takes about a month to ship the LNG from the Middle East to Japan. With shipments arriving constantly, a few missed shipments would not immediately signal a crisis. But an extended cut-off would spell trouble for the country.

India became unable to import LNG after locking down the entire country in late March. The Japanese government has said it would not go so far as a lockdown, but if the number of Covid-19 cases keeps rising, that could affect LNG imports.

"A single infected person onboard a ship means that the entire crew needs to be tested and the ship needs to be sterilized, and it's even possible that the ship will be barred from docking at an LNG terminal," said an official at a major trading house.

Japan was already facing a power shortage this year, "so the timing is very bad", said a power industry source. The Sendai nuclear power plant in Kagoshima Prefecture was shut down last month because it failed to meet antiterrorism standards. The No 3 reactor at the Ikata nuclear power plant in Ehime Prefecture is offline following a court injunction. The number of nuclear reactors in operation this year is expected to temporarily fall by about half from nine, so Japan cannot rely heavily on nuclear power.

Japan's energy self-sufficiency stands at about 10 percent, well below the 40 percent for food. The movement to shift away from carbon has led to a backlash against domestic coal-fired power plants, so dependence on LNG could rise further. One reason Tokyo Electric is rushing to restart its Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear plant in Niigata Prefecture is that "heavy concentration in LNG power in Tokyo Bay is a major risk to the stable supply of power", according to an official at the utility.

The coronavirus pandemic is testing whether Japan's government and utilities can diversify energy sources to prepare against the risks that threaten supplies.

(Source: Financial Times)

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Are the OPCW's reports on Syria reliable?

By Mohammad Jafari

A group of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) insiders have recently termed a new report that blamed the Syrian government for an alleged 2017 chemical weapons attack as unreliable, noting that none of the members of the OPCW fact-finding mission (FFM) deployed to the site of the alleged attacks during their investigations.

Dave DeCamp, a journalist focusing on US foreign policy and wars, wrote in his report published by the Anti-War that the OPCW has been operating with a pro-western government bias.

"Over the past year, the OPCW has been quietly facing a crisis of credibility. The crisis started when whistleblowers within the organization shared information that contradicted the findings of an OPCW investigation into the April 2018 alleged chemical attack in Douma, Syria. Leaks and whistleblower testimony show the organization suppressed the findings of its experts to fit the narrative that the Syrian government was responsible for the attack. That crisis of credibility continues. A group of OPCW insiders have just spoken out against a new report that blames the Syrian government for an alleged 2017 chemical weapons attack," he went on to say in his report.

On April 8th, the OPCW issued the first report from its new Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), a unit of the organization established to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks inside Syria. The new IIT report found "reasonable grounds" to conclude the Syrian government was responsible for three chemical attacks in Ltamenah, Syria at the end of March 2017. Specifically, two sarin attacks on March 24th and 30th, and one chlorine attack on March 25th. The three alleged attacks jointly "affected" 106 people and did not claim any lives.

The Grayzone published a response to the IIT report from a group of OPCW insiders who called the credibility of the IIT "compromised" and said the report is "scientifically flawed." According to The Grayzone, the authors who wrote the piece "represent the view of, at minimum, a small group of current and former OPCW officials who took part in its [the IIT report's] drafting and review."

The insiders were suspicious of the IIT from its formation. "It was very clear to us during the creation and setup of the IIT that its intent was not to investigate alleged incidents of chemical attacks in Syria. Instead, the team was created simply to find the Syrian government guilty of chemical attacks." The OPCW was granted the power to attribute responsibility for chemical attacks in 2018.

The insiders question what motive the Syrian government would have to use chemical weapons, pointing out the gov-



ernment's advantageous position over the opposition at the time. They also point out using chemical weapons would risk western intervention. "Let's say they took this wild risk by using sarin ...They did this by supposedly dropping a couple of sarin bombs on fields; agricultural lands in the middle of nowhere. Really?"

One fact the insiders take great issue with is that no members of the OPCW fact-finding mission (FFM) that initially investigated the Ltamenah incidents, and no members of the IIT ever deployed to the site of the alleged attacks. Instead, the investigators relied on evidence provided to them by members of Syrian opposition groups. The insiders wrote, "not one member of the IIT conducted a field investigation. Literally everything in the case has been provided by the sworn enemies of the Syrian government."

The insiders say the opposition groups brought "evidence" to the FFM over a period of months and years, and the handovers were generally done in Turkey. "The narratives, the witness accounts, the soil samples, the metal fragments, the photographs and videos; every item of so-called 'evidence' had been provided by those who have everything to gain by implicating their enemies in a chemical attack."

The insiders say the IIT is made up of investigators "without any background or expertise in chemistry, chemical weapons processes or technology, weapons systems or ballistics." Therefore, the investigators are completely reliant upon experts approved by the OPCW. According to the insiders, these experts "represent the same Western and NATO intelligence agencies, units, institutes, laboratories and individuals that have already become so heavily invested in 'proving' the complicity of the Syrian government."

If the Syrian government was not responsible for any chemical attacks at Ltamenah,

it would point to staging by the opposition. The insiders explore how this could have been done. They again point out that the evidence the FFM and IIT used – soil and gravel samples and metal fragments – was given to them by opposition forces, some was even delivered over a year after the alleged incident.

The insiders also take issue with the language used in the report. "Weak language stating that 'there are reasonable grounds to believe' the official story, it could be argued, actually implies a 50/50 case in which there are similarly reasonable grounds 'not to believe' it."

"Reasonable grounds" was the same language used in the final FFM report on Douma, which was published in March 2019. The report found "reasonable grounds" to believe a chlorine chemical attack likely occurred. Although the report did not explicitly attribute blame, it ignored an engineering assessment by an OPCW employee that concluded there was a "higher probability" the two cylinders found in Douma were "manually placed at those two locations rather than being delivered from aircraft." This conclusion would point to a staging. Ignoring this conclusion, like the OPCW did, would lead the reader to believe the Syrian government was responsible. The engineering assessment was published by the Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media in May 2019, kicking off the Douma whistleblower scandal.

So far, four whistleblowers from the OPCW have come forward to speak out against the Douma investigation. The Douma incident resulted in airstrikes against Syrian government targets from the US, UK, and France. Two of the whistleblowers who spoke out both claimed US officials were brought in to OPCW headquarters to present "evidence" to the FFM that the Syrian government was responsible for a chlorine attack in Douma. The Douma

scandal shows the OPCW has been operating with a pro-western government bias.

The IIT is expected to release reports on the April 2017 attack in Khan Shaykhun and the April 2018 incident in Douma. The alleged attack at Khan Shaykhun resulted in US airstrikes on a Syrian government airbase. Similar to the Ltamenah incident, the Khan Shaykhun FFM was unable to visit the site of the alleged attack and relied on other groups to provide evidence. Among those groups were the Syria Civil Defense, also known as the White Helmets. This group of first responders claims to be neutral in the conflict but receives the bulk of its funding from western governments. Out of all the incidents the IIT is expected to report on, the Douma incident is the only one where an OPCW FFM was actually deployed to the site of the alleged attack. But when that FFM reached conclusions not acceptable to the OPCW and the western powers it favors, the team was replaced.

After the IIT published its report on Ltamenah, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo released a statement that said, "The United States shares the OPCW's conclusions." Pompeo went on to praise the organization, "The United States commends the thorough investigations and expert work of the OPCW, which has again demonstrated that its efforts in Syria are unbiased and professional."

The OPCW's credibility is able to survive since most western mainstream media outlets refuse to cover the Douma scandal. When the scandal is mentioned, it is usually referred to as "Russian disinformation." In a story about the coming IIT reports, The Guardian quoted a chemical weapons expert who referred to the scandal as part of "Russian-led disinformation campaigns." The expert said, "For example, the supposed whistleblower controversy at the OPCW last year, which the organization comprehensively rejected with an official inquiry. Even though the criticism was found to be baseless it does not stop the conspiracy theorists."

The two whistleblowers at the center of the controversy responded to the OPCW's "official inquiry" in letters published by The Grayzone, and in Peter Hitchens' blog at "The Mail on Sunday". The whistleblowers' responses completely dismantled the OPCW's weak attempt at downplaying the leaks and discrediting the two men. As far as the scandal being a "Russian-led" disinformation campaign, the leaks and dissent came from within the OPCW, not from Russia.

As these IIT reports come out, it is important to look at them in the proper context. The OPCW should not have the power to assign blame while the Douma scandal goes unresolved. The IIT reports will likely be weaponized by western powers to increase sanctions on Syria – collectively punishing the citizens of a sovereign nation trying to rebuild after nine brutal years of war.

Former Lebanese president elaborates on Rafik Hariri's bribe to bomb southern Lebanon

The former Lebanese president Emile Lahoud referred to Rafik Hariri's half a million-dollar bribe to bomb southern Lebanon which made Lahoud demand his own resignation.

Emile Lahoud is the 15th President of Lebanon from Nov. 24, 1998, to Nov. 23, 2007. He was born on January 12, 1936, in the town of Baabdat. He is the son of General Jamil Lahoud, who played a key role in establishing the Lebanese army and strived to achieve independence for the country.

In an interview with Mehr News Agency, Emile Lahoud discussed a number of regional and global issues. This is the second and final part. The first one was previously published on Monday.

■ What is your assessment of the latest events in Lebanon? Are there still efforts to destroy the weapons of The Resistance and Hezbollah in Lebanon? Especially since all the plans and scenarios for disarming the Resistance failed?

Since the beginning of 2005, when Rafiq Hariri was assassinated, I have only spoken to the media once a year, after the anniversary of Lebanon's independence, because I was the army commander at the time and was speaking on the anniversary of the army's feast.

Rafiq Hariri was a businessman and was always looking for making more profit. When I was commander of the army, he offered me half a million dollars a month to buy army officers, but I strongly opposed him. When I became president, he offered me the same thing again, but as someone who believed in the rights and interests of the Lebanese people and the importance of resistance to deter Israeli threats, I strongly opposed the offer. Due to my thorough familiarity with military affairs, I strongly opposed the merger law (Hezbollah's integration into the military), while the Lebanese authorities at the time insisted on doing so.

In 1993, I was the commander of the army, and I did not know Hafez al-Assad, the then president of Syria, and all Lebanese politicians opposed the merger of the army and complained to Hafez al-Assad. He further told them that Lahoud is right and that the merger should take place.

In 1993, when bombing Israel was planned, Rafik Hariri, Abu Jamal, al-Shahabi, and Ghazi al-Kanaan said that it was the right of the Lebanese government to get rid of Hezbollah. Hariri told me that the Lebanese Supreme Council of Defense was going to pass a resolution in order to terminate Hezbollah and that all I had to do was to hit (bomb) Hezbollah in the south.

My conscience would not allow me to bomb the Lebanese in their homes, and I demanded my resignation and told them to find someone else as commander of the army. Of course, I had predicted that they would not be able to pass the resolution in the Supreme Council of Defense. Despite this, they made their decision and informed me of the order to attack Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.

After the order was issued, as I entered my office, I saw a map prepared by the commander of the international forces for the destruction of Hezbollah. The commander of the international forces was affiliated with the intelligence service in which Jamil al-Sayyid and Michel Rabbani were playing a part in. I asked them to ignore the plan, but they refused, then I told them to look for another commander for the army.

The then foreign minister Farès Boueiz called and asked me to launch a missile attack on Hezbollah's positions. I told him I was no longer in the army. During a trip to Damascus, Jamil al-Sayyid met with Mohammed Nasif and informed Hafez al-Assad of this issue, which surprised him. It was later revealed that Abu Jamal, al-Shahabi, Ghazi Kanaan, together with Rafik al-Hariri had made the decision.

For the first time, Hafez al-Assad wanted to meet with me. At that time, if this decision was made, Hezbollah could only resist for 2 hours. I said this to show that Lebanon is built on a mountain of corruption and commercial profit. Here, I need to mention the election law in Lebanon. I consider the election law in Lebanon to be a purely Israeli because each of the foreign parties, including France, the United States, and Saudi Arabia, is working to secure Israel's consent to support their tribes in the Lebanese elections. I believe that the new election laws in Lebanon can save the country politically from the shackles of religious tribalism.

■ Can the government of Hassan al-Diab make a serious change? Given your political experience and knowledge of Lebanese political leaders, can the new prime minister implement these changes, especially since the region is undergoing new developments?

Hassan Diab is able to make changes, and he is an honorable man and follows a school that has taught us responsibility. It should be noted that the credentials of the cabinet ministers have been approved by Parliament, which has come to power on the basis of religious divisions. Most cabinet members are out of politics, and each has its own authority in parliament. Therefore, al-Diab had no choice but to make some concessions. In my opinion, Hassan al-Diab has done 100 times better than al-Hariri. If Hariri remained prime minister, things would certainly not have gotten any better.

In the tenth month of last year, when the entire Lebanese nation sought the survival of al-Hariri as prime minister, I explicitly stated that Hariri should leave because, due to his presence, the country's affairs would not improve. So I announced that he should be replaced by al-Diab whom I didn't know well at the time. However, after watching him closely for a while, I realized that he is a very good person and has taken the right path. I also stated that we must form an interim government to assume certain duties and responsibilities.

These tasks include monitoring individuals who have transferred their money out of Lebanon and whose assets must be transferred to Lebanese banks and the Lebanese economic cycle; the policy brings in \$ 20 billion in foreign currency to the country. Unfortunately, they deny this today. Recently, Lebanese central bank governor Riad Salamé falsely claimed that there was no such amount, despite the \$ 20 billion. Therefore, I believe that returning such money to Lebanon could solve the problem of the dollar or foreign currency in the country and reduce prices.

Today, decisions are being made in the Lebanese cabinet, but it is clear that cabinet members will not be able to prosecute the powerful corrupted individuals and punish them. It seems that today everyone is satisfied that we cannot provide the necessary foreign currency for our country: We have not borrowed money for seven months, and this is due to the fact that the Lebanese authorities have decided to use the deposited property instead of borrowing.

Here, I warn the government and the country's political rulers not to encroach upon people's property, because protecting this property is part of the people's sacred rights. If the government plays with this property, I will be the first to stand up to it. We did not allow Israel to take our rights, so how can we allow government officials to oppress the rights of the people with their corruption.

End of part 2 of the interview

Interview by Fadi Boudieh and Mehdi Azizi

How militarism can simply change result of elections in the U.S.!

Even thinking about deployment of military troops at poll stations amid the 2020 presidential elections in the United States under security pretexts is worrisome as the elections under military control are regarded by the world monitoring bodies as the blatant violation of democracy, so ignoring the internationally-accepted principle of the free-military elections will push the country into a deep dictatorship by the men of weapons.

John Lindback, who served as a former director of elections in Oregon and past president of the National Association of State Election Directors, has cautioned about the consequences of militarization of election in the United States.

He has explained his viewpoints and experiences in an analytic article published by The Hill.

"The early October sun was shining through dust clouds in a parking lot of a rural polling place in western Kyrgyzstan. Voters inside the polling place, located near the border with Uzbekistan, were casting ballots in the 2015 parliamentary elections. Two international observers, one from Germany and one from the United States, had just finished their assignment at the polling place and climbed back into their vehicle to head toward the next several polling places they were expected to observe that day, Lindback said in his article.

"As their driver carefully maneuvered through potholes, a military vehicle transporting more than a dozen Kyrgyzstan troops had rolled into the lot and stopped near the front door of the polling place. 'Wait!' shouted the German observer to the driver. 'We have to go back. We have to go back immediately!' The observers knew military presence could mean trouble and must be reported. They went back and observed that



the troops had shown up to vote and, after doing that, they left. All was well," he further said about his experience in Kyrgyzstan.

International observers sent to developing countries are routinely told to immediately report any evidence of military or police influence at polling places. Minority groups around the world, including in the United States, have for years reported that people find the presence of uniforms at the polls to be intimidating or as an attempt to use scare tactics to suppress voting. As officials in the United States confront the serious obstacles of conducting the upcoming election amid the coronavirus pandemic, the siren calls of "bring in the military" are starting to ring out.

It is easy to understand why, as the situation looks awful. Voters could risk their lives by simply going to polling places. Some states are incapable or politically unwilling to use a backup plan, such as sending qualified voters a ballot in the mail. The

United States is facing a possible double whammy of a public health disaster and an election disaster. What do Americans do both during and after disasters? They look for assistance from the military and first from the National Guard. One Arizona state senator has called for the military to work at the polls. National Guard volunteers, out of uniform, also assisted at the polls in the recent election in Wisconsin.

So it looks like an easy call. But not so fast. Let us recall that elections run by civilians reside at the heart of our democracy. Let us keep in mind that elections free of military control are considered by international agencies as a sign of a robust democracy. Let us also remember that a country with elections run by the military is viewed around the world as a dictatorship. Our national predicament calls for partnerships and detailed planning to avoid a major dual calamity of a public health emergency and an election emergency. The role of the military, such as

the National Guard, should be discussed in any disaster planning exercise. But troops should be brought in only as a last resort and under certain strict conditions.

In the event of a last resort, any arrangement for the National Guard or any other military command to help with elections during this pandemic must be conditioned on civilian officials retaining control over all administrative matters related to conducting elections. The military does not decide who gets to vote and who does not. The military has no role in counting votes and releasing results. Uniformed military must not be allowed inside or near entrances of polling places. They must not carry weapons. Finally, the role of the military needs to be transparent. If military members out of uniform are working at polling places, for instance, details on what they are doing and who is supervising them must be disclosed.

Unfortunately, the public is now largely unaware that some states, such as Washington, have sought help from cybersecurity experts at the National Guard for their elections. The states are justifiably concerned about bad actors penetrating their voter registration and voting systems. However, this involvement of the military has to be disclosed to the public. What is their role? What specific cybersecurity expertise does the National Guard have that cannot be provided by civilians? What kind of access would the National Guard be given to voter registration and voting systems in order to assist states and the Homeland Security Department?

The United States has been regarded as the model democracy for years. We should continue to act as such no matter what the circumstances. We cannot afford to send a message to the world that ceding civilian control of any aspect of an election to the military is acceptable.

Qeshm, Kish islands to reopen hotels, tourist sites

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iran’s southern islands of Qeshm and Kish will reopen hotels and tourist attractions as coronavirus lockdown measures are relaxed in the country, Persian media reported on Wednesday.

However, eco-lodge units and wedding halls in Qeshm will remain closed until further notice.

Meanwhile in Kish Island, sea clubs, restaurants and malls have been allowed to reopen after the holy month of Ramadan as the island is one of the white areas of the country with no traces of coronavirus.



Officials also asked locals and tourists in both islands to continue observing health protocols and social distancing rules strictly.

Qeshm Island is a heaven for eco-tourists as it embraces wide-ranging attractions such as the Hara marine forests and about 60 villages dotted mostly along its rocky coastlines.

The island also features geologically eye-catching canyons, hills, caves and valleys, most of which are protected as part of the UNESCO-tagged Qeshm Island Geopark, itself a heaven for nature-lovers.

Many travelers to Qeshm believe that the Stars Valley or Valley of Stars is a “MUST SEE”. It is home to bizarre-shaped gorges, tall pillars, canyon-like paths, hollowed-out spaces as well as the smooth and round stones, which have been formed by the wind and rain eroding the soil, rocks and stones. Locals believe that a star once fell on this area thereby creating the rocky shapes that make it seem as if from another planet.

Over the past couple of decades, the coral Kish Island has become a beach resort where visitors can swim, shop and sample a laid-back and relatively liberated local lifestyle. It is home to free-trade-zone status, with ever-growing hotels, shopping centers, apartment blocks, and retail complexes.

Dishmok historical fortress to undergo restoration

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Dishmok historical fortress in southwestern Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province will undergo some rehabilitation works, a provincial tourism official has said.



The restoration project aims to repair and strengthen the fortress, which is damaged by recent heavy rains, Majid Safai said on Tuesday, CHTN reported.

A destination for domestic and foreign travelers, the basement and parts of the fortress dates back to the Sassanid era (224–651), while the main building belongs to the Qajar period (1789–1925).

Last month, provincial tourism chief Mohammad Hosseinzadeh announced that the tourism sector of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province was prepared to improve quickly after coronavirus crisis ends, while it has taken 150 billion rials (over \$3 million) hit from the impact of coronavirus over the last two months.

He also noted that innovative plans and programs and various cultural festivals were being organized to attract tourists and travelers to the alluring destinations of the province.

The western province attracted over four million people, mostly domestic travelers, during the Iranian year 1397 (ended March 2019), according to data announced by provincial tourism department.

Ancient fortified structures: Birjand castle

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** – Birjand castle, covering 3,000 square meters in area, is the oldest monument in a city of the same name in eastern Iran. Sources say that the stronghold dates back to the Safavid era (1501-1736) used for military purposes in older to help residents being alert from the invasion of enemies, especially Turkmen and the Uzbek.



From above the castle, which is built from clay and mud bricks, one can see the full vistas of the surroundings lands.

It is said that the castle was linked to other parts of the city through underground tunnels. The monument was fully restored during Qajar epoch (1785-1925).

The capital of South Khorasan province, Birjand has long assumed a high strategic position in the eastern part of the country, almost halfway between Zahedan (near the borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan) on the one hand, and Mashhad (center of Khorasan Razavi) on the other.

According to Iran Tourism and Touring Organization, by virtue of this geographic situation it played important roles in both world wars, as a major link in the defense line of the East Persian Cordon during the first and as a key point on the Allies’ supply route to the USSR in the second. Birjand is known for its saffron and handmade carpet exports.

No major harm to Sassanid-era fortress by quake

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – No serious damage was inflicted on the centuries-old Falak-ol-Aflak Fortress as a medium-sized quake struck Iran’s western province of Lorestan on Wednesday, according to a group of assessors dispatched by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts.

Located in Khorramabad, the capital of Lorestan, the fortress was hit by an earthquake of magnitude 5.1. The quake was at a depth of 7 km, and took place near the city of Firouzabad.

“After the earthquake, we immediately dispatched our experts to Falak-ol-Aflak Fortress to investigate possible damages,” Tasnim quoted provincial tourism chief Seyyed Amin Qasemi as saying on Wednesday.

“Investigations revealed some (minor) harm to towers of the fortress but fortunately no serious damage was inflicted to Falak-ol-Afalak Castle.”

Regarding to probable damages to other historical sites and monuments scatted across the province, the official noted further investigations are being carried out in every corner of the province teams of experts under supervision of local tourism offices.

Also known as Falak-ol-Aflak Castle, the unmissable eight-towered monument dominates the city as one of the most visited travel destinations in the region for both for domestic and foreign sightseers.

In the past couple of years ago, the historic castle was faced with lots of problems that resolved in close cooperation of provincial officials by the means of both essential and



urgent repair projects, he explained.

The fortress dates from the Sassanid era

(224–651). It seems particularly imposing

and dramatic when floodlit at night, offering

picturesque views of its encircling crenellated battlements.

More tourists visit Mazandaran province and spend more

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – The number of foreign tourists visiting the northern Iranian province of Mazandaran rose by 81 percent during the past Iranian year 1398 (ended March 19) while spending rose by almost a quarter, according to a senior provincial official.

“International vacationers in Mazandaran province increased from 86,000 in 1397 to 106,000 in 1398, and spending rose by 25 percent year on year,” IRNA quoted Mofid Qolami as saying on Tuesday.

The official noted that revenues from foreign travelers rose from \$129 million in 1397 to \$160 million in the subsequent year.

He also attached great importance to tourism development and related infrastructure in the province, saying that all (provincial organizations) should assist the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts to achieve this goal.



In January, the provincial tourism department announced a total of twenty two tourism projects, worth 2,515 billion rials (some \$60 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) had been inaugurated in Mazandaran during the first nine months of 1398.

The projects included building hotels and hotel apartments, travel agencies, eco-lodge guest houses as well as recreational and tourist facilities, which generated some 1,500 jobs directly or indirectly.

Stretched along the Caspian Sea and Alborz mountain range, Mazandaran is a popular destination for domestic holidaymakers and it is home to more than 3,500 villages and rural areas, hosting millions of domestic night-stays in year.

The latest available data show eight million tourists visited the Islamic Republic during the first ten months of the past Iranian calendar year.

Kermanshah reopens historical sites as coronavirus lockdown eased



TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – The historical sites of Taq-e Bostan, Bisotun and the Temple of Anahita in western Kermanshah province have recently been reopened as the coronavirus lockdown has

been eased, deputy provincial tourism chief Alireza Barshahi said on Wednesday, CHTN reported.

Kermanshah has several popular historical sites, of which these three sites have been

allowed to reopen as the strict sanitary and social distancing requirements can be observed carefully in these places, he added.

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

Taq-e Bostan and Bisotun both on the UNESCO World Heritage list, are amongst top travel destinations of Kermanshah province.

Inscribed into the base of a towering cliff, Taq-e Bostan comprises extraordinary Sassanian bas-reliefs of ancient victorious kings divide opinions. Late afternoon is the best time to visit, as the cliff turns a brilliant orange in the setting sun, which then dies poetically on the far side of the duck pond.

Bisotun is a patchwork of immense yet impressive life-size carvings depicting the king Darius I and several other figures. UNESCO has it that Bisotun bears an outstanding

testimony to the important interchange of human values on the development of monumental art and writing, reflecting ancient traditions in monumental bas-reliefs.

Temple of Anahita in the city of Kangavar is believed to have been built circa 200 BC. Several column bases and ruins of a wall remain from the magnificent Greek-style temple.

The temple was used during the Parthian era (248 BC-224) as well as the Sassanid era (224-651).

The monument was damaged as it was used for various purposes by the Seljuk, Ilkhanid, Safavid, and Qajar dynasties, which ruled in Iran over the past centuries.

The Temple of Anahita was seriously damaged by an earthquake in 1957. Afterwards, people invaded the perimeter of the site, using stones from the temple to rebuild their homes at that location.

Discover a paradise of migratory birds in the heart of barrenness!

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – A photo collection depicts various bird species, both native and migratory ones, remaining and nesting across Howz-e Marreh, a seasonal wetland surrounded by barren plains of Qom province, central Iran, May 5, 2020.

Now covering an area of 10,000 ha, thanks to recent downpours, the wetland is nearing another, named Howz-e Soltan Lake.

However, the water levels of the two are continuously fluctuating; in autumn and winter, when there are heavy rainfalls, they seem very sprawling, far different from what it looks during the spring and summer.

Named after a neighboring hill, Howz-e Marreh is a refuge for rare bird species as well. It is also a heaven for birdwatchers, nature lovers, and eco-traveling enthusiasts.

Adjacent to the Qom – Tehran highway, is also an epicenter of a relatively rich fauna. Best time to tour the lake starts from early spring to late autumn.



ICRC lauds Iran's significant measures in fight against coronavirus

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Barbara Rizzoli, head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) delegation in Tehran, has said the actions taken by the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) to battle COVID-19 outbreak were very significant in various fields, including prevention and treatment.

She made the remarks during a joint press conference held in Tehran on Tuesday to mark the World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, with IRCS chief, Karim Hemmati, in attendance.

World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day is celebrated annually on 8 May, which is the anniversary of the birth of Henry Dunant, who was born on 8 May 1828. He was the founder of ICRC and the recipient of the first Nobel Peace Prize.

"Humanity, impartiality, justice, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality are recognized as the seven international principles of the movement that are at the forefront of our work," Rizzoli highlighted.

These seven principles have led 80 million members of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent to work together, regardless of their nationality, tastes or background. The best example of this is with the outbreak of COVID-19, services provided by Red Crescent volunteers who are struggling to cope with the disease, she explained.

She also mentioned those who lost their lives during this period in the service and



said that "We must always pay tribute to these people."

In the fight against coronavirus, the IRCS, along with the Ministry of Health and other responsible organizations, has undertaken important activities, from rapid diagnosis and screening to providing medical services and shelter, she noted, adding, but the most important activity of this population has been informing the public about healthcare and treatment.

The ICRC has supported the Iranian Red Crescent Society as much as possible, one of the contributions was the payment of 500,000 Swiss francs, she stated.

"Supporting and holding joint activities is another field of our activity. For example, we cooperated with the IRCS in educating the dangers of landmines, as well as producing educational tips on COVID-19," she explained.

"We also support an NGO in the eastern part of the country, specifically in Mashhad city, which is providing personal protective equipment," she said, "because we believe that during epidemics, importance of some activities multiplies and we need to pay more attention to them and support them."

The actions taken by the IRCS during this period were very significant and cover a wide

range of activities in various fields, including prevention and treatment, she emphasized.

She cited the ICRC's communications network, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, as well as more than 200 national populations which are connected with each other at the same time.

She also stressed the importance of national populations in crises such as the pandemic, as what the Iranian Red Crescent Society is doing these days.

Referring to some measures taken by the IRCS regarding the prevention of the virus throughout the country, Hemmati in April noted that since the onset of the outbreak, more than 980 voluntary plans and projects to contain the epidemic has been implemented across the country, with 72,694 volunteers participating in the implementation of these projects.

The first phase of public donations was allocated to provide health and essential items for the deprived and unprivileged areas, and besides, 500,000 patients suffering special diseases were provided with essential health items, he explained.

Through the second phase, the IRCS, to provide medical items for COVID-19 patients in hospitals, purchased 100 ventilators worth approximately 160 billion rials (around \$3.8 million), 52 devices have been provided with the help of charities and public participation, Hemmati concluded.

WHO launches "Save Lives: clean your hands" campaign to slow COVID-19 spread

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The World Health Organization (WHO) has launched a campaign, calling upon policy makers to provide the necessary infrastructure to allow people to electively perform hand hygiene in public places in a bid to slow the spread of coronavirus.

Annually more than 8 million deaths in low or middle-income countries are attributed to poor quality care and failures in infection prevention measures during health care.

However, infection and antimicrobial resistance in health care are not only a concern in developing countries but are actually a worldwide problem.

Hands play an important role in the COVID-19 virus transmission because contaminated hands are the vehicle transferring the virus to the mouth, nose or eyes and also from one surface to another by contaminated hands.

Hand hygiene is one of (if not the) most effective action to reduce the spread of the pathogens and prevent infections, including the COVID-19 virus.

Hand hygiene campaign

Since 2009, every year, WHO celebrate the "Save Lives: Clean your Hands" campaign on May 5.

Also thanks to the strength and effectiveness of this campaign, this year hand hygiene has been vigorously promoted and implemented as a critical prevention measure in fight



against COVID-19.

Many countries are committed to improving hand hygiene. So far, 142 out of 194 WHO member states have made formal statements pledging their support to the campaign. So far, over 20,000 health care facilities across 189 countries are actively engaged in improving hand hygiene.

Poor hand hygiene practices are also due to overload and lack of time by clinical teams given the shortage of staff affecting the health systems in both high- and low-/middle-income countries.

This year, WHO's annual global hand hygiene campaign has a special focus that is the role of nurses and midwives in delivering clean care through hand hygiene and infection

prevention and control (IPC) best practices. This theme links to the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife that is celebrated this year. The slogan of the campaign is "Nurses and Midwives: clean care is in your hands".

About nurses and midwives

Alongside the year of the Nurse and Midwife, the 2020 global hand hygiene campaign recognizes their critical role in IPC and hand hygiene practices.

Given their special proximity to the patient, nurses and midwives are also best placed to advise patients and families on good hand hygiene and infection prevention practices. However, global shortage of nurses and midwives is a major challenge to infection prevention, because low nurse-to-patient ratio is associated with spread of pathogens and thus, increased health care associated infection rates and outbreaks.

Universal free public hand hygiene stations

Community members can play a critical role in fighting COVID-19 by adopting frequent hand hygiene as part of their day-to-day practices.

By widely improving hand hygiene practices, countries can help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Member states are being encouraged to promptly provide universal access to public hand hygiene stations and highly encouraging their use to help slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Gas stoves making indoor air up to five times dirtier than outdoor air, report finds

Gas stoves are making people sick, contributing pollution that makes indoor air up to two to five times dirtier than outdoor air, according to a new report.

Despite the risks, regulators have failed to set standards for indoor air quality — a problem that is now likely to be exacerbated by large numbers of people spending time inside and cooking at home during the coronavirus pandemic.

Fossil-fuel-burning stoves are likely exposing tens of millions of Americans to air pollution levels that would be illegal if they were outside, concludes the review of decades of science by the Rocky Mountain Institute and multiple environmental advocacy groups.

Lead report author Brady Seals said little attention has been paid despite longstanding knowledge of the problem. "Somehow we've gotten accustomed to having a com-

bustion device, often unvented, inside of the home," Seals said.

About a third of US households cook primarily with gas — which emits nitrogen dioxide and carbon dioxide, in addition to the particle pollution that all types of stoves produce. Older, poorly maintained stoves pollute even more including risks from carbon monoxide.

Even small increases in short-term expo-

sure to nitrogen dioxide can increase asthma risks for children. One analysis found that children in homes with gas stoves have a 42% higher chance of having asthma symptoms. Another in Australia attributed 12.3% of all childhood asthma burden to gas stoves.

Nitrogen dioxide also makes chronic obstructive pulmonary disease worse and may be linked to heart problems, diabetes and cancer.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

Tehran to host INOTEX 2020 in June

The 9th International Innovation and Technology Exhibition (INOTEX 2020) will be held at Tehran Permanent International Fairground on June 7-10.

It is expected that more than 18,000 people will attend the event which is aimed to attract investment for startups and introduce investment opportunities to them.

Over 500 companies, startups, and investors will set up booths at the exhibition representing their latest achievements, with more than 600 B2B sessions and 20 side events to be held during the three-day event.

Established in 2012, INOTEX is a platform for innovation and technology, which seeks to introduce latest technologies to large and medium-sized industries in addition to connecting customers of technology products to their manufacturers, and also introduces investors to the opportunity to invest in technological projects or start-ups.

تهران میزبان نمایشگاه اینوتکس ۲۰۲۰ در خرداد

نهمین نمایشگاه بین‌المللی نوآوری و فناوری (اینوتکس ۲۰۲۰) با شعار «اکوسیستم نوآوری و فناوری زیر یک سقف» ۱۸ تا ۲۱ خرداد ماه سال ۹۹ در محل دائمی نمایشگاه‌های بین‌المللی تهران برگزار می‌شود.

به گزارش ایرنا، نمایشگاه اینوتکس با هدف اصلی «جذب سرمایه برای استارت‌آپ‌ها و شرکت‌ها و نیز معرفی فرصت‌های نوین سرمایه‌گذاری» برگزار می‌شود.

این نمایشگاه بر سه حوزه «هوشمندسازی»، «دیجیتال» و «توسعه پایدار» تمرکز می‌کند. اطلاع از آخرین تغییرات نوآوری منطقه، آموزش آخرین استراتژی‌های کارآفرینی یا حضور فعال کارشناسان و صاحب‌نظران ملی و بین‌المللی، یافتن بازار جدید برای محصولات و خدمات، و نیز جذب سرمایه برای استارت‌آپ‌ها و شرکت‌ها، از دیگر فرصت‌هایی است که برای شرکت‌کنندگان در نمایشگاه اینوتکس وجود دارد.

پیش‌بینی می‌شود بیش از ۱۸ هزار نفر از این نمایشگاه بازدید خواهند کرد. بیش از ۵۰۰ شرکت، استارت‌آپ، و سرمایه‌گذار در این نمایشگاه غرفه خواهند داشت و بیش از ۶۰۰ جلسه B2B و بیش از ۲۰ رویداد جانبی برگزار خواهد شد.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"bi-, bin-, bis-"

■ **Meaning:** two or twice

■ **For example:** *Biscuit* comes from the French meaning twice-cooked.

PHRASAL VERB

Opt in

■ **Explanation:** to decide to join a group or system

■ **For example:** Employees have the choice to opt in to the scheme.

IDIOM

Cross your mind

■ **Explanation:** If an idea or thought crosses your mind, you suddenly think of it

■ **For example:** It just crossed my mind that the shops are closed today.

Up to 3.5 billion people will suffer in 'unlivable' hot places by 2070, report finds

In just 50 years, 2 billion to 3.5 billion people, mostly the poor who cannot afford air conditioning, will be living in a climate that historical research says would be too hot to handle, a new report said.

With every 1C increase in global average annual temperature from man-made climate change, about a billion or so people will end up in areas too warm to be habitable without cooling technology, according to ecologist Marten Scheffer of Wageningen University in the Netherlands, co-author of the study.



How many people will end up at risk depends on how much carbon dioxide emissions, which trap heat, are reduced and how quickly the world population grows.

Under the worst-case scenario for population growth and for carbon pollution — which many climate scientists say is looking less likely these days — the report, published on Monday in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, predicts about 3.5 billion people will live in extremely hot areas. That is one-third of the projected 2070 population.

But even scenarios considered more likely and less severe project that in 50 years there will be a couple of billion people living in places that are too hot to bear without air conditioning, the report said.

"It's a huge amount and it's a short-time. This is why we're worried," said Cornell University climate scientist Natalie Mahowald, who did not take part in the report. She and other outside scientists said the new report makes sense and conveys the urgency of the man-made climate change differently than past research.

In an unusual step for climate change researchers, a team of international scientists studied humans in a similar way to bears, birds and bees to find the "climate niche" where people and civilisations flourish. They looked back 6,000 years to come up with a sweet spot of temperatures for humanity: Average annual temperatures between 11 to 15C.

We can — and do — live in warmer and colder places than that, but the farther from the sweet spot, the harder it gets.

The scientists looked at places projected to get uncomfortably and considerably hotter than the sweet spot, and calculated at least 2 billion people will be living in those conditions by 2070.

Currently about 20 million people live in places with an annual average temperature greater than 29C — far beyond the temperature sweet spot. That area is less than 1 per cent of the Earth's land, which is mostly near the Sahara Desert and includes Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

But as the world gets more crowded and warmer, the study concluded large swathes of Africa, Asia, South America and Australia will likely end up in this same temperature range. Well over 1 billion people, and up to 3.5 billion people, will be affected depending on the climate altering choices humanity makes over the next half century, according to lead author Chi Xu of Nanjing University in China.

With enough money, "you can actually live on the moon", Mr Scheffer said. But these projections are "unlivable for the ordinary, for poor people, for the average world citizen".

Places like impoverished Nigeria — with a population expected to triple by the end of the century — would be less able to cope, said study co-author Tim Lenton, a climate scientist and director of the Global Systems Institute at the University of Exeter in England, the Independent reported.

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Bill Gates boosts war on malaria

(September 22, 2003)

The founder of the Microsoft software company Bill Gates has given 168,000,000 dollars to help in the fight against malaria. Around 1,000,000 people a year are killed by the disease, mostly in Africa, and numbers are growing due to increasing drug resistance. This report from the BBC's Southern Africa correspondent, Barnaby Phillips:

Bill Gates, along with his wife Melinda, visited a **malaria treatment and research centre** north of the Mozambican capital Maputo.

Mr Gates said that malaria is **robbing** Africa of its people and **potential**. United Nations officials warn that malaria does not only **inflict** terrible suffering, it's also damaging Africa's economies.

The **grant** from the Bill Gates **Foundation** will help **to fund** the search for a vaccine as well as develop new drugs and new **preventative measures** to fight the **mosquito-borne** disease. Malaria and AIDS both kill thousands of African children each day.

Words

malaria treatment and research centre: a place providing care and study into malaria

robbing: taking from

potential: if something has potential it is capable of being useful

inflict: if you inflict something on someone, you make them suffer

grant: money given for a special purpose

Foundation: an organisation that provides money for a special purpose

to fund: to provide money for

preventative measures: ways of avoiding something

mosquito-borne: carried by mosquitoes

(Source: BBC)



!Be kind to me

China launches spacecraft via largest carrier rocket

China successfully launched its largest carrier rocket, which was carrying a new-generation spacecraft, state broadcaster CCTV said.

The Long March-5B carrier rocket took off at 1800 local time (1000 GMT) at the Wenchang Space Launch Center in the southern island province of Hainan. It was the first mission carried out by the Long March-5B, CCTV reported, citing the China Manned Space Engineering Office, Reuters reported.

The Long March-5B - with a length of about 53.7 meters and takeoff mass of about 849 tonnes - was also carrying an inflatable cargo return module.

China said in March it was aiming to launch an experimental spacecraft without a crew as part of a broader spaceflight programme to shuttle astronauts to its future space station and for future manned space exploration. The launch was earlier scheduled for mid- to late April.

China aims to complete a multi-module, inhabited space station around 2022. It became the third country to put a man in space with its own rocket in 2003 after the former Soviet Union and the United States.

China has since been racing to catch up with Russia and the United States to become a major space power by 2030.

U.S. to agree to PACT with 'like-minded' nations on space mining

The U.S. has been working on a draft deal that would regulate mining on the Moon as well as establishing "safety zones" around would-be extraterrestrial bases. However, the proposal reportedly excludes Russia, a major space power.

The Trump administration is ironing out details of a plan that would give its potential mining activities on the Moon a semblance of legality - even if not all the space-faring nations, including major ones such as Russia, are on board - a source told Reuters on Tuesday.

Citing U.S. officials, the outlet reported that Washington will ask some of its allies, such as Canada, Japan, the UAE, and European nations, to sign an agreement that would regulate mining on the lunar surface in preparation for greater human activity on the Moon.

The agreement could pave the way for private companies to claim ownership over the resources they extract, some of which hope to mine the Moon for water, which can be converted into rocket fuel.

The proposed pact also provides for the establishment of "safety zones" around bases which, according to Washington's vision, could soon pop up on the Moon. The zones would vary in size depending on the "operation," the source told Reuters.

While this provision might appear to run afoul of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty that bans all nations from staking territorial claims over any part of a celestial body beyond Earth, the Trump administration is set to argue that the agreement is aimed at boosting coordination between the countries involved, and only reinforces the 1967 treaty.

The U.S. will begin negotiating the pact with its allies "in the coming weeks." However, at least in the "early" stages, the talks will not include Moscow, the report said.

Moscow has repeatedly blasted Washington for its continuous push to make space the legal equivalent of the Wild West, including plans to militarize the outer realms and seize territory on other planets.

While it has yet to realize its designs to grab hold of outer space, Washington has long eyed the vast resources it has to offer. Back in 2015, for instance, Congress passed a law allowing American companies and individuals to tap into Moon and asteroid resources.

Last month, Trump brought that vision one step closer to fruition, however, signing an executive order declaring that the U.S. does not view space as "a global commons" and arguing that "Americans should have the right to engage in commercial exploration, recovery, and use of resources in outer space."

(Source: RT)

Taliban not living up to commitments, U.S. Defense Secretary says

U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper said that the Taliban were not living up to their commitments under an agreement signed this year, amid signs the fragile deal is under strain by a political deadlock and increasing Taliban violence.

After lengthy talks behind closed doors, the Taliban and Washington signed an agreement in February for reduced violence and a move toward talks with the Afghan government, but attacks by the group have increased since then, Reuters reported.

"I don't think they are," Esper told reporters when asked if the Taliban were living up to their commitment.

He added that he believed the Afghan government was also not living up to its commitment. The Afghan government was not part of an agreement between the United States and the Taliban.

Esper said the Afghan government and the Taliban "both need to come together and make progress on the terms that (are) laid out."

Progress on moving to negotiations between the militant group and the Afghan government has been delayed, in part by the political feud between President Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, who both claimed to be Afghanistan's rightful leader following September's disputed election.

The political deadlock comes as the Taliban has increased the pace of violence.

The Taliban have mounted more than 4,500 attacks in Afghanistan 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.

The United States is continuing its drawdown of forces in Afghanistan, which are expected to reach about 8,600 troops in this summer.

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 shielding its hospitals from COVID-19, Britain left many of the weakest exposed'

UK overtakes Italy with Europe's highest official coronavirus death toll

The little girl was waiting for her mum, Sonya Kaygan. Her grandmother hadn't broken the news that Kaygan, 26, who worked at a nearby care home, was dead, one of over 100 frontline health workers killed by the coronavirus in Great Britain.

A Reuters investigation into Kaygan's case, the care home where she worked, and the wider community in which she lived provides an intimate view of the frontline of Britain's war on the coronavirus. It exposes, too, a dangerous lag between promises made by Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government and the reality on the ground.

Even as the government was promising to protect the elderly and vulnerable from the deadly virus, local councils say they didn't have the tools to carry out the plan, and were often given just hours to implement new government instructions.

Policies designed to prevent hospitals from being overwhelmed pushed a greater burden onto care homes. With hospitals given priority by the government, care homes struggled to get access to tests and protective equipment. The elderly were also put at potentially greater risk by measures to admit only the sickest for hospital treatment and to clear out as many non-acute patients as possible from wards. These findings are based on documents from government agencies seen by Reuters, interviews with five leaders of local authorities and eight care home managers.

It is too early to reach final conclusions about the wisdom of these policies. Still, staff and managers of many care homes say they believe the British government made a crucial early mistake: It focused too much attention on protecting the country's National Health Service at the expense of the most vulnerable in society, among them the estimated 400,000 mostly elderly or infirm people who live in care homes across Britain.

The government summed up that policy in the slogan "Protect the NHS." The approach gave the country's publicly-funded hospitals priority over its care homes. A



UK government spokesman defended the strategy. "This is an unprecedented global pandemic and we have taken the right steps at the right time to combat it, guided by the best scientific advice."

The effects of this approach have been felt desperately in Elizabeth Lodge, in Enfield, north London, where Kaygan worked.

The first coronavirus test of a resident of the Lodge only took place on April 29. That was 34 days after the first suspected case at the home, said Andrew Knight, chief executive of residential services at CareUK, a private company which operates the home. It was also 14 days after Matt Hancock, the UK health secretary, pledged tests would be available to "everyone who needs one" in a care home.

"The government's response on testing has come way too late to have any meaningful effect on keeping the virus out of our homes," said Knight, the CareUK executive, in a statement to Reuters.

So far, at least 32,300 people have died in Britain from the coronavirus, the highest toll in Europe, according to official UK data processed by 2 May. Out of those deaths, more than 5,890 were registered as occurring in care homes in England and Wales by April 24, the latest date available. These figures don't include care home residents who were taken to hospital and died there.

Many care home providers believe the figures understate the number of deaths among care home residents because, in the

absence of testing, not all are being captured. During the 10 weeks prior to the outbreak, including the height of the flu season, an average of 2,635 people died each week in care homes in England and Wales. By April 24, that weekly death toll had risen to 7,911. According to Reuters calculations, the pandemic has resulted in at least 12,700 excess deaths in care homes.

"I think the focus early on was very much on the acute sector," or urgent hospital treatment, "and ensuring hospitals were able to respond in an effective way," said Graeme Betts, acting chief executive of Birmingham City Council, which oversees the UK's second-biggest city. "And I think early on care homes didn't get the recognition that perhaps they should have."

Helen Wildbore, director of the relatives and residents association, a national charity supporting families of people in residential care, said while it was right for the initial focus to be on protecting the NHS, "I think it has taken too long for the government to turn its attention" to vulnerable people outside hospital. "I think it's fair to say that the sector has felt like an afterthought for quite a long time."

■ UK overtakes Italy

The United Kingdom has overtaken Italy to report the highest official death toll from the new coronavirus in Europe, figures released Tuesday showed, increasing pressure on Prime Minister Boris Johnson over his response to the crisis.

Weekly figures from Britain's Office for National Statistics (ONS) added more than 7,000 deaths in England and Wales in the week to April 24, raising the total for the United Kingdom to 32,313.

Only the United States, with a population nearly five times greater, has suffered more confirmed fatalities from the virus than Britain, according to the data so far.

Figures are based on death certificate mentions of COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, including suspected cases.

Hamas applauds UK legislators' opposition to Israel's annexation plan

The Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has hailed British lawmakers' opposition to Israel's land-grab scheme to annex more Palestinian territories.

In a letter to British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Friday, 127 current and former MPs from across the political spectrum voiced their outrage at the Israeli regime's West Bank annexation scheme.

They urged the premier 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," further read the letter, which was organized by the Council for Arab-British Understanding (Caabu).

On Tuesday, Hamas spokesman Hazem Qasem said in a press conference that the stance adopted by these lawmakers

and the widespread international rejection and condemnation of Israel's annexation plans confirmed the isolation of "the Zio-American policy" against Palestinians.

The Hamas spokesman, whose remarks were carried by Palestinian Information Center, also called on all parties, which oppose Tel Aviv's annexation scheme, to adopt practical and serious measures to bar the occupying entity from continuing its expansion policy and punish it for its ongoing crimes against the Palestinian people and land.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is facing a number of criminal indictments, has repeatedly stressed that he would start plans for annexing more areas in the West Bank on July 1, in accordance with U.S. President Donald Trump's controversial plan, commonly known as the "Deal of the Century."

Bahraini regime deprives imprisoned Shia cleric of urgent surgery



Bahraini authorities are reportedly preventing an imprisoned Shia Muslim cleric from receiving appropriate medication and obstinately refusing to allow him to have a much-needed surgery.

The family of Sheikh Mirza al-Mahrous has voiced grave concerns over the wellbeing of the ailing cleric after his health condition worsened, and officials at the notorious Jau Prison, south of the capital Manama, prevented him from undergoing an emergency operation, Arabic-language and independent Manama Post online newspaper reported on Tuesday.

The family said they "received a phone call from him on Sunday, May 3, 2020, informing them of deterioration of his health condition due to the Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), and that the medicine he takes does not work and cannot ease symptoms."

Sheikh Mahrous told them he urgently needs to have a surgery as diagnosed by a specialist, but the Jau Prison administration deliberately refuses to transfer

him to hospital.

The sheikh is among a group of opposition leaders, rights activists, bloggers and Shia clerics arrested in connection with their role in the mid-February 2011 popular uprising against the ruling Al Khalifah regime.

He was the vice president of the now-dissolved al-Zahraa Society of Orphans prior to his arrest.

A Bahraini court found the detained opposition figure guilty of "attempting to overthrow the regime" and subsequently sentenced him to 15 years in prison.

Sheikh Mahrous has frequently gone on hunger strike in protest at prison authorities' delay in his treatment and denial of the necessary health care in light of his chronic colon disease.

Anti-regime Bahraini protesters have been staging almost daily demonstrations in the tiny Persian Gulf kingdom ever since a pro-democracy uprising began there several years ago.

(Source: Press TV)

Trump denies ties to Americans linked to Venezuela 'coup plot'



U.S. President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that the United States government had nothing to do with an alleged incursion into Venezuela that landed two U.S. citizens behind bars in the crisis-stricken South American country.

Trump said he had just learned of the detention of the pair, accused by Venezuela of being mercenaries. Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said they were part of an operation to kill him that was backed by neighboring Colombia and the U.S.

"Whatever it is, we'll let you know," Trump told reporters in Washington, DC, before departing from the White House to Arizona. "But it has nothing to do with our government."

Maduro said: "The United States government is fully and completely involved in this defeated raid" and praised members of a fishing village for cornering one group and netting the "professional American mercenaries".

U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper echoed Trump's comments later on Tuesday, saying "The United States government had nothing to do with what's happened in Venezuela in the last few days."

Authorities in Venezuela identified the two detained men as Luke Denman and Airan Berry, both former U.S. special forces soldiers associated with the Florida-based private security firm Silvercorp USA.

A third U.S. ex-Green Beret and Silvercorp founder, Jordan Goudreau, claimed responsibility for leading "Operation Gideon", which was launched with an attempted beach landing before dawn on Sunday that left eight suspected attackers dead.

The two former U.S. soldiers were detained on Monday dozens of kilometres from the first attempted beach landing in a fishing village. Authorities say they confiscated equipment and detained dozens of others.

No easy draw in AFC U19 Championship: Sirous Pourmousavi

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Sirous Pourmousavi, head coach of Iran national U20 football team, believes that all the teams in the 2020 AFC U19 Championship are strong and there is no easy draw.

Talking about the seeding of the 2020 AFC U19 Championship, Pourmousavi said, "Teams are seeded based on their performance in the previous edition of the tournament. Our team did not qualify for the 2018 AFC U19 Championship. That's why we are seeded in pot 4 of the competition. We were well aware of that."

The 2020 AFC U19 Championship will be the 41st edition of the AFC U19 Championship. It will take place in Uzbekistan, between 14 and 31 October 2020.

"To be drawn in a good group is one of the factors that can help you in any tournament. But we already knew that we are not very lucky in this regard because we are seed in the last pot and may be drawn in a very difficult group. Though, I believe that in the final stage of the Championship, all teams are strong and there will be no easy draw," Pourmousavi said.

The head coach of the Iran national U20 football team, also spoke about how the pandemic coronavirus crisis has affected on the preparation of his team.

"The big problem is coronavirus outbreak, which has halted all our programs, including training camps and friendly matches, while on the other hand, the U19 Championship has not been deferred, and



we have to prepare for the tournament in this weird circumstance," he said.

"The reality is that we have lost a great deal of time, and that makes the job harder for us. We monitor the training and preparation of each player online, but it

is not enough. Players need to be fit and well-prepared to restart the training" he added.

In August 2019, Iran U19 football team became the champions of the second edition of the Central Asian Football

Association's (CAFA).

The 2020 AFC U19 Championship will be the last edition to be played as an U19 tournament, as the AFC have proposed switching the tournament from under-19 to under-20 starting from 2023.

First Iranian footballer dies from coronavirus



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Mohsen Bavi, a player of the Shariati Kut-e Abdullah Karun football team in Ahvaz, died due to coronavirus on Tuesday.

He had a history of wearing the shirt of Esteghlal Ahvaz team, IRNA reported. Bavi is the first Iranian football player to die due to COVID-19.

Health ministry spokesman Kianoush

Jahanpour said that the total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus has reached 99,970 of whom 6,340 have lost their lives.

The Iranian sports competitions have been canceled from March to prevent the spread of COVID-19 outbreak.

Worldwide, the virus has killed over 258,873 people and infected more than 3,700,000 million.

Marc Wilmots irresponsible about Iran team: top official



S P O R T S TEHRAN — The Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) Secretary General has hit out at former Iran coach Marc Wilmots, accusing him of being irresponsible about his team.

Under tutelage of the Belgian coach, Iran defeated minnows Hong Kong and Cambodia in the 2022 World Cup qualifiers but lost to Bahrain and Iraq in Group C that

left Iran in the third place in the group.

"As I've already said, Wilmots was looking for money and was irresponsible about Iran national football team," Nabi said.

"Wilmots has filed a complaint to FIFA to get his full payment but he should not give him money for his irresponsibility. He left his job half-finished," he added.

Turkey to resume football leagues in 2020 summer



The football leagues in Turkey will resume in 2020 summer, the country's football body said on Wednesday.

"For now, we decided to start Turkish football leagues, which were previously suspended [due to coronavirus], such as the Super Lig, first, second, third divisions and amateur leagues in the week of June 12, 13 and 14," the Turkish Football Federation (TFF) President Nihat Ozdemir said in a video conference.

He stated that the federation has now different scenarios to handle the coronavirus process so that the football's actors will not be harmed.

Ozdemir said that they will apply to the Turkish Health Ministry so that the new schedule for the games to be implemented and the ministry will refer the issue to the Coronavirus Scientific Advisory Board.

"Following the joint works of the Health Ministry and scientific board, they will decide how the games will be played."

He recalled that Turkish leagues were held behind closed doors after the first coronavirus case was seen on March 11 and the federation suspended the local competitions after the fatalities.

Ozdemir said that Turkey aims to complete the 2019-2020 football season with the support of all public offices.

He added hopefully that the football leagues will be completed by the end of July, the championship cups to be handed in on the pitch, and Turkey will host 2020 UEFA Champions League final in August.

In March, European football's governing body UEFA postponed three major European finals including the Champions League final match in response to the pandemic.

Champions League final was initially scheduled for May 2020 but all UEFA competitions, top-tier Champions League, and second-level Europa League are still on hold.

Istanbul's Ataturk Olympic Stadium was named the venue of 2020 final.

It will host its second Champions League final after one in 2005 between Italian club AC Milan and England's Liverpool.

Sporting events across Turkey were suspended on March 19 to stem the spread of coronavirus, which has infected more than 129,000 people in the country so far.

Turkish Super Lig clubs Fenerbahce, Galatasaray, Besiktas and Trabzonspor announced each resuming training sessions this week.

Turkey, to date, has registered 3,520 virus-linked deaths while more than 73,200 people have recovered.

(Source: aa.com.tr)

Virus could wipe 10 billion euros off football player values, says report



The transfer value of players in 10 of Europe's top leagues could plummet by up to 10 billion euros due to the economic crash caused by coronavirus, a study from accounting firm KPMG said on Wednesday.

Transfer spending is expected to fall dramatically, with clubs across the continent facing huge losses as a result of football's shutdown.

The top divisions in England, Germany, Italy and Spain remain committed to trying to finish the 2019/20 seasons so they can honour huge TV contracts and minimise the financial hit.

KPMG estimates that Europe's top five leagues, including France, where the season has ended, could lose four billion euros (\$4.3 billion) if the campaigns cannot be completed.

Those leagues are also the main drivers of the European transfer market. The study also looked at the top leagues in Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal and Turkey and England's second-tier Championship.

With little money to spend, values could fall by nearly 10 billion if there is no more football this season -- the "worst-case" scenario.

They could still plummet by 6.6 billion

euros if leagues were completed behind closed doors. That modelling was based on all 10 leagues being completed, even though seasons in France and the Netherlands have been ended.

"Our recent analysis reveals that the aggregate value of all the 4,183 players in the 10 European leagues under consideration decreased by a total of almost EUR 10 billion, a 26.5 percent drop since February for Scenario 1," said KPMG's latest Football Benchmark report.

"Players' values would decrease by EUR 6.6 billion, a 17.7 percent decrease in Scenario 2."

Paris Saint-Germain players Kylian Mbappe and Neymar are still the two most valuable players according to the report, but the number of players worth over 100 million euros would shrink from 15 before the pandemic to just eight if seasons were not completed.

The lack of cash could, though, see clubs becoming more creative with swap deals.

"Financial constraints are likely to lead to a decrease both in the volume of transactions and in the transfer fees, and to an increase in the number of swap and loan deals," the report added.

(Source: AFP)

Persepolis to lodge complaint against Anthony Stokes

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iranian football club Persepolis are going to file a complaint against Irish striker Anthony Stokes.

The former Celtic forward signed a six-month contract with Persepolis during the winter transfer window after he was released by Turkish second-tier outfit Adana Demispor.

He traveled to the UAE with Persepolis to meet Sharjah in the AFC Champions League but refused to return to Tehran after he was allowed to stay one more day in Dubai.

Later, Stokes announced that he couldn't come to Iran because of coronavirus.

Now, the Iranian club want to lodge against the 32-year-old forward.

Fenerbahce terminate Sayyadmanesh's contract

Turkish football club Fenerbahce terminated the contract with Iranian striker Allahyar Sayyadmanesh.

The 19-year-old player was loaned to Istanbulspor and represented the team in seven games in the TFF 1. League but failed to find back of the net.

Sayyadmanesh joined Fenerbahce last year from Esteghlal on a five-year deal but failed to meet expectations.

Sayyadmanesh was a member of Iran U-17 football team who qualified for the 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup quarter-final in India.

He made his Iran national football team debut on 6 June 2019 against Syria and scored the fifth goal.

(Source: Sabah)

Iran beach soccer still fifth in world ranking

The Iranian national beach soccer team remained unchanged in the world ranking.

Team Melli are the top team in Asia with 2309 points. Iran defended their title at the Intercontinental Beach Soccer Cup in November.

Portugal replaced Brazil at top of the ranking with 4266 points.

Brazil moved down to second place with 4245 points. Italy and Russia are third and fourth with 3946 and 3923 points, respectively.

(Source: beachsoccer.com)

Manavinejad sets sights on move abroad

TASNIM — Iran volleyball team outside hitter Mohammad Javad Manavinejad is going to join a European team.

Manavinejad says he has received offers from PlusLiga (Poland) and SuperLega (Italy) teams.

He was a member of Italian team BluVolley Verona from 2017 to 2019 and played for Saipa of Iran last season.

"I've received offers from Polish and Italian teams as well as several Iranian teams. I hope to choose the best option," Manavinejad said.

FIFA to soon announce decision on 2020 Futsal World Cup

MNA — FIFA says that an initial meeting has been held to discuss the situation over holding the 2020 FIFA Futsal World Cup and the final decision will soon be announced.

The event was due to be held from September 12 to October 4 in Lithuania, however, the coronavirus outbreak has complicated the situation. On the one hand, the qualification events in Asia and America have been postponed due to the pandemic, and on the other hand, Lithuania has requested the postponement of the event for one year.

On its latest statement, FIFA had said that it would announce the decision till April 30, but it didn't come.

One report suggested that FIFA has requested a three months postponement but Lithuania has not accepted the offer. Meanwhile, another report claimed that the event has been postponed to September 2021 but FIFA has not yet officially announced its stance.

To get the latest information, Merh News Agency reached out to FIFA for clarification on the issue.

"As you might be aware, the Bureau of the FIFA Council has established a FIFA-Confederations working group to address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic," FIFA told Merh News Agency in an email on May 4.

"Based on the working group recommendations following an initial meeting, a decision on the FIFA Futsal World Cup Lithuania 2020 from the Bureau of the FIFA Council is expected soon," added the letter.

Bundesliga can return in late May

The Bundesliga is allowed to start again in the second half of May, according to a report from Christian Falk, the head of football at German sports media outlet Sport Bild. Falk added the league can decide the date in the time window itself.

Earlier this week it was reported there were 10 positive COVID-19 cases among the 36 clubs in Germany's top two soccer divisions.

Bundesliga teams returned to training last month.

(Source: TSN)

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

There are two kinds of people who are greedy and never satisfied: seekers of learning and lovers of the world.

Imam Ali (AS)

Coronavirus cancels Leader's annual meeting with literati

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's annual meeting with literati, which is organized during the holy month of Ramadan every year, has been canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei glances at a book by Tehran-based Afghan writer Mohammad-Sarvar Rajai (C) during his annual meeting with poets and literati on May 20, 2019. (Leader.ir)

“Due to the spread of coronavirus and the health protocols in this situation, the Leader's annual meeting with poets, like his other meetings planned for the holy month of Ramadan, has been canceled,” Abbas Mohammadi, the director of Art Bureau's Literary Creations Center, said on Wednesday.

Poets and literary figures from Iran and some Persian-speaking countries attend a meeting with Ayatollah Khamenei every year on the birthday of Imam Hassan (AS), which falls on the 15th of the holy month of Ramadan.

In his meeting last year with the literati, the Leader criticized Persian media and Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) for disregard of the standard language, using “faceless language” and foreign terms and words, and addressed the cultural officials and literati, “Don't let the Persian language fall into decay and ruin.”

Audio version of “Sulh al-Hasan” released

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — An audio version of the Persian translation of “Sulh al-Hasan” (“The Peace Treaty of Imam Hassan”) by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has been released.



A poster for the audio version of the Persian translation of “Sulh al-Hasan”.

The audiobook was introduced during a ceremony held at the Shohadaye Radio Building in Tehran on Tuesday.

Narrated by Naser Nezami, Mohieddin Taqipur, Ahmad Ganji and Abolfazl Shahbahrami, the book is available at iranседа.ir, the new radio media website affiliated with the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB).

The first edition of the Persian version of the book written by the Iraqi Shia scholar Sheikh Radi Al-Yasin (1935-1993) was published in 1969.

The book reviews the outstanding works of Imam Hassan (AS), the second Imam of the Shia Muslims, the issues that he faced during his Imamate, and the events and political attitudes that led to peacemaking, as well as the unfair accusations made against him.

Naqqali perfect medium to present Shahnameh stories: performer Mirza-Ali

→1 “Many TV series, films and plays have been made to present stories from the Shahnameh,” he said and added that only naqqals and Shahnameh reciters can make the best impact by their performances.

“I believe the duty of a naqqal is to preserve and promote Persian literature, especially the Shahnameh,” he said.

Mirza-Ali is the director of Tazieh and Ritual Arts Office of Tehran's Art Bureau. He is also the executive secretary of an online festival of naqqali and Shahnameh recitation, which the Art Bureau plans to organize.

“The Dramatic Arts Center of the bureau has been concerned about Persian language and literature and that is why a festival with the central theme of naqqali and recitation of stories of the Shahnameh has been set up,” he added.

Interested appliances including children, young adults and adults have been asked to submit their videos of naqqali, or recitations of the Shahnameh in different local dialects to the festival.

The works will be judged in two female and male categories.

“Performers from Isfahan, Shiraz, Tehran, Khorasan and many other Iranian cities have been invited to recite stories of the Shahnameh in their local dialects and submit them to the organizers,” he explained. “This way we actually intend to take the Shahnameh from off the shelves in houses and place it into the real lives of the people,” he said.

“Innovation is one of the festival's priorities. Those who can make the best use of the virtual world to better represent their naqqali performances and Shahnameh recitations will be of high significance,” he remarked.

He added that the festival has so far been warmly received and has received many submissions from different regions.

The works will be judged by juries at the Dramatic Art center of the bureau and winners



Morshed Mohsen Mirza-Ali performs naqqali during Noruz in Tehran in March 2017.

will be announced on May 24.

“This shows that our people are interested in the Shahnameh. This is the very first festival the Art Bureau has launched,” he said.

He noted that the organizers plan to make it an international event for the coming editions.

“We have Tajik people who speak Persian. Our neighboring countries and the Iranians residing outside the country can also take part in the next editions,” he said.

He added that he is surprised that the younger generations have enthusiastically welcomed naqqali over the past decade.

“I can say we are facing a tsunami of narrators and reciters these days,” he noted.

“This is precious and the festival aims to promote it,” he said.

“However, this warm welcome must be organized because they need good masters. We have many good parents who would like their children to enter the world of literature through naqqali, but they are not very familiar with experts and they need masters and experts to be trained,” he asserted.

He also noted that in the past time naqqali was a male occupation but today that has

changed and more females are showing interest.

“These girls will be mothers in the future and how good it is that mothers know how to beautifully narrate stories. And now, the females are brilliant and shine well in naqqali, and I am so happy with it. They have their share in training children and they have their shares in the art of naqqali,” he said.

“The festival wants to preserve the Persian language and transfer this national identity to the younger generation,” he concluded.

Doc explores Hitler's plot to assassinate Allied leaders in Tehran



Manuchehr Zendedel acts in a scene from Iranian filmmaker Ata Panahi's documentary “Long Jump”.

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian filmmaker Ata Panahi has made a documentary named “Long Jump” exploring the leader of the Nazi Party in Germany Adolf Hitler's plot to assassinate the Allied leaders during the Tehran Conference.

The idea of making the documentary came to Panahi's mind when he was working on his debut feature documentary “Carsten's Letters” in 2018 about Carsten, a German aviator and spy who was on a mission in Iran during WWII, and his letters to his wife Liana in Germany.

“In my research for the film, I stumbled upon a subject, which I had never seen in any book and I had never read anything about it before,” the filmmaker who is interested in the issues of World War II told the Persian service of MNA on Wednesday.

“I first thought that I was faced with an imaginary subject rather than a real documented event, but after some research into the issue I realized that when the Allied summit was scheduled to be organized in Tehran, Hitler was informed of the meeting and plotted to assassinate the Allied leaders in Tehran,” he added.

“Along with the film editor Pedram Bahrani, I gained

access to archives that few people have access to; for example, we found a high-quality color film of the Allied summit,” he noted.

Panahi has remade some scenes of the event to attract more attention to his film.

There are different stories about Hitler's plot to assassinate the Allied leaders during the Tehran Conference, therefore Panahi spent a lot of time studying to arrive at the most reliable one.

The Tehran Conference was a meeting between U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin in Tehran from November 28 and December 1, 1943.

During the conference, the leaders coordinated their military strategy against Germany and Japan and made a number of important decisions concerning the post-World War II era.

The film's title refers to Operation Rösselsprung (Long Jump) that Germany designed to kill or kidnap Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt during the conference. The plot was foiled by clever intelligence work, a drunken disclosure and a bit of good luck.

Book on Martyr Soleimani published in Indonesia

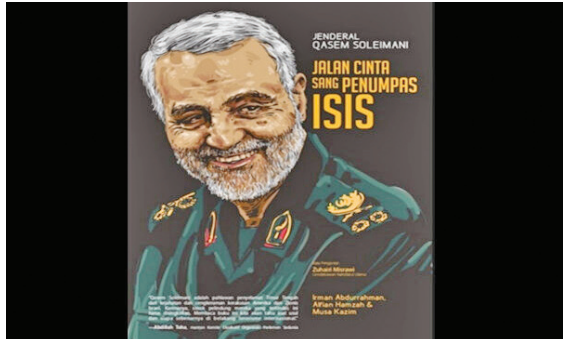
CULTURE **TEHRAN** — A book recounting Commander Qasem Soleimani's struggles against the ISIS terrorists in the region has been published in Indonesia.

The book “General Qasem Soleimani: The Love of the ISIS Passenger” (Jenderal Qasem Soleimani: Jalan Cinta Sang Penumpang ISIS) has been authored by Irman Abdurrahman, Alfian Hamzah and Musa Kazim, Iran's Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) has announced.

Quds Force chief Soleimani was martyred in a U.S. air

raid in Baghdad on January 3.

In a preface to the book, the authors wrote, “General Qasem Soleimani is a complete figure: a military strategist, charismatic and clever leader, and a traveler who always witnessed love in his life.” “If we want to be objective and study the history of chaos in the Middle East [West Asia] diligently and thoroughly, then, what is likely to be present in our perception is precisely the humanistic, tactical and loving figure of Soleimani. He is a good friend of humanity,” they added.



Front cover of the book “General Qasem Soleimani: The Love of the ISIS Passenger” by Indonesian writers.

Disney tests reopening strategy at Shanghai Disneyland

SHANGHAI (Reuters) — Walt Disney Co. will kick off its strategy next week to begin restoring its lucrative parks business that has suffered \$1 billion in lost profits from the coronavirus-led shutdown.

Disney said on Tuesday it will reopen its Shanghai Disneyland park on May 11 but severely limit the number of guests and enforce strict social distancing measures on rides and in restaurants.

The plans provide a glimpse at how the company - which in previous quarters generated a third of its revenue from parks, experiences and consumer products - will recover from the pandemic.

“We will take a phased approach with limits on attendance using an advanced reservation and entry system, controlled guest density using social distancing and strict government required health and prevention procedures,” Disney Chief Executive Officer Robert Chapek said on a conference call with analysts after reporting second-quarter earnings.

“These include the use of masks, temperature screenings and other contact tracing and early detection systems.”

Executives said they have “limited visibility” over the timing on when other parks, stores and the company's cruise line would reopen.

The stakes are high: more than half of the \$1 billion in second-quarter operating profit declines came from just two weeks of closure of Disney's U.S. parks, Chief Financial Officer Christine McCarthy told analysts on Tuesday, with the rest coming from the closure of parks in Asia and its



People visit Shanghai Disney Resort as part of the three-day Grand Opening events in Shanghai, China, June 15, 2016. (Reuters/Aly Song)

smaller, but popular cruise business.

To quickly reduce overhead, Disney furloughed more than 120,000 employees in April.

Chapek said the company would only reopen locations that would not lose money.

“We would not reopen any park unless we can make at least a positive contribution to that overhead and operating profit level,” he said.

In China, Disney executives explained, the company will take it slow to test new ideas. Guests at Shanghai Disneyland

will be required to purchase admission tickets valid on a selected date only, and annual pass holders will need to make a reservation prior to arrival.

Ride vehicles, lines and restaurants will be set up to follow social distancing guidelines. Guests and employees will be required to wear masks, which guests can remove when dining.

Guests' temperatures will be screened and the park will use the government-issued Shanghai Health QR code, a contact tracing and early detection system used in China. Sanitization and disinfection will occur more frequently, the company said.

Disney Chief Medical Officer Dr. Pam Hymel said the company is exploring ways to use technology such as its Play Disney Parks App to help with those efforts, according to a Disney blog post on Tuesday. Reuters previously reported that guests could be notified via app or another technology when they can go on a ride or in a restaurant to eliminate lines.

Chapek said Shanghai Disney Resort, which includes Shanghai Disneyland theme park and other properties that have previously been reopened, tends to attract 80,000 guests a day.

The Chinese government is limiting that capacity to 24,000 daily guests but Disney is planning to open the park “far below” that capacity to try out new procedures, Chapek said. After a few weeks park attendance will be up to the government's guidelines, he added.